

January 11, Baptism A (Isaiah 42:1–9; Matthew 3:13–17)

Sometimes it's hard for us to remember who we are.

by [Christine Chakoian](#) in the [January 2026](#) issue

Published on January 4, 2026

Last fall I attended my high school class's 50th reunion. A lot of people remembered me—not because I was all that special, but because I was at the reunion with my identical twin sister, Karen. Everyone remembered two of us, and, just like the good old days, nobody could tell us apart. “Which one are you?” people kept asking.

Sometimes it's hard for *us* to remember who we are. I was amazed at all the memories that bubbled up at the reunion—of choir and Russian class, dear friends and fierce competitors. I remembered things about my young life that I hadn't thought of for decades: the urgency we felt to work for racial justice and an end to war, our commitment to LGBTQ welcome, my feminist identity, my church that celebrated the first Earth Day and how excited we were to save the planet. Who am I now? Am I who, at my core, I had hoped I would be? Am I who *God* wanted me to be?

One thing I'll never forget is a story retired Presbyterian pastor Jim Lowry tells. Each Saturday evening in his youth, just before he left the house to pick up his date, his father would look him squarely in the eye and say to him, “Child, remember who you are.” Jim grew up in the heart of the South at a time when the notion of who you were meant something—not just about money, education, or race but about character. What you did, how you behaved, reflected on you and on your family name. Jim had a responsibility to bear the Lowry name with honor.

“Remember who you are.” This is not just for our sake, but for the world around us too. In *The Lion King*, Rafiki asks Simba, “Who are you?” It is a pivotal moment: Rafiki confronts Simba's denial of his true identity as the rightful heir to the Pride Lands. It is only later that Simba finally gets it, when his late father Mufasa speaks to him from the sky: “Remember who you are. . . . You are my son and the one true king.” Only then is Simba able to come to terms with his past, lay claim to his identity, and take up his responsibility to restore the Pride Lands.

Matthew's telling of Jesus' baptism is often seen as an announcement to everyone about who Jesus is: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” But it is more than a public address. Jesus' baptism is also his own calling to remember who he is.

The context matters. Jesus' baptism comes immediately after John the Baptist's cry to the people to repent. It is time-sensitive: they must prepare for the one who will usher in the kingdom of God. When Pharisees and Sadducees come to be baptized, John scoffs, warning that they will be “cut down and thrown into the fire” for their failure to bear good fruit (Matt. 3:2–7).

Now, Jesus comes to be baptized. But John resists: “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” John recognizes Jesus for who he is, the one whom God sent to bring the kingdom of heaven near (Matt. 3:2). And John is correct: Jesus has no sins to repent of, no words to confess, no actions to atone for.

Nevertheless, what Jesus knows is this: It is crucial that his identity is announced publicly if he is to begin his work. And it is just as essential that Jesus himself lay claim to his identity—that he take up his calling to restore the world. He is the one who will fulfill God's promise in Isaiah 42: God's “chosen one” on whom God's Spirit

will rest . . . the one who “will bring justice to the nations” . . . the one who will “open the eyes that are blind” and free “prisoners from the dungeon.”

It will not be easy. As Jesus begins his journey “to fulfill all righteousness,” he will face temptations, battles, betrayals, and, ultimately, death on the cross. And through it all, he will remember who he is, even—especially—in the hardest times. But will his followers?

It is no accident that God’s same message is repeated at the transfiguration. As Jesus begins his journey to his crucifixion, he brings his closest disciples to the mountaintop. Moses and Elijah join him there, reminding him of others who have suffered for the sake of the kingdom. While they are there, the heavens open as they did at Jesus’ baptism, God’s voice proclaiming “This is my Son, the Beloved—*listen to him*” (Matt. 17:5).

As this echo of today’s passage makes clear, it is crucial that we recognize who Jesus is. The public proclamation at Jesus’ baptism and the intimate repetition with his disciples are not just for Jesus’ sake, but for ours. Because over time, his followers will be required to ask ourselves who we believe Jesus is. Like the first disciples, we will be pressed to ask ourselves who we are and what purpose our lives have.

Who are we really? Will we hear our calling to do what we can to “fulfill all righteousness” . . . to be “a light to the nations” and “bring out the prisoners from the dungeon”? In the end, will we remember who we are?