
Knowing Jesus

The Baptism of Christ

Various texts (Luke 3:15-22)

12/30/2018

Main Idea: God's love for us compels us to turn to Jesus and trust in Him. Baptism is the act which symbolizes that we have done so.

Lesson Objective: Understanding and accepting our identity in Christ

Introduction

As your class time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

The young son of a Baptist minister was in church one morning when he saw for the first time baptism by immersion. He was greatly interested in it, and the next morning proceeded to baptize ... you guessed it ... his three cats in the bathtub. The youngest kitten bore it very well, and so did the younger cat, but the old family tomcat rebelled. The old feline struggled with the boy, clawed and tore his skin, and finally got away. With considerable effort the boy caught the old cat again and proceeded with the “ceremony.” But the cat acted worse than ever, scratching the boy’s face. Finally, after barely getting the cat splattered with water, he dropped him on the floor in disgust and said, “Fine, be a Methodist if you want to!”

Regardless of our religious affiliation or tradition, baptism must be more than a “ceremony” by which we forcibly comply with some imposed standard of religiosity. Baptism is an act of obedience, yes. But it is also a free will offering—a personal, purposeful, and public statement of faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If someone has to wrangle you into compliance, you’re no more “baptized” than that rebellious tomcat.

Baptism Origins

Exodus 29:4; 30:20; Leviticus 15:31

⁴ You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water.

²⁰ When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the Lord, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die.

³¹ “Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.” [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#).

From our texts above we can see that the LORD established from the very beginnings of the Jewish faith a prefigure of baptism that was to come. One of the unique distinctions in ancient Judaism was its attention to ritual purity not only for the priest, but with necessary water cleansing rituals for lay persons as well. The use of water as an instrument for religious and physical cleansing is prevalent throughout the Pentateuch. Those who had committed certain defiling offenses were required to immerse themselves in water in order to ritually purify the body.

Whenever possible the people were to be submerged into “living water.” “Living water” was water which flowed of its own accord (spring fed or rain). It was a symbol of God’s grace because fresh flowing water was clean and healthy (The rabbis in the time of Jesus taught that if there were not enough men in a city to warrant a synagogue whomever could meet by the streams of water thus showing that there was grace for them. eg. Acts 16:13).

If there was not a local flowing body of water, then the Israelites constructed a mikveh. It is known in antiquity more as a bathing pool. Most of these mikvehs were fed by conduit or natural springs. They also contained seven de-

scending steps into the water. This portrayed the symbolism of completion of the cleansing. With the return from Babylonian Captivity there was a renewed emphasis on the details of ritual purity. There have been numerous Mikvehs that have been unearthed around the Temple Mount in recent years, which shows us that Jews were practicing immersion during the time of Christ.

Gentiles were also included in this practice if they desired to convert to Judaism from paganism. They typically partook of baptism as entry into the Jewish community. The purpose of this entry requirement, known as proselyte baptism, was to remove any hint of ceremonial uncleanness from the Gentile. Gentiles were considered spiritually and ritually unclean and needed purification in order to enter Israel and the temple. Ritual cleansing for Jews was symbolic of inward cleansing, as “one who has become a proselyte is like a child newly born.”¹

Apart from proselyte baptism, some Jews used immersions as acts of repentance. The Qumran sect participated frequently in water purification rituals. They considered immersions spiritually ineffective if not accompanied by sincere repentance and “humble submission ... to all the precepts of God”. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance and baptism. He was called the “Immerser” (βαπτιστής, *baptistēs*; Matt 16:14; Mark 8:28; Luke 9:19) and the “Baptizer” (βαπτίζων, *baptizōn*; Mark 1:4, 6:14, 24).

The purpose of John’s baptism was to awaken the Jewish people to the reality of the coming Messiah. John’s baptism was a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4 ESV). For John, Jewish ethnicity was not a prerequisite to salvation or a relationship with God. Josephus, a Jewish writer

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that recorded many events around Jerusalem, referred to John as “a good man” who “had urged the Jews to exert themselves to virtue, both as to justice toward one another and reverence toward God, and having done so join together in washing” (*Antiquities* 18:116). He also mentions that John’s baptism, while an outward symbol, was a purification ritual that took place only when “the soul had been cleansed already by righteousness” (*Antiquities* 18:116–117).²

What is the purpose of repentance? How would you explain your experience of repentance to an unbeliever?

Why do Christians, though saved, need to live a lifestyle of ongoing repentance?

What is revealed about our attitude toward sin if we want salvation without repentance?

² Benjamin Espinoza, [“Baptism.”](#) ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Jesus' Baptism

Luke 3:15-22

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)

Luke gave us the story leading up to Jesus' baptism. Within this story, he identified the coming of divine salvation and the human response needed. Luke introduced John the Baptist within the framework of a prophecy found in Isaiah (40:3-5), thus placing his ministry inside of God's divine plan. John's preaching and the subsequent response of sinners were powerful demonstrations of God's power. Those who witnessed these amazing events watched expectantly. Israel had been waiting for the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. The people debated in their minds, wondering whether John the Baptist was the Christ.

Some people may have questioned John's authority and message. His authority came through his preaching. He rested solely on the authority of Scripture. The **good news** he proclaimed came from the old story found in the pages

of what we call the Old Testament. John spoke of a God who was consistent, purposeful, and faithful to complete his promises. He called for the people to come to the old place, the wilderness (remember Israel's history of the wilderness), in order to find what was fresh and new in God. What was so amazing about what God was doing with John in this wilderness is that the people didn't have to go on a forty year journey of wanderings before they could enter into God's place. Their journey would be difficult in that they had to cross over from their self-centered religious pride and piety to an humble submersion into God's authority. They had to change their thoughts (repentance), and then they could enter into the living waters (a.k.a grace of God).

The Messiah was so much greater than John that the great prophet was not worthy to perform a task of unstrapping one's sandals. Only non-Jewish slaves were required doing this act for their Jewish masters, for Jewish slaves were exempt from this demeaning act.³ John's reference to the Messiah being more powerful indicated the Messiah had greater authority—not just more strength or ability—than John. John's authority was an endowed power, given to him by God who called him. The Messiah's authority is inherent in Himself. His is the power to save, and His is the authority to judge.

It's important to note that the events described in Luke 3:19-20 are not given in chronological sequence, since John could not have baptized Jesus while he was in prison. Luke wrapped up his discussion of John's ministry before moving on to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. John was arrested at some point after Jesus began His public ministry.

³ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 135.

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark provide a detailed account of Jesus' baptism, while Luke and John mention the event briefly (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; 3:21–22; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:29–34). In all of these accounts, the authors connect John's baptism of Jesus with the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit and a declaration of Jesus' sonship. The event served as the inauguration of Jesus' ministry on earth and a validation of John's ministry. Jesus was baptized, not because he was a sinner in need of repentance, but as a way of identifying himself with those he came to save.

God had appeared in OT times through theophanies. Now the Spirit appears as a dove. Only Luke has the expression "in bodily form," giving more substance to the experience of the Spirit's presence. Luke does not say that anyone other than Jesus was aware of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps others present saw only a dove without realizing its significance. The descent of the Spirit is reminiscent of Genesis 1:2, but no specific parallel is drawn.

"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" designates Jesus as the unique Son of God. 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 had read in Luke 1:32–35 and 2:49, i.e., that Jesus was the Son of God before his baptism. Here we may simply observe that the words **"beloved"** and **"well pleased"** convey the idea of choice and special relationship. Jesus has now received his commission.⁴

⁴ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 140. Walter L. Liefeld, *"Luke."* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 859.

With the presence of the Trinity within Jesus' baptism, we can understand more about His true identity. This identity illustrates the role each member of the trinity plays in his ministry of redeeming the world.

- **The Father** declaring Jesus to be his beloved Son affirming his **Family Identity**.
- **The Son** humbling himself to serve the will of his Father affirming his **Servant Identity**.
- **The Spirit** anointing the Son to carry out his Father's mission affirming his **Missionary Identity**.

According to verses 15-16, how was John different from Jesus?

How would your relationship with God be different if He demanded perfection, and repentance wasn't an option? Explain.

What can you do this week to show God how much you appreciate His grace and mercy?

Identity of Baptism

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)

OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST DRIVES OUR BEHAVIOR. For many, the Christian life is lived more out of duty than desire. But the gospel teaches us a different way to live. We do because we already are. Our doing flows from our being. For example: *who we are drives what we do, and what we do reinforces who we are*. As we do, because we are, and through the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ who makes us who we are, we are expressing the fundamental difference between religion and gospel, works and grace.

The NT teaches that we are a new creation: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* (2 Corinthians 5:17) If you have been born again spiritually by faith in Jesus, then you already are a new creation. Baptism is an important act of obedience that shows your belief in the reality of who you are in Christ. It actually symbolizes your new creation identity and the change it should bring in your way of life. When we are baptized we are showing that spiritually we have been *"Buried with Jesus in the likeness of his death, raised in the likeness of his resurrection to walk in newness of life."*

Have you ever thought of baptism as a naming ceremony? — ***baptizing them in the name of...*** When we are baptized, we are literally taking on **the names of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**. We are baptized into our **triune** identity. **At our baptism, those very same identities are affirmed in us. These identities form the core of who we are as followers of Christ. They are identities that Jesus wants us to live by and to pass on from believer to believer and from generation to generation.** First, we are baptized in the name of...

THE FATHER--Affirming our FAMILY Identity

At the moment of salvation, because of what Jesus has done for us, we are **adopted** into the family of God...a family consisting of **all** those in heaven and on earth who know the Lord, a family relationship that **transcends** the biological. It is a spiritual forever family! The more we believe we really ARE family, the more Christlike traits will be seen in our behaviors toward one another. What if we began to see the lost as brothers and sisters who are estranged from the Father who desperately need to find their way back to Him and into the family before it is too late? It would definitely impact the way we relate to them.

If we love one another and the lost as family then maybe they will want to be a part of the family!

THE SON--Affirming our SERVANT Identity

Before his incarnation the Son existed as equal with God. After his incarnation, he now sits at the Father's right hand in heaven as the God-King. But while he was on the earth, though God and King, he took the form of a servant. That is the mind we are to have in ourselves. It's our identity as those baptized in the name of the son. We are servants and before we are exalted to positions

of honor in the next life, we must exist in this world as those who are sent to give our lives as a ransom for many.

We serve our King by serving others with the servant-heart of our King.

What do servants do? Servants listen to the people they serve to look for ways to be of service. If we truly believe we are servants, then that is how we will view our human interactions every day—as opportunities 1) to listen to people with interest, 2) to truly know people because they are valuable to us, and then 3) to help lighten their load in tangible ways. We do this in the name of Jesus, the ultimate servant-King who values us so much that he was willing to give his life to rescue and restore us!

THE SPIRIT--Affirming our MISSIONARY Identity

Just as Jesus received the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the threshold of his public ministry, so we receive the indwelling presence of the Spirit for our **public** ministry. His presence in our lives means we are "**sent** ones", Missionaries! This is our true identity.

Do you believe that you are a missionary? If you and your family, maybe with a few close friends, were called, sent, and fully funded to go to another country and establish the gospel — to start a church and see people come to faith in Jesus — what would you immediately begin to do? What would your life consist of? How would you be with the people there?

When you put all three of our identities together, we are...

A family of servant missionaries sent as disciples to make disciples.

If everyone in the world were to receive these new identities through grace and by faith in Jesus, it would change the world, wouldn't it?

Let's start right here in our own community.