

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World, Jesus, the Christ, amen.

I don't like stories that don't have an ending. You know the kind I'm talking about. Movies that leave you hanging and end with the big cliff hanger that makes you want to come back for the sequel. "Who shot JR," goes way back to the TV Series Dallas. With the explosion of cable channels and other network alternatives like Netflix and Amazon Prime, there's so many choices, but sometimes I start watching a series and before any of the loose ends get tied up the series is cancelled and I never get the plotlines resolved. We used to watch a show called Zoo. It was a Sci-Fi series where the animals all over the world mutated and rose up against humans. The show didn't get renewed for a 4th or 5th season and was abruptly cancelled. Just right in the middle of this animal uprising, that's it folks, no more shows... Some shows now a days take so long between seasons I totally lose major events that contribute to where we're at in the story.

In the Bible, all four Gospels tell about the Baptism of Jesus. In the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we get the actual description of the Baptismal act itself. Unfortunately, all three of those accounts of Jesus' Baptism are like those movies or TV shows that don't reveal the entire story. Some say they do it intentionally so we can put ourselves into the story and write the ending our way. That may be true in the movies and it might also be true when we're

talking about the Baptism of Jesus, but for many of us unfinished stories just leave us with too many questions. Questions like why Jesus would need to be baptized for the forgiveness of his sins, when he hadn't actually committed any. Or how is it that Jesus was born without the stain of original sin? If I spend a few more minutes thinking about it, I'm sure I could come up with several more questions, but I think you get my point. Matthew, Mark, and Luke also left these questions for the early Church as well. They've been asked for millennia.

When John wrote his account, most scholars believe he had knowledge of and access to all the other Gospel texts. In fact, by the time John wrote his Gospel, Matthew, Mark, and Luke had been published and were known by Christians from Palestine to Europe and Africa and probably even into China. It occurred to me this week as I re-read all four baptismal accounts, that John's story doesn't really include a first hand account of what occurred. What we have here in John's Gospel is what happened after the Baptism over the next couple of days. John didn't have to give us a blow by blow account of Jesus going under the waters of the Jordan or the splitting open of heaven, complete with the booming voice of God. John and John's audience already had three other Gospels that described all of that. What the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke left out was why. Why did Jesus have to submit to being Baptized for the remission of sins and for repentance when he wasn't in need of either? It's in John's version where we

finally get some answers to our questions, but also probably find out we have even more questions that we hadn't thought of until now... How does John answer the question of why Jesus submitted to the ritual of Baptism for the forgiveness of sin? The answer is so John the Baptist could clearly and unambiguously identify Jesus as the Messiah and point to Jesus as the pre-existent, Lamb of God, the very Son of God in the flesh.

You see, John the Baptist was pretty popular in his day. In other words he had a lot of followers on his Twitter account, if such a thing would have existed. His popularity proved to be an obstacle to recognizing Jesus as God's only begotten son, the Lamb who takes away our sin. In John's version we find out that it wasn't enough to have the water wash Jesus, the dove descending, the heavens open and, the voice of God speaking. John's disciples still thought John the Baptist was the one they were waiting for. They thought he was either the Messiah or Elijah who had returned. So, John the Baptist needed to continue setting the record straight about who this Jesus really was. In the synoptic Gospels, John the Baptist's job is over when he completes the baptism of Jesus, but according to John the Gospel writer, the Baptist's job wasn't quite finished until he made very obvious he was not the Messiah, but this Jesus of Nazareth was the one they've been longing and searching for. If Jesus had decided to go along with John the Baptist and foregone his baptism, there wouldn't have been the opening of the

heavens. There wouldn't have been a voice of God declaring Jesus to be the beloved Child of our heavenly Father. Without someone to point to Jesus and declare: Look! This man, this Jesus is the Lamb of God who will bear the sins of the world. He's the Paschal Lamb whose blood covers us and protects us from the angel of death as the lamb's blood over the doorposts did for the Hebrew people in Egypt during the first Passover. He's the Son of God who permanently, once and for all time, takes the full wrath of God for the sinful broken world and makes the atoning sacrifice that reconciles us to our Father. This, Jesus is the one we've all been waiting for. It's him you seek, not me!

In this version of the Baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist is our perfect example of our mission should we decide to accept it. John the Baptist recognizes who Jesus is, then places himself under His reign, but he doesn't stop there. He continues to point to Jesus for days afterward. It's not recorded in the Bible, but my guess is that JBAP never stopped pointing people to Jesus for the rest of his life... As a result of JBAP's continued efforts to point to Jesus, his own popularity fades so that Jesus' popularity may grow. The first disciples of the grown up, Baptized Jesus are two of JBAP's own disciples. It's not a competition for JBAP. He knows his mission has been accomplished and all the questions have finally been answered because people are finally recognizing Jesus for who he really is, the Messiah, Lamb of God, and God's Son.

From JBAP's witness, Andrew and another unnamed disciple became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. Andrew ran and told his brother Simon. When Simon met Jesus for the first time, the very first thing Jesus did was change his name from Simon to Cephas, which means Rock. The translation of Cephas into English is Peter. That was the first of many changes Jesus would bring to Simon Peter's life.

Since that first encounter where JBAP pointed to Jesus, then Andrew brings Simon, then Simon brings his friends and so on and so on, until today people have been bringing others to come and see Jesus for themselves. Someone you know pointed to Jesus and told you He was your savior. For me it was my mom. She used to tell me over and over about how she prayed for a son for so many years and how I was the answer to her prayers. I grew up learning the faith from her. I wish I had taken the time to ask who pointed her to Jesus. I think I know. It was her Aunt Julia who raised my mom after both her parents died before she was a year old. Who brought Aunt Julia to know Jesus? God only knows, but I can tell you I'm so blessed because they did.

Who pointed Jesus out to you and how are you at pointing others to Jesus as the Lamb of God, God's only Son who saves us from our sin? I know we as a congregation do a lot of pointing, but I'm asking on a more personal level. You don't have to travel to a faraway exotic place or join a missionary team to point

others to Jesus. Andrew started with his brother and the rest, so they say is history... For the next minute or so I'd like for us all to think of that one person who we wish could be part of Jesus body of disciples. It might be your brother or sister, maybe your cousin or even your neighbor or a friend. Whoever you have in mind, the first step in pointing that person to Jesus, is prayer. Before you try to bring that person to know Jesus first pray for them. Andrew spent the entire day with Jesus before he went to get his brother and we should do the same... No matter how afraid of talking about Jesus to another person you might be, we can all pray for that one person we're thinking about. Once you've been praying for that person for a while, maybe a month or maybe a year, I guarantee you'll be given the perfect time and opportunity to use your words and actions to point to Jesus.

So, the rest of the story about why Jesus was baptized and what that means for us is finally revealed through this baptism story from the Gospel of John. It's about recognizing who Jesus really is and what it means for us and our lives today. May God give you that perfect divine appointment so you can do for someone what my great Aunt Julia did for my mon and what my mom did for me. May you be remembered, not because of how big your house was or how fancy your car is, but by how your life pointed to the Savior of the world. May Jesus Christ be, not just the savior of the world, but also your savior and the real love of your life who you just can't wait to share with your friends. Amen.