

Whatever else Jesus's baptism story is, it is first and foremost a story of the sacred ordinary. It is a story of profound humility. The holy child conceived of the Holy Spirit, celebrated by angels, worshiped by shepherds, and feared by Herod, stands in the same muddy water we stand in.

The Messiah's first public act is a declaration of solidarity. Jesus's first public act is an act of alignment. Of radical and humble *joining*. His first step is a step towards us.

"Let it be so," he says to John in Matthew's version of the story, echoing the radical consent of his mother, Mary, who raises him in the faith.

Let it be so at the hands of another, he decides, indicating that his power lies in his capacity to surrender, to share, and to submit.

Let it be so *here*, he further decides, in the Jordan River with its rich and sacred history.

The Jordan where once upon a time Jesus's forbears, the ancient Israelites, entered the land of Canaan. The Jordan where the prophet Elijah ended his prophetic ministry, and his successor Elisha inaugurated his. The Jordan which flowed under the same sky God first opened "in the beginning," at the dawn of Creation.

In other words, in this one moment, in this one act, Jesus steps into the whole Story of God's work on earth, and allows that story to resonate, deepen, and find completion.

Moreover, in this one act, Jesus steps into the common and inescapable experience of living in a broken, sin-soaked world, and hungering for righteousness, redemption, and restoration within that world.

Our ancestors in the faith didn't know what to make of a God who would taint God's self by association. They couldn't understand Jesus's willingness to risk defilement by identifying himself with our messiness, our chaos, and our weakness. They – like many – wanted to keep God separate, safe, and above all else.

To embrace Christ's baptism story is to embrace the core truth that we are all united, interdependent, connected, *one*. Our personal "goodness" notwithstanding, our baptisms bind us to all of humanity – not in theory, but in the flesh – such that you and I are kin, responsible for each other in ways we fail so often to honour.

To embrace Christ's baptism story is to embrace the wild truth that we are united, interdependent, connected, *one*. Whether we like it or not, the bond God seals by water and by the Spirit is truer and deeper than all others. It makes a stronger claim on our lives and loyalties than all prior claims of race, gender, tribe, nationality, politics, preference, or affinity.

Baptism asks that we bear all the risks of belonging. The risk that others might hurt us. The risk that others will change. The risk that they will change *us*.

Is it easy to honour such a staggering claim? No. Do we have a choice? No.
Are we (the Church) known for doing this well? No.

We have tamed baptism, turning it into something merely ritualistic and decorative.
Our baptism is our belonging.

We are called into radical solidarity, not radical separateness.

In baptism, we are freed to touch, embrace, and love all that is broken within and
around us, because we are always and already God's Beloved. We're beloved not
because we've done anything to earn it, but because God's very nature, inclination,
and desire is to love - and to birth that same kind of love in us.

Baptism is all about stepping in, all about finding the holy in the course of my
ordinary, mundane life within the family of God.

Stand in the place that looks utterly ordinary, and regardless of how scared or jaded
you feel, cling to the possibility of a surprise that is God. Listen to the ordinary, and
know that it is infused with divine mystery. Jesus is the one who stands in line with
us at the water's edge, willing to immerse himself in shame, scandal, repentance, and
pain so we might hear the only Voice that will tell us who we are and whose we are
in this sacred season.

Listen.

We are God's chosen.

God's children.

God's own.

Even in the deepest, darkest water, we are the Beloved.

Wendy