

Have you ever wondered why Jesus wanted or needed to be baptized? He was perfect – the Son of God? Why did he need the baptism of repentance that John was offering – the one that all the people flocked to receive? It is an interesting question and John the Baptist addresses it. John wants Jesus to baptize him not the other way around. But Jesus says – no let it be so and John baptizes Jesus in the same way that he has baptized all the other sinners. And when Jesus comes up from the water, the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

I love Debie Thomas', from the Journey with Jesus online magazine, take on this. She writes – **“In this one moment, in this one act, Jesus stepped into the whole Story of God's work on earth, and allowed that story to resonate, deepen, and find completion.”**¹ Jesus stepped into our sinful lives, into our mess and brokenness by being baptized with the same baptism that was offered to all.

I think we can learn a lot about baptism from Jesus when it comes to stepping into baptism. What I heard from Debie Thomas was that the baptism we teach is more about stepping out – stepping out to declare our faith in Jesus. I get that. That is what I teach. I tell parents that when they bring their infants to be baptized, that they are making promises that they intend to raise their children to follow Jesus Christ. And then in confirmation, I tell our young people that they are taking on their baptismal promises for themselves – that they will declare in front of the congregation that they will follow a life in Christ. They are stepping out to proclaim their belief.

Debie Thomas describes her own experience of her baptism at 12 years old. She writes **“Baptism, I thought, was all about my effort, my obedience, my responsibility. So much depended on me! There were so many ways I could mess up! I had no idea that my “personal decision to love God,” important though it is, pales in significance to God's cosmic decision to love me — and the whole of humanity and creation along with me. In other words, I didn't know the paradoxical power of stepping in. Of giving myself over to something deeper and more trustworthy than the shifting sands of my own opinions, creeds, and doctrines: an ancient cloud of witnesses. A worldwide community of the faithful. A liturgy that endures. A created universe that whispers, laughs, and shouts God's name from every nook and corner.”**²

Giving oneself over – that was the phrase that stuck with me because so much of baptism and then confirmation for me has been about being prepared and there is nothing wrong with that. Being prepared to say you are ready to follow Jesus Christ is a necessary step, but then realizing that it is all not up to your effort is also important, because following Christ means giving yourself over to God, to being encompassed by his incredible love and to letting that love change you and lead you.

You give yourself over to a way of life where God calls you to do things you would have never considered which disrupt your life. You become a part of a community of other Christians who are also trying to following God and who get it wrong, who are annoying and just plain drive you crazy. You pray to someone you cannot see, try to find meaning for your life in words that were written thousands of years ago and show up for those in need or rejected/hated by everyone else.

¹ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2497-stepping-in>

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This is why I love the idea of stepping in rather than out, because it is not about us. It is about God. And the only way it can be about God is to step into what God is inviting us to.

Recently, I sent out an email and posted in our announcements, that our Sunday School program was no longer working. Our teachers who served for many many years were done and since we didn't have any other takers, we were looking at a radical change. However, during the final practice before the Christmas practice, one mom approached and asked what were the requirements to be a Sunday School teacher. I said – a willingness to serve and also added that it would grow her faith. She told me that since she saw the email, something had been bothering her. I think she named what was bothering her as God. She was being bothered to teach Sunday School. She didn't like the bothering and it would interfere with her Sunday Mornings – probably one of her few peaceful times during the week. I said – well it is not every Sunday with our new system and she said well that was the answer I got too. I told her the Holy Spirit i.e. God is bothering you.

That is what baptism is about – being open to God through being part of a faith community, through prayer, through reading of scripture, through fighting for justice and through being with the poor, the outcast and the rejected in this world.

I want to end with Debie Thomas' words, "**Baptism — I understand now — is *all about stepping in, all about surrender, all about finding the holy in the course of my ordinary, mundane life within the family of God.***"³

How are you being called to step into life with Jesus Christ?

³ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2497-stepping-in>