

## Time for a New Beginning

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Gospel reading. **Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.** Here ends our text.

Life is full of new beginnings. You might remember some new beginnings in your life: your first day at a new school; the first day of a new job; moving into a new neighborhood. You left some things behind. You began something new. You make new friends and relationships. You sense a new purpose in life. You have a fresh start. You begin again.

Certainly for Jesus Christ, his incarnation and birth were a new beginning. As the Son of God, he'd existed with God the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity. He'd spoken creation into existence. He even formed man from the dust of the ground. But now he was beginning as a human being, part of his own creation. Imagine God himself, being a baby, helpless and vulnerable. He flees from Bethlehem to Egypt and then moves to Galilee. In his childhood he grows up in Nazareth, plays with the other children, goes to school, and learns the carpentry trade under his father Joseph. Certainly many new beginnings for the Son of God. But now Jesus is a man. It's time for yet another new beginning. He leaves some things behind. He puts away the tools from his carpentry shop, kisses his mother farewell, and leaves his hometown. He begins again. He travels to Judea to begin a new vocation, that of prophet. He comes to the Jordan River, a place of many new beginnings.

If you remember, the patriarch Jacob first crossed the Jordan when he left his family, Isaac and Rebecca and Esau, behind. He left behind his childish, deceitful ways. He crossed the Jordan with only his staff to begin a new life, a new vocation as shepherd under his uncle Laban. He began responsible ways. He began a new family and a new relationship with the God of his fathers. It was a new beginning.

The Jordan was also the boundary which the Israelites crossed when they came into the Promised Land. They left behind their old vocation of slaves in Egypt. They left behind their unbelief in the desert. They didn't cross the Jordan by bridge or with boats. It was a miraculous crossing. The presence of God stood in the middle of the Jordan as the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant. The waters ceased to flow, and the Israelites passed through on dry ground. They began a new nation in a new home. They began living as the believing children of God. It was the beginning of a new kingdom.

It was also at the Jordan River that the prophet Elisha began his new vocation of prophet. The prophet Elijah had just ascended into heaven in a chariot of fire, leaving his cloak behind for Elisha. It was at the Jordan that Elisha received a double portion of the Spirit of God. He struck the Jordan River with Elijah's cloak, the waters parted, and he walked through on dry ground. It was a miraculous beginning.

It was to the Jordan that the Syrian commander Naaman came at the instruction of this same prophet Elisha. He came as a pagan Gentile, an enemy of God's people. He came as an unbeliever in the prophet's words. He came as a leper, a dead man walking. But he washed in the Jordan seven times, and his skin became as clean as a newborn babe. He left behind his leprosy and unbelief and began a new life. He began again as a believer in the God of the Israelites. It was another miraculous beginning.

To this same Jordan River Jesus comes for a new beginning. He comes to be baptized by John. John doesn't understand this. He's been preaching a baptism of repentance. He's been offering a new beginning for sinners. "Repent. Turn from your sin and turn to God for forgiveness." But why would Jesus need baptism? He doesn't need a fresh start. He doesn't need to leave sin behind and begin again? John recognizes quite the opposite. "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me." I'm the one who needs a new beginning. "But Jesus says to John, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." It was fitting to fulfill all righteousness. It was fitting to fulfill all of God's will and plans as foretold by the prophets.

Our Old Testament reading today speaks of God's will and plans in his Son Jesus Christ. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." This is a prophecy of Jesus' baptism at the Jordan. For "when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." God was making a new beginning for the world in his Son Jesus Christ. With the Holy Spirit upon him, Jesus was beginning his ministry as the servant of God to bring justice and righteousness to the nations.

How would this be accomplished? Jesus would lead a righteous life, but he'd also become the sin bearer for the world. Throughout his ministry Jesus forgave sins. He forgave the sins of the woman who wiped his feet with her hair. He forgave the sins of the paralytic. He forgave the sins of the woman caught in adultery. He gave them a new beginning. Where'd all those sins go? They went upon Jesus, and he bore them. But Jesus also carried the effects of sin. The effects of sin are a fallen world with blindness and lameness, disease and hunger, storm and calamity. During his ministry Jesus took the effects of sin upon himself. He gave sight to the blind, restored the lame, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and calmed the storms. He gave a new beginning. Where did all these effects of sin go? Jesus carried our infirmities and bore our sorrows. And finally, during his ministry as God's servant, Jesus bore the consequences of sin. The consequences of sin are punishment and death. During his ministry Jesus raised the dead. He raised the son of the widow of Nain. He raised the daughter of Jairus. He raised Lazarus. He gave them a new beginning. Where did these deathly consequences of sin go? Jesus took their punishment of death upon himself. Jesus carried all these sins, their effects, and consequences to the cross. There he bore the punishment of sin as he was crucified, and there he died. The sins of the world were then buried with Christ in the tomb. This is how all righteousness, all justice, was fulfilled. Jesus satisfied God's justice for the sins of the world and brought righteousness to the nations. And it all began at the waters of the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized.

In a similar way, there was another place where God made a new beginning for you. It wasn't at the waters of the Jordan. But it was at the waters of your baptism. At the baptismal font you left some things behind. Like Jacob you left behind your deceitful ways. Like Naaman your leprosy of sin was washed away. Like the Israelites you left behind your slavery to sin and the devil. It was a miraculous event. The presence of God was there. Like for Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended upon you. You received a portion of the Lord's Spirit. He gave you faith in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Like Jacob, you began a new relationship with the God of your fathers. God is pleased with you, and heaven is open to you. At your baptism you entered the kingdom of God and began living as a believing child of God. You began a new vocation with a new purpose in life, that of serving God and serving others. That's where it all began at the waters of your baptism. God gave you a new beginning.

But no sooner had the water on your head dried, than your old sinful nature popped its head up again. Over time you returned to deceitful ways, to unbelief, to slavery to sin, to your old rotten ways. Once again, it's time for a new beginning. You don't get rebaptized, though, but you return to your baptism. You hear the cry of the John the Baptist, "Repent! Turn from your sin and turn to God." You confess your sin and receive Christ's forgiveness. The old man gets left behind, buried with all your sins in the tomb. But just like Christ rose again, so your new man rises again to live before God in righteousness and purity. You have a fresh start. You begin again. This isn't something that happens every few years but every day. So every time you make a mistake, or doubt God, or fail and fall down, you remember your baptism and say, "It's time for a new beginning." It's time for a new life. It's time for a new beginning in Christ. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.  
Amen.