

Baptized into submission

By [Erin Martin](#)

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Some of my favorite words from the United Methodist Church's liturgy for Holy Baptism are the first ones spoken: "Brothers and sisters in Christ: Through the Sacrament of Baptism we are initiated into Christ's holy church. We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and the Spirit. All this is God's gift, offered to us without price." As a pastor, what a privilege it is to announce the abundance of God's generosity extended to us in baptism. Initiation into the church, incorporation into God's acts of salvation, new birth through water and the Spirit—all gifts bestowed upon us, not because we are worthy to receive them, but because God is gracious to give them. Free gifts! What more could we want in this season of post-holiday sticker shock?

When Jesus comes from Galilee to be baptized in the Jordan River by John, John's first impulse is to resist the gift. For John, it is all wrong. Jesus is the greater one, Jesus should be the one to baptize him, not vice-versa. What John doesn't yet understand, perhaps because Jesus' ministry is just getting started, is that what it means for Jesus to be the greater one *is* for him to submit to the lesser one. Soon we will hear it everywhere Jesus goes: the last shall be first, the least greatest, the humble exalted. In Jesus' baptism, we don't hear Jesus preach this message; we see him embody it. Jesus' gift to John is the gift of submission. The long-awaited Anointed One allows himself to be plunged into the water by John and as a result, emerges from the water as the Beloved Son, the Suffering Servant. It is Jesus' submission that is pleasing to God, for it "fulfills all righteousness."

In baptism, we too emerge from the water as beloved sons and daughters whose new life, in the pattern of Christ, is one of servanthood. We too are given the gift of submission. The challenge for those of us who are baptized is to live into the gift of our own transformation.

[Dean McIntyre tells a story](#) about the greatest Christmas gift he received this year. It was a card from the singer and songwriter Ken Medema that contained a \$10 bill in it along with the instructions to use the money as Dean saw fit. He writes, “I had Ken’s \$10 bill in my wallet when I stopped at the grocery store on my way to work one morning. In the checkout lane next to mine was an older couple who spoke in a thick east European accent of some kind. They did not have enough money to pay for their purchases, which appeared to me to be all staples—no frills or extras. They were having to decide which of their purchases to send back to the shelves. I gave Ken’s \$10 to my own checker and asked her to give it anonymously to the young woman checking out the older couple. It covered their deficit and allowed them to keep a few dollars in their pocket. They were gratefully confused as I watched them head for the door.”

Isn’t that the way our baptism works? It is a gift that contains within it the generosity of God, a gift that through us keeps on giving. We have been baptized into the submission of Jesus, the greatest gift there is to receive. Therefore, we can once again this year remember our baptisms and be thankful.