You might not think of this often, but the Solar System where we live is awash in water.

One of the moons of Saturn has water geysers. Another moon of Jupiter has water beneath its surface. The stunning ring of Saturn is made up entirely of water ice crystals.

The outer planets of Uranus and Neptune are giant ice cubes surrounding an unknown core.

Comets are snowballs hurtling through space, leaving tails of ice as they approach the sun.

In the distant past, Mars and Venus had oceans until they evaporated.

Astronomers are getting hints that planets in other solar systems have water. Recently a comet from another star system came hurtling through our solar system. It is made of water.

And, of course, this good earth, our island home, is awash in water. Fully 70 percent of the earth’s surface is covered in water. Our moon has frozen water at its poles.

You and I are made of water. About two-thirds of our body is water, and our blood is about the same salinity as the ocean. We are water-beings.

With this much water in the universe, you might reasonably suspect that the probability of life elsewhere is great.

Today in the gospel story from Matthew, we join Jesus at the banks of the River Jordan as he steps into the water of his baptism.

As he immerses himself in the water, Jesus immerses himself in life with all humanity, and with all life on this earth — and perhaps — with all life throughout the universe.

John the Baptist tries to hold him back. “Why should you be baptized?” he asks. “You should baptize me.”

But John is asking the wrong question. Jesus insists on being baptized. He insists on sharing everything about life on this earth.

He insists on sharing everything about life with us — our joys, our dreams, our challenges, our heartbreaks, our mortal bodies.

I know our culture thinks of baptism — if it thinks of it at all — as primarily a dedication ceremony at the birth of a baby. There is nothing wrong with that, and I love baptizing babies.
When I was growing up it was called “christening,” which sounds like launching a baby ship. When I was a child, most baptisms were done privately, and I suspect mine was too.

But Baptism is more than a launching ceremony. So much more.

Baptism opens a way of life that will transforms us and transforms the world around us. Baptism opens a window to the world as God dreams the world to be — a world of hope, compassion, justice, and mercy.

Baptism is an invitation for us to become not just spectators, but participants in God’s dream of bringing wholeness and healing, kindness and love to this earth.

It is never too soon in life to begin this way of baptism. This is the deeper reason we baptize babies. Babies have much to teach us about compassion and selfless love. We need babies here.

It is also never too late in life to begin this way of baptism, which is why we baptize people of all ages and stations in life.

Yet baptism is more than just about us as individuals. Baptism is about all of us together, as Saint Paul calls us the Body of Christ alive in the world. It is why we don’t do private baptisms any longer because we welcome the newly baptized into the household of God, and that would be all us.

Infants and children are as valuable in the household of God as anyone else, so why wait to baptize them? We need everyone here.

And once you are in, you are in, and nothing can take your baptism away from you. This is why we baptize people only once. In the words of the Prayer Book, you are “Christ’s own forever.” We don’t re-baptize people. Once you are in, you are in.

But there is even more to this.

Water brings life. Water also brings death. Too much water, and we drown. By being baptized, Jesus also walks into death with us. When Jesus emerges from the water of baptism, he begins his journey to Jerusalem and his death on the Cross.

By going to the Cross, he shows us there is more to life than our mortal death — that death does not get the last word.

His followers experience him after his death, and they are transformed by their experience. And they continue to experience him again and again — and so do we.

The resurrection of Christ Jesus opens a window for all of us to experience reality beyond the horizon of our mortal existence on this earth — and this experience begins with the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan.

His baptism also reminds us that parts of us that harm and wound ourselves, and the parts of us that harm and wound others, also needs to die.
This is why baptism is the central sacrament of the Church — and is central to all that we do together as a community of faith.

It is in the deepest mystery of baptism that the Holy Spirit shape us into followers of Jesus Christ.

Our baptism comes with a cost – the cost of being a follower. We hear the cost in the pledges of our baptism.

We make these promises every time we come together to baptize someone. We pledge to pray and share in the breaking of the bread, and when we fall short, to repent and return to the Lord.

We promise to love our neighbors as ourselves, and we promise to respect the dignity of every human being.

In short, we promise to share God’s dream of creating a world based not on greed, political power, violence and revenge, but a world based on peace, hope and justice.

Our baptismal pledges may compel us to take an unpopular stand, or show compassion to those who are shunned by the society around us.

We might find ourselves in uncomfortable, difficult places — as so many before us have been.

This way of life begins for us once again today as we stand with Jesus at the River Jordan as he is immersed into his baptism of life with us.

In the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him: he will bring forth justice to the nations.”

Amen.