

John Baptizes Jesus of Nazareth

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Mark

Jesus comes to John to be baptized, as if to declare that he is the one John has been proclaiming. As Jesus emerges from the water, God's Spirit descends upon him like a dove, and a voice from heaven confirms Jesus' identity. "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:10–11). Although Jesus is the Son of God, that doesn't negate Jesus' human ethnicity, language, culture, and family. He is from Nazareth of Galilee. Galilee was a remote region, and Nazareth had a bad reputation among the elites in the capital, Jerusalem.

Origins influence the way people present themselves and are perceived as they go about their work. Sometimes an identity may be an advantage. At other times, it creates barriers. Immigrant workers, for example, often face stereotypes about their homeland or ethnicity. They typically lose whatever status and reputation they had in their community of origin. Highly skilled workers may be shunted into unskilled jobs. Financial and emotional support networks may be torn apart.

Jesus' identity as uniquely beloved of God is deeper and more fundamental than the circumstances of his origin. In God's eyes, Jesus is not some suspicious character from Nazareth, but God's beloved, born to bring God's own Holy Spirit throughout the world. Jesus' obedience to his calling, opens the way of the Lord to all creation, and his work on the cross fulfills and perfects all good work. If Jesus can embrace his particular human origin, each of us can embrace ours. No one has the right to treat us as inferior because of our identity. And none of us have the right to treat another person as inferior because of their identity. For most of us, this alone is cause to repent.

Even so, our origin does not dictate or limit our identity. Through baptism—the visible sign of turning to Jesus' way—we accept our identity as children of God above and beyond any identity the world confers. The identity that we have as children of God is the starting point by which we live out our lives, even in the workplace.