

“What’s Your Identity?”

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It’s a known fact that identity theft has increased dramatically in the US. Studies reveal that over 15 million residents in the United States have their identities stolen each year with financial losses in the neighborhood of \$50 billion dollars. Today's Gospel story about Jesus' Baptism also talks about identity.

The early Church had many questions about the Baptism of Jesus Christ. Why did Jesus need to be baptized by John at all? It surely wasn’t for the forgiveness of sin? Was John a greater prophet or teacher than Jesus? All the Gospel writers have something to say about the Baptism, but Matthew links Jesus’ Baptism to the fulfillment of righteousness.

Open to Matthew 3. In each Gospel account, Jesus' Baptism is accompanied by the giving of the Spirit, and in three of them it’s also accompanied by a voice from heaven pronouncing Jesus' as God's beloved Son, a child with whom God is most pleased. Verses 16-17, *“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*

In Jesus’ Baptism, He learns who He is in relation to whose He is. At His Baptism, Jesus is given the gifts of identity and affirmation.

Jesus’ Baptism leads to His public ministry. For thirty years, Jesus was just another young man who grew up in Nazareth. He learned how to be a carpenter from His father, Joseph. He went through the same human situations that you and I go through. The only difference was He never sinned!

The gift of identity leads to mission. Jesus is the Son of God sent to earth to preach and teach and heal, but He’s also on earth to do exactly what God promised Adam and Eve in the Garden. He’s come to save humanity from their sins. He suffered and died in our place so we might be redeemed. He is our Savior!

It’s only by having a clear sense of God's affirmation and identity that Jesus can take on the enormous mission in front of Him. This is very clear in Matthew 4, where the Tempter's point of attack at Jesus’ temptation is precisely on the question of identity: *“If you are the Son of God...”*. Satan calls into question Jesus' relationship with His Father because he knows that Jesus, as with humanity before Him, is vulnerable to temptation.

And this is where the story of Jesus' Baptism intersects with our own. We can only live in the mission God has given us as we hear and believe the Good News that we, too, are beloved children of God. As with Jesus, we discover in Baptism who we are by hearing definitively whose we are!

As we come to the waters of Baptism, we hear God speaking to us, telling us how special we are to Him. He says in Isaiah 43:1, *“I have called you by name, you are Mine.”* Baptism is nothing less than the promise that we’re God's beloved children. Brennan Manning put it this way, *“Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is an illusion.”* No matter what we do, God will be with us. No matter where we go, God is for us and will not abandon us.

Open to Romans 6. In Baptism we are blessed with the promise of God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit is there guiding and leading us each step of the way. We are given a name. That name is Christian. Each one of us is marked with the cross of Christ. He came and took our punishment when He died on the cross, but His resurrection is also ours. Verses 8-11, *“Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he*

lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” We are named a beloved child of God forever.

Our Baptism begins a journey for us as we live in Christ and trust Him for our salvation. It’s a trust that’s played out in all the circumstances of our lives. When you’re baptized, you’re taking on a new identity. You’re no longer alone. You’re part of a group of redeemed people who know Jesus is the answer. Galatians 3:27 says, “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*”

Because you’ve put on Christ, you need to be willing to share that faith with the world around you. They should see Him as the answer as they see you. The more you affirm who you are in Christ, the more your behavior will reflect your true identity.

In Baptism, God offers a wonderful wardrobe for His children. It’s His Son’s life, death, and resurrection. These are ours to “wear” spiritually. This is what identifies the Christian. If you want to be labeled as a “somebody”, then be labeled as one who’s wrapped up in Jesus. Be labeled with Christ. Be proud you’re a Christian.

Know Jesus is with you every step of the way even when people might persecute you because you are a Christian. Don’t be ashamed of all the Christ has done for you! God has identified you as His and named you as part of His family!