

# Rock of Ages,. Cleft For Me

*Words and music are in the print version.*

Having taken upon himself  
The burden of our unrighteousness,  
By which we were oppressed,  
Christ has clothed us  
With his own pure righteousness.



## First Sunday after Epiphany

Old Orchard Church

January 15, 2012 — 10:15-11:50 a.m.

**Cover Art:** Cover art: "The Baptism: from the St. Albans Psalter, Germany, late 1100's. **Song:** "Rock of Ages" by James Ward (music) © 1985 James Ward Music. All rights reserved CCLI #188763. Words: Augustus M. Toplady.

# Christ Our Brother, Baptized: Celebrating God's Solidarity with Us

As Jesus was born under the Law,  
was obedient to the Law,  
and came to fulfill the Law on our behalf,  
so he submitted to John's baptism of repentance in our place.  
He who was without sin  
stood with us in our need for forgiveness.  
So let us be encouraged; let us claim the promises of God  
set over us as a banner at our own baptism;  
And let us claim Christ's righteousness as ours,  
even as we, his brothers and sisters,  
live to love him,  
to obey and enjoy him.  
**Alleluia and Amen!**



## Scripture Readings

Old Testament Lesson: Ezekiel 36:22-29  
Gospel Reading: Matthew 3:1-3, 13-17

## Sermon

“Motivation for Missions”

Revelation 5

Kirk Norris, seminary intern, preaching

We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly—and in a circle, at the end of worship. A word of direction is given, and with this everyone stands and moves to the walls. The cup is passed in two forms: in a chalice and then in small individual cups. You are free to choose.

And as this is the Supper of the Lord Christ, please listen to the instructions we give as to what qualifies a visitor to participate. **But whether you intend to take communion or not, please join us in the circle.**

## Solidarity

What does “solidarity” mean? It means to stand alongside someone so closely that you're almost “solidly” one with them. The word captures the essence of what the high, exalted, eternal Son did when he became human: he stood alongside us, he stood in solidarity with us. Our joys became his joys, our afflictions, his afflictions. Nowhere is this more dramatically expressed than in Jesus' insistence to John that he must be baptized. He, the pure and perfect One, baptized by a sinner in a ritual signifying that one was morally dirty, in need of spiritual washing—a kind of bath for the soul stained by selfishness, by disregard for God and everything God calls good.

When John objected to baptizing Jesus, Jesus overrode the protest with the insistence, **“It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness”** What did Jesus mean? At the very least he meant that this was the Father's will that the sinner should baptize the Sinless One and thus place him who needed no moral cleansing squarely in the midst of those who do. Jesus was baptized in solidarity with us; and solidarity is love. Jesus came because he loved us. And whoever loves, serves. In obedience to his Father, Jesus came as the Suffering Servant, promised by Isaiah. He came to be our Brother and like an older brother hero, to take the rap we deserved. How striking is the parallel between God's words in Isaiah 42 and the audible voice John heard from heaven as Jesus climbed up out of the river:

**Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.**  
(Isaiah 42:1)

**And a Voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** (Matthew 3:17)

All this should move us profoundly: Jesus' baptism should be a high moment in the history of God demonstrating his love for us. But it isn't quite that for us, is it? To modern people, spiritual rituals seem artificial and a bit fakey. “After all,” we assure ourselves, “It's **just** a ritual.” Political, military, and social rituals still have the power to move us, as I think most of us would agree when we watch, say, the graveside ceremony for one of our soldiers killed in Afghanistan or Iraq. But this ritual of a bath for the troubled soul, a symbolic washing off of the heart's grime, was given to John the Baptist by God as something terribly important: a salve for troubled consciences. It was a baptism of repentance.

So also is the baptism Jesus later commanded his disciples to wash us in. But that baptism has something added to it, something which makes it, specifically, Christian baptism, something fuller than John's baptism: it also now signifies the “pouring” of the Spirit of God, of divine Goodness, into the emptiness of our own goodness on the basis of Christ's finished work at the cross.

God the Son was baptized in solidarity with us in our sinfulness so that eventually, by his grace, we might stand in solidarity with him in his righteousness, that everything he won in his dying and rising would become ours, when we believe. That is what the gospel means.

—Ron Lutjens