

Introduction

1. Do you remember your baptism?
 - a. When, where, and how were you baptized?
 - b. Your baptism was and still is a significant milestone in your journey in life with Jesus.
2. Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry as God recognized His special Son.

A. Jesus Came to John for Baptism (Mt 3:13-15)

1. Mark simply stated that "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan" (Mk 1:9-11).
2. Luke recorded, "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too" (Lk 3:21a).
3. Matthew added more detail related to John the Baptist's reluctance to baptize Jesus.
 - a. **Read Mt 3:13-15.**
 - b. John the Baptist knew that Jesus was the Messiah and believed that he needed Jesus' baptism more than Jesus needed his. (14)
 - c. Jesus corrected John's misunderstanding when He said, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness (Gk., *plerosai pasan dikaiosunen*)." (15)
 - d. Warren Wiersbe notes, "Our Lord's baptism in water was a picture of His work of redemption (Matt. 20:22; Luke 12:50). It was through His baptism of suffering on the cross that God 'fulfilled all righteousness'" (Wiersbe, *Compassionate*, 49).
4. Why was Jesus baptized by John? Why was His baptism proper and necessary "to fulfill all righteousness"?
 - a. **Validation** – Charles Erdman notes, "[Jesus] set his seal of approval upon the work of John and to attest the message which declared that repentance and confession of sin are absolutely necessary for all who are to share the salvation of Christ" (Charles Erdman, *The Gospel of Luke*, 43).
 - b. **Identification** – Jesus' baptism was an event through which He was not only identified as the Son of God (i.e., fully divine) but also identified as one of us (i.e., fully human).
 - 1) God's Son identified Himself with humanity as the representative of a new people of God at the inauguration of the public ministry for which He came and through which He would fulfill His purpose, the salvation of humanity.
 - 2) After His resurrection Jesus would command, ". . . Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (Mt 28:19). This is a further identification with us, since a good leader never asks his/her followers to do anything that he/she is unwilling to do.
 - c. **Transition** – Jesus' baptism was an important transition point as he moved into His public ministry.
 - 1) John the Baptist came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4).
 - a) For Jews, baptism was nothing new. It had long been associated with a ritual process symbolizing the transition from an old identity to a new identity (e.g., converts to Judaism; brides; those entering the Temple sanctuary; those who copied the scriptures (e.g., *mikveh* of Qumran)).
 - b) When Jesus came "to baptized by John" was He repenting and needing forgiveness for sins? **NO!**
 - i. Jesus never repents or confesses any sin because He has no sin.
 - ii. Paul declared, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).
 - iii. The writer of Hebrews affirmed, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (Hb 4:15).

- 2) Rabbi Maurice Lamm reveals the meaning of baptism. “The person at this moment of transition . . . marks a move to an altered status or to a life transition” (Rabbi Maurice Lamm, *Becoming a Jew*, Jonathan David Publishers, 1991).
 - a) For sinners, John’s baptism was a sign of repentance and movement to a new life in the coming kingdom of God.
 - b) For Jesus, baptism marked His transition from private life to public ministry as He undertook the fulfillment of His God-given purpose.
 - c) “It is recognized by other New Testament sources as the formal beginning of Christ’s public ministry (Acts 1:21-22; 10:37-38)” (*Harmony*, 45).
 - 3) Wiersbe adds, “[Jesus] was ‘about thirty years of age’ (Luke 3:23), and the Jewish Levites began their work at age thirty (see Num. 4:3, 35)” (Wiersbe, *Compassionate*, 49).
 - 4) Jesus was transitioning from the normal course of life to the mission for which the Father had sent Him.
- d. **Mission** – Jesus’ baptism identified His mission in life and His commitment to fulfill it.
- 1) Jesus’ baptism was a public acknowledgement of who He was and His purpose in coming.
 - 2) The Greek verb “torn open” (Gk., *schizo* – “torn, split, opened”) used in Mark’s account is significant. Matthew and Luke use different verbs which will be detailed below.
 - a) Tearing signals two important moments in history and in the life of Jesus as he took up his mission and as he fulfilled it.
 - b) In Mk 1:10, heaven was “torn open” as God the Father and Spirit testified to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God as he formally took up his redemptive ministry.
 - c) Mk 15:38 records that “The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” This was considered to be an act of God which marked the completion of Jesus’ redemptive ministry as the heretofore limited access to God was opened for all who would come through Jesus’s sacrificial death on the cross.
 - d) The Father intervened at the beginning of Jesus’ mission and at its culmination on the cross to identify Jesus as His Son.

B. Jesus’ Baptism (Mt 3:16-17; Lk 3:21-23)

1. The accounts of Jesus’ baptism in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are close parallels.

Read Mt 3:16-17; Mk 1:10-11; Lk 3:21-23a. (See *Harmony*, p. 45)
2. All three accounts agree that Jesus was “baptized” (Gk., *baptiso*), which indicated a full submersion of His body under the water.
3. There are small variations in detail from the vantage points of the various eyewitnesses.
 - a. Matthew and Mark focus on events as Jesus came out of the water.
 - 1) Luke recorded the additional detail that these events occurred not only after Jesus’ baptism but also “as he was praying” (Lk 3:21).
 - 2) On this Lukan detail Wiersbe notes, “Only Luke mentions that Jesus was praying . . . As the perfect Son of Man, Jesus depended on His Father to meet His needs, and that was why He prayed” (Wiersbe, *Compassionate*, 49).
 - 3) Charles Erdman adds, “Luke alone mentions that this experience came when Jesus was in prayer. He realized that it was a time of crisis. Prayer is usually the condition of those heavenly visions and spiritual experiences which prepare us for our tasks in life” (Erdman, 44).
 - 4) Robert Stein notes, “For Luke prayer was frequently a time of revelation and direction from God. Indeed Luke often added to narratives references to Jesus at prayer ([Lk] 6:12; 9:18,28-29; 11:1; cf. 22:40-41). The Holy Spirit, furthermore, often comes in response to prayer. Jesus serves here as a model for Christians in their prayer lives” (Robert Stein, *Luke* in NAC, 139).
 - b. In all three accounts heaven was opened.
 - 1) As mentioned, Mark said witness saw heaven “being torn open (Gk., *schizomenous*)” (Mk 1:10).
 - 2) Matthew said heaven “was opened (Gk., *eneochthesan*)” (Mt 3:16);
 - 3) Luke simply said heaven “was opened (Gk., *aneochthenai*)” (Lk 3:21).

c. The Holy Spirit was present.

- 1) Mark identified Him as “the Spirit (Gk., *ho pneuma*)” (Mk 1:10).
- 2) Matthew identified Him as the “Spirit of God (Gk., *pneuma theou*)” (Mt 3:16).
- 3) Luke gave Him the full title “the Holy Spirit (Gk., *ho pneuma to agion*)” (Lk 3:22).

d. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus.

- 1) Matthew said witnesses saw the Holy Spirit “descending like a dove (Gk., *katabainon osei peristeran*) and lighting on him (Gk., *erchomenon ep auton*)” (Mt 3:16);
- 2) Mark agreed saying they saw the Holy Spirit “descending on him like a dove (Gk., *os peristeran katabainon eis auton*)” (Mk 3:10); and
- 3) Luke added a small detail in stating that the Holy Spirit “descended . . . on him in bodily form like a dove (Gk., *katabenai . . . somatiko eidei os peristeran ep auton*)” (Lk 3:22).
- 4) What is the significance of the Holy Spirit’s descent upon Jesus?
 - a) The symbol of the dove as a representation of the Holy Spirit is clear to us as NT believers, but it must be understood in the framework of the OT.
 - i. The dove was a veiled reference to the Spirit “moving” (KJV) or “hovering” (NASB, NIV) over the waters of creation in Ge 1:2.
 - ii. Jews in the OT typically saw a dove (Hb., *jonah*) as representing the community of Israel.
 - iii. Jesus is the unique representative of the new Israel that came about through His work.
 - b) The Spirit descended not literally in the form of a dove but “like” (Gk., *osei, os*) a dove.
 - c) In Ac 2:3 the Holy Spirit descended on believers, the new Israel. At that time, the Holy Spirit descended as “tongues like as of fire,” which may be seen as a fulfillment of John the Baptist’s words, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Mt 3:11, cf. Mk 3:8).
- 5) G. Campbell Morgan notes, “The bird of sacrifice for sin in the ancient economy rested in holy gentleness upon Him, Who is God’s one, perfect, final Sacrifice for sin. The dove is the emblem of weakness; but the Spirit of God in the form of a dove is an emblem of power in gentleness—Deity submissive to sacrifice for the salvation of men. This was an anointing for death, for atonement. It was not simply an anointing for preaching, but for living in order to dying. He had consented to death; and Heaven crowned Him with power for that death” (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 28).

e. A voice (Gk., *phonen*), which can be interpreted as none other than the voice of the Father, spoke.

- 1) Matthew made the statement of the voice a general declaration to the crowd: “This is my Son, whom I love: with him I am well pleased (Gk., *Outos estin ho uios mou o agapetos, en o eudokesa*)” (Mt 3:17).
- 2) Mark and Luke used the same words in Greek but made the statement as a personal word spoken to Jesus Himself: “You are my Son, whom I love: with you I am well pleased (Gk., *Su ei ho uios mou o agapetos, en soi eudokesa*)” (Mk 1:11, Lk 3:22).
- 3) The words used are the same. Only the voice of the verbs are changed from third person singular in Matthew to second person singular in Mark and Luke (i.e., “This is” vs. “You are”).
- 4) Stein adds an important insight, “The voice from heaven clearly reveals a unique relationship between Jesus and God and refers to Jesus’ past as well as present status with God. The voice did not confer upon Jesus a new status, so we should not see here some kind of adoptionist Christology. Rather, the voice confirmed what the readers read already in Luke 1:32-35 and 2:49, i.e., that Jesus was the Son of God before his baptism” (Stein, 240).

f. Notice that at Jesus’ baptism, according to all three accounts, all three persons of the Trinity are present: Son, Holy Spirit, and Father.

4. What did the words of the Father mean?

- a. The Father spoke to initiate re-creation by sending forth His Word, Jesus the Son, into the world like the Spirit who hovered over the baptismal waters in the midst of God’s re-creative action.
- b. The Father spoke these words again at the Transfiguration (cf., Mk 9:7) as Jesus prepared to make the final journey to Jerusalem to fulfill His God-given mission on the cross.

- c. As the Father spoke from heaven, He combined words from Ps 2:7 with some from Isa 42:1.
- 1) Psalm 2 is not only an enthronement psalm for kings of Israel but also for the Messiah.
 - a) God through the psalmist declared, “. . . He said to me, ‘You are my son; . . .’” (Ps 2:7, underlining mine).
 - b) Only Israel (cf., Ex 4:22-23; Jer 2:2; Ho 11:1-3) and the king, as Israel’s representative (cf., Ps 2:7), are proclaimed as God’s son in the OT.
 - c) Jesus is the Son of God, the firstborn of the new Israel, and the only perfect King in David’s line whose reign has no end.
 - 2) Isa 42:1 is the first of the four Servant Psalms of Isaiah. These psalms speak of a suffering servant, either a nation or individual, who will come to suffer for the salvation of all people.
 - a) God said through Isaiah, “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations” (Isa 42:1, underlining mine).
 - b) The last of the four Servant Psalms is found in Isa 52:13-53:12. It recounts the suffering of the Servant for the sins of the people.
 - c) Isaiah declared, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isa 53:5).
 - d) God for the first time in scripture brought together Messiah and Suffering Servant in one person, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
 - d. The voice of God gave witness to the truth of who Jesus is and what He had come to do.
 - e. Jesus came to be the Messiah and Suffering Servant of God who would save His people from sin.
5. Luke added the unique detail of Jesus’ age at His baptism: “Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry” (Lk 3:23a).
- a. The age of 30 may be significant as an indication that Jesus had reached maturity for completing His service. At the age of 30, Levites entered full service at the Temple (cf., Nu 4:3). Thirty was also the age at which Joseph began his service under pharaoh (cf., Ge 41:46).
 - b. Assuming Jesus was born around 6-4 BCE, the date of His baptism would be about CE 24-26.
 - c. Assuming Jesus’ ministry lasted about three years, then Jesus’ death and resurrection would most likely have occurred about CE 27-29.

C. Reflections

1. Is your baptism still significant to you today? How?
2. Are you praying each day as you live out your baptismal commitment to God?
3. Are you regularly receiving the re-filling of the Holy Spirit’s fire in your life/ministry?
4. Thank God for His marvelous plan which brought together the Messiah and the Suffering Servant in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.