

▣ JESUS BAPTIZED BY JOHN

Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23 / Yeshua §24

The day before graduation, the United States Marine Corp hosts Family Day at MCRD San Diego. The day begins with a run by the marines. We had not seen our son for thirteen weeks and were eager to identify him as his platoon ran passed. All the men were wearing the exact same military green shorts, green shirts and hats with exactly the same haircut. They were all tan from hours in the sun. Cathy, Alyssa and I strained to identify Caleb, but we could not.

The issue of identity is a major issue in the coming of the Messiah King. How was God going to identify the true Messiah to His people Israel?

As we have discovered, God's plan included sending a messenger to prepare the way of the Messiah. The story of Jesus actually begins with this messenger. As we discovered, the messenger is John the Baptist, miraculously born to Zechariah & Elizabeth in their old age. As a young adult, John spent many years isolated in the Judean Wilderness away from the influences of rabbinic Judaism and Sanhedrin politics. In 26 A.D. God called John out of the wilderness to begin his work of preparing the people to receive the Messiah and ultimately identifying the Messiah to the nation of Israel. On the occasion of Jesus' baptism, John received supernatural assistance in identifying the Messiah.

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| Part 1. | The Coming of the King → <i>Jesus Baptized by John</i> |
| Part 2. | The Authentication of the King |
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▣ JESUS CAME TO JOHN TO BE BAPTIZED (MATTHEW 3:13-17; LUKE 3:23)

MATTHEW 3:13-17 (ESV)

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Luke adds:

LUKE 3:23 (ESV)

Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age...

Luke records Jesus "was about thirty years of age" when He began His public ministry. If He was born in 7-6B.C. and John the Baptist began his ministry in 26A.D., Jesus was about 32 or 33 when He came to John to be baptized.

Before we get into the story of Jesus' baptism, let's think about the ritual of water baptism itself.

BAPTISM

First, baptism was a common Jewish practice long before it became an ordinance of the Christian church. Jewish baptism was always by immersion. Jewish baptism was practiced for two reasons:

▣ Jewish baptism was practiced for two reasons:

- Purification from ceremonial uncleanness.
- Conversion to Judaism.

1. **Purification from ceremonial uncleanness.** The Mosaic Law stipulated a number of ways a person might become ceremonially unclean such as by touching a dead body. Immersion in a *mikvah*, a body of fresh water, purified the unclean.
2. **Conversion to Judaism.** Baptism was required for gentile conversion to Judaism. A convert's baptism symbolized both their purification and their identification with Judaism. In the case of Gentile conversion, baptism had the added meaning of identification – they were identifying with Judaism.

The baptism of John the Baptist was by immersion. Those who were baptized were, through their baptism, identifying themselves with John's message that they needed to return to God and prepare themselves for His Kingdom.

Dr. Fruchtenbaum provides a very clear summary about baptism:

The basic idea behind baptism, then, is identification, and the one who is being baptized identifies himself with a person and/or a message and/or a group. By doing so, he disassociates himself from an old identification. Those who were baptized by John the Baptist identified themselves with his message and prepared themselves to accept the Messiah. Whomsoever he would point out to be that Messiah, upon Him they would believe. It should be noted here that John's baptism was not the same as believer's baptism. That is why those who were baptized by John but had left the country before he could point them to Messiah had to be rebaptized into believer's baptism by Paul (Acts 19:1-7). In believer's baptism, one identifies with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3-4).¹

Why did Jesus come to John to be baptized?

▣ WHY DID JESUS COME TO JOHN TO BE BAPTIZED?

John himself initially resisted and argued it wasn't Jesus who needed to be baptized, but John himself! Jesus did not need to repent. So why did he want to be baptized?

First, in response to John, Jesus said:

"Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Some understand the reference to *righteousness* to be a reference to the Mosaic Law; that is, by being baptized Jesus was affirming His commitment to keep the Mosaic Law. That's a possibility, but the Mosaic Law is nowhere mentioned.

The reference to *righteousness* may rather be a general reference to obeying God's will. It was God's will Jesus be baptized by John. At Jesus' baptism God the Father intended to publicly identify Jesus as the Messianic Son. Likewise, at Jesus' baptism, God the Spirit intended to anoint Jesus for service.

So first, Jesus came to John for baptism because it was God's will.

Second, by being baptized by John, Jesus was affirming and identifying with John's message: the people needed to return to God and prepare themselves for His Kingdom.

Jesus persuaded John. Together they went down into the waters of the Jordan where John immersed Jesus. When Jesus came up out of the water, two things happened.

▣ TWO THINGS HAPPENED WHEN JESUS WAS BAPTIZED (MATTHEW 3:16-17)

MATTHEW 3:16-17 (ESV)

16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

The two things that happened, in reverse order, were:

¹ Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Jewish Perspective, Volume 1*, p. 479.

- ☐ 1. God the Father verbally identified Jesus as the Messianic Son.
- 2. God the Spirit anointed Jesus for service.

☐ God the Father Verbally Identified Jesus as the Messianic Son.

In Psalm 2, God refers to the Messiah King as His Son.

PSALM 2:7-9 (ESV)

I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Those who heard God's voice understood the title *Son*. There, at the outset of Jesus' public ministry, there on the occasion of His baptism, God the Father verbally identified Jesus as the Messianic Son.

The second thing that happened was that the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus for service.

God the Spirit Anointed Jesus for Service.

Did the Holy Spirit take the form of a dove and rest upon Jesus? Or did the Holy Spirit, in some other form, descend like a dove would descend? Quite honestly, I don't know and as I've studied the passage, I can't find evidence to settle one way or another.

But whichever the case, the point is that the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus for service.

Had Jesus not been indwelt by the Holy Spirit prior to His baptism?

The implication is that He had not.

And this would have been consistent with the Holy Spirit's ministry to prophets, priests and kings under the Mosaic Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, God the Spirit indwelt and empowered specific people to serve God in specific capacities. Saul, the first king of Israel, was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. King David and his legitimate successors were indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve God by reigning over His people Israel. This indwelling was not permanent; the Holy Spirit could remove Himself as He did in the case of Saul. This is why King David, in Psalm 51, pleads with God, "take not your Holy Spirit from me." We do not have this fear. Under the New Covenant we are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the moment of our spiritual resurrection.

As Jesus begins His public ministry, the Holy Spirit descends and empowers Him for ministry. The very first thing the Spirit will do is lead Jesus out in the wilderness to battle Satan (Matt. 4:1-11).

The baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of His public ministry. On that day, God the Father verbally identified Jesus as the Messianic Son and God the Spirit anointed Jesus for service.

At the heart of Jesus' story is His identity. It is the core controversy in the first half of His ministry. All across the land, the question on people's lips was, "Is he the Messiah?"

For Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Jesus' baptism is an important event because of God the Father's declaration and the Spirit's anointing. No greater confirmation can be had to establish Jesus' identity. It continues to be strong evidence because the gospels are reliable historical records.

Jesus' baptism is extremely important for the doctrine of the Trinity. Here we have all three members of the Trinity present: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Most often, God the Father is referred to in the Scriptures as *God*; Jesus is referred to in the New Testament as *Lord* and the Holy Spirit is referred to as the *Spirit* or as the *Holy Spirit*. Completely understanding the triune nature of God is beyond us as finite human beings. But I offer this definition hopefully as a help. As to the nature of God, the Bible reveals that:

There is ONE divine nature fully possessed by THREE distinct persons:

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

To many people down through history to this day, the Trinitarian nature of God, “Doesn’t make sense”. As a result, many reject Christianity while others embrace cults such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormonism that reject the truth of the Trinity.

But we believe Matthew, Mark, Luke and John accurately recorded what took place at Jesus’ baptism. And there we see all three members of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Trinitarian nature of God is revealed throughout the Old and New Testaments. We should glory in awe and wonder in our three in one God – God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²

² You can find helpful studies on the Trinity at www.ariel.org/ComeandSee and at www.bible.org.