

Sunday, January 18, 2026      Second Sunday after Epiphany Worship Sermon  
"Buried with Christ"   Pastor Takaaki Inoue  
Romans 6:3-10, Matthew 3:13-17

### ① **【John the Baptist's Great Baptismal Movement】**

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness and performed the "baptism of repentance." Baptism was for foreigners who believed in the Lord God; native-born Jews did not receive it. John declared, "All people, whether foreigner or Jew, are the same. Unless they bear the fruit worthy of true repentance, they will perish," and baptized everyone. People wondered if he might be the Messiah. Crowds gathered from all over the country to John in the wilderness, confessed their sins, and received baptism from him. Such a great baptismal movement had never been seen before, so he came to be called "John the Baptist." To these crowds, John declared: "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11)

### ② **【There is a world of difference between knowing Jesus and not knowing Him】**

Amidst that great crowd was Jesus, who had come out from the countryside of Nazareth. John was astonished to see Jesus appear before him and tried to refuse to baptize him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, yet you come to me?" (Matthew 3:14).

●The prayer book records John's astonishment thus: "When the hand of John the Baptist touched your most holy head, it trembled. ... O spotless Lord, why have you come to me? In whose name shall I baptize you? In the Father's name? The Father dwells within you. In the Son's name? You yourself have taken human form. In the Holy Spirit's name? You bestow the Holy Spirit upon believers from your mouth."

The crowd did not recognize who this young man from Nazareth was among them. But John said, "I am not worthy to untie his sandals." He said, "I am less than a slave; I am not worthy to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. How dreadful it would be for me to lay my hand on his head!" Soon, this same man would have nails driven through his feet, a crown of thorns placed upon his head, and spit spat upon his face. In knowing this man, the gap between the crowd and John was as wide as heaven and earth. Do you truly know this man? How do you treat him? That will become clear in the next world.

### ③ **【The Various Meanings of Baptism and Its Blessings】**

Jesus said to John, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15), and was baptized by John. Though Jesus was the sinless Son of God, He was baptized not for Himself, but for our salvation.

**(1) “It portrays the true image of those who obey God.”**

Paul states, “Our ancestors were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea... and were baptized into Moses” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4), declaring that crossing the Red Sea is a prototype of baptism. However, the Israelites later turned away from God and fell into sin. Therefore, by obediently receiving baptism, Jesus heals the disobedience of the old Israel. When Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, and the voice of God the Father declared, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Jesus is the new Israel, the one who truly obeys God.

**(2) “He established a new baptism that brings death and rebirth.”**

In the Bible, water was used as an instrument of judgment. In Noah's flood, it destroyed the wicked; in the Red Sea, it destroyed the Egyptian army. John declared that a new baptism—one with the Holy Spirit and fire—would begin through the Messiah, distinct from his own baptism with water. By deliberately receiving baptism with water, Jesus united within Himself both the baptism with water and the baptism that brings the Holy Spirit. Through water, the old self is buried; simultaneously, the Holy Spirit creates the new self.

● Cyril of Jerusalem preached to the catechumens at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 348: "Three times you were immersed in the water and rose again, symbolizing Christ's three-day burial. ... That saving water was both your tomb and your mother's womb. ... What a strange and wondrous thing! We did not truly die, nor did we truly enter a tomb, nor were we truly crucified and resurrected. Yet even if the imitation is only a form, the salvation is true."

So as I always say, you have already died in this world.

**(3) “It is a ceremony of becoming one with Christ”**

Just as the stain on clothing is transferred into the water through contact with it, so too, through becoming one with Christ, the Son of God, my sins are transferred onto Him. That is why He needed to be baptized with us humans. Therefore, baptism can be called a ceremony of becoming one with Christ—a wedding ceremony, if you will. Paul wrote: “We were buried with Christ through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6:4-5)

The Lord Jesus used the word “us” to become a fellow sinner with us. God shared everything with humanity, achieving complete solidarity with us. God not only became human and shared our humanity, but also shared in our uniquely human sin, sickness, and death. Anyone would share in good things. But who would share in the unpleasant things? Who would want to bear sin? Where is the one who will

bear shame, defilement, and mockery alongside us? Where is the one who will take on our sickness? Yet this is who God is. This is called love. That someone would suffer with us, become like us—this is truly a profound blessing. John said, “Have you come to me?” And indeed, that is exactly it. Because humans cannot ascend to heaven by their own strength, Christ descended to come to you.

#### **(4) “Through Baptism, We Put on Christ”**

The prophet Elisha took Elijah's cloak, which had fallen from heaven, and struck the Jordan River with it. The river parted, and they were able to cross. The Jordan River symbolizes death. This mantle of Elijah is Christ Himself. “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Galatians 3:27) Those who are clothed with Christ are not swallowed up by death but can cross over into the world of life, the kingdom of God.

#### **(5) “The Work of God's Promise = Sacraments”**

Naaman, the Syrian commander afflicted with a severe skin disease, immersed himself seven times in the unclean Jordan River and was restored to skin like a child's. This clearly illustrates the meaning of the sacraments. It is not because the water is clean that sins are washed away through baptism, but because of God's word (promise): “Wash yourself, and you will be clean.” For our sins to be cleansed, “obedience” is required. It means to be like me and obey God's word.

● I was baptized on Christmas Day, December 19, 1982, when I was 23 years old. My wife and I were baptized together. I didn't understand the complexities of faith; I simply wanted my sins forgiven and to be cleansed. This year marks 43 years since my baptism. Being baptized didn't mean I stopped sinning, nor did it make me a perfect, pure person. The one thing that is clear is that through baptism, my Master changed.

Once we lived under the master called “the Law.” According to the Law, we were disqualified and could not enter heaven. But the One who rules over me has changed. I have been united with Christ and placed under the rule of Christ's love and forgiveness. Christ has become my Master. Therefore, the law has changed. Christ's love is the new law. Paul also says this: “Consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11). Therefore, bury your old self. Abandon your own righteousness. What Christ commands becomes the standard for everything. Abandon the notion that you can live apart from Christ. If you separate yourself from Christ, you will immediately fall under the dominion of the law, destroying both yourself and those around you. If you are your own master, die to that self. Make Christ your Master and obey Him in submission. A person becomes like those they are with. If you are one with Christ, you will surely become like Him. I give thanks for this wonderful grace.