

The story behind the OCEANS that cover 70% of Earth's surface is long and complex, and shrouded in mystery.

The question of HOW Earth came to be the BLUE MARBLE PLANET we know today has spawned fascinating theories.¹

- Did water come crashing down on the wings of water-bearing comets and asteroids?
- Or was it already present inside the planet, and came to the surface over time?²

The latest research points to a likely combination of both of those theories.

But whatever OCEANS' ORIGINS may be on this 3rd Rock from the Sun, there's no doubt that it's the presence and prevalence of WATER that enabled LIFE to gain a foothold here, and over deep time, to thrive.

On a Sunday when we recall Christ's baptism in the Jordan and remember our own, we're connecting the dots...

- Between OUR LIVES OF FAITH and OCEAN HEALTH;
- between our VOCATION AS STEWARDS and the FATE OF THE WATERS on which all life depends.

From earliest centuries, followers of Jesus have seen the connection between the sacred act of baptism and the sacred waters of Earth.

3rd century church father Tertullian put it this way:

"We, little fishes, after the example of our...Lord Jesus Christ, are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water."

You see, WATER is not only THE SOURCE that connects us to Christ through the sacrament of baptism, it is the MEDIUM in which we live our lives of faith. For not only do we abide in water, we are water.

¹ You can read about several theories by following these links: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/10/141030-starstruck-earth-water-origin-vesta-science/>
<https://scitechinstitute.org/earths-water-where-did-it-all-come-from/>

² <https://scitechinstitute.org/earths-water-where-did-it-all-come-from/>

The majority of the human body—60% or more depending on certain factors—IS WATER...

And the way we INTERACT with water, the way we STEWARD water, the way we USE water MATTERS to those of us whose lives are shaped by the promises of the Triune God we receive in baptism.

So, HOW ARE WE DOING? How are we managing our relationship with the OCEANS of EARTH?

I'm afraid it must be said that WE'RE GETTING A FAILING GRADE. Particularly when it comes to plastic pollution.

The statistics are alarming.

- Globally, we produce over 400 million tons of plastic each year—30% more than the weight of all humanity.
- Less than 10% of that plastic is recycled. The rest ends up in our environment – and in us.
- An estimated 33 billion pounds of plastic enters the ocean every year — that's two garbage trucks full of plastic every minute of every hour of every day, 365 days a year. A figure expected to TRIPLE the next 20 yrs.
- Plastics, both macro and micro, are by far the largest, most harmful and most persistent fraction of marine litter, accounting for 85% of total marine waste³

All those bits of plastic leach toxic compounds into the oceans.

But it's not just WATER QUALITY that plastics impact.

- Every year 100,000 marine mammals and turtles and 1 million sea birds are killed by marine plastic pollution.

See what I mean by failing grade?

³ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2023/08/explainer-what-is-plastic-pollution/#:~:text=But%2C%20this%20brief%20life%20cycle,if%20no%20action%20is%20taken>, <https://www.sas.org.uk/plastic-pollution/plastic-pollution-facts-figures/>, <https://goodfaithmedia.org/garbage-truck-worth-of-plastic-enters-oceans-every-minute/>, <https://usa.oceana.org/our-campaigns/plastic/>

One more dismal fact: What happens to all the unrecycled plastic waste, you may ask? Much of it is illegally exported to poor countries—a practice that’s spawned a new name: Toxic Colonialism.

Since January of 2021, the U.S., Canada, and the European Union have offloaded hundreds of millions of tons of plastic to other countries, where much of it is landfilled, burned, or littered into the environment.⁴

And I haven’t even mentioned the fact that 99% of all plastics are made from chemicals sourced from fossil fuels, which we desperately need to divest from.⁵

I know—statistics like these are mind numbing and can temp us to check-out.
But stay with me...

We live in a state whose people are deeply concerned about the impact of plastics on the Ocean and Salish Sea.

92% of Washington voters are concerned about single-use plastic products and 87% support local and state policies that reduce single-use plastic.

**Moving from CONCERN to ACTION is always the hardest step.
But we can do it—together.**

Our Creation Care Team is making plastic pollution a cornerstone of its action plan for 2024...

And there will be opportunities throughout the coming year for individuals and households to work on changing our habits so that GOOD INTENTIONS become POWERFUL REALITIES.

So stay tuned... be prepared to join in.

⁴ <https://www.invw.org/2022/04/18/rich-countries-are-illegally-exporting-plastic-trash-to-poor-countries-data-suggests/> To learn more about what happens to those items we put in our recycling bins in Seattle, read this recent article in the Seattle Times: <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/recycling-101-a-deep-dive-into-a-king-county-facility-where-the-magic-happens/>

⁵ <https://www.ciel.org/issue/fossil-fuels-plastic/#:~:text=Over%2099%25%20of%20plastic%20is,in%20the%20US%20and%20beyond.>

When John the Baptist stands in the Jordan, his feet anchored on its muddy bottom, he announces:

ONE MORE POWERFUL THAN I IS COMING! ...

...and no sooner do the words leave his mouth than THAT ONE, Jesus of Nazareth, makes his entrance, wading into the river to be baptized. And then...

HEAVENS TEAR, SPIRIT SWOOPS, VOICE DECLARES:

YOU ARE MY SON, THE BELOVED; WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED.

What kind of Voice it was, no one can say for sure.

The way Mark tells it, perhaps Jesus himself was the only one who could decipher that glorious thunder.

But in my imagination the Psalmist got it right:

The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;

The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedar trees...shakes the wilderness... makes oak trees writhe, and in the Temple, all are crying, "GLORY!"⁶

A VOICE like that has much in common with the surging ocean surf that's been hitting the West Coast in recent days.

And if we read on to verse 12 in Mark, we find, indeed, that Jesus is **DRIVEN IMMEDIATELY** from the Jordan out into the wilderness; **THRUST THERE** as if caught on the leading edge of a **monster wave** and **deposited** by the same divine energy that swept over the waters at creation.

If Jesus has access to such power, he doesn't show it, not yet anyway.

And when he does show it, it will be manifest not as the brute force of nature or as the malevolent force of weaponry, but as the power to heal.

All that the future holds for him and the community he will summon begins here in Jordan's waters and with those words: BELOVED.

⁶ Psalm 29, from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, edited.

The resources of the faith tradition in which we ground our lives, the texts and stories, songs and visions of Scripture, point us toward a future in which water will continue to play a central role.

Addressing new converts preparing for baptism, 4th century Bishop Maximus tells them:

“In the baptism of the Savior the blessing which flowed down like a spiritual stream touched the outpouring of every flood and the course of every stream.

We must be baptized by the same stream as the Savior was.

But... to be dipped in the same water, we do not require the regions of the East nor the river in Jewish lands, for now Christ is everywhere and the Jordan is everywhere... Thus even if perchance a river should have some other name in this world, there is in it, nonetheless, the mystery of the Jordan.”

What St. Maximus knew in the 4th century we are coming to see in the 21st century in a new way—that the waters of the Jordan make all waters holy and protecting these waters—from river to aquifer to ocean—is the vocation of every Christian community, wherever it may be.

The way we interact with water, the way we treat Earth’s oceans, the way we choose care over convenience MATTERS to us whose lives are shaped by the promises we received in baptism.

For all waters on this planet home – salt or fresh, ocean, creek or stream – are connected. It’s what way things are...the way God intended them to be.

Amen.