

The Baptism of Jesus

<i>Text</i>	Matthew 3:13-17
<i>Reading</i>	Matthew 3; Isaiah 42:1-9
<i>Theme</i>	Jesus takes up his work of salvation for his people in obedience to his Father.
<i>Purpose</i>	To show that Jesus willingly entered his ministry in obedience to God for our salvation.

The beginning of a new work or project or phase of life is always an important and significant time and is often marked with a public ceremony.

The beginning of the reign of a king or queen is marked with a coronation.

The baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of his public ministry and so was a very significant occasion, so much so that all three persons of the trinity were noticeably present: Jesus in the water, the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus as a dove, and the voice of the Father speaking from heaven.

Context: The first two chapters of Matthew's gospel describe the birth of Jesus, but then we hear nothing about his life during the next thirty years until this moment. Even the other gospels only record one incident in the childhood of Jesus which was when he was 12 years old and he went to Jerusalem and the temple. Matthew passes over these 30 years in silence and moves directly from the birth of Jesus to his baptism and his public ministry.

Jesus is now about 30 years old and he has a clear knowledge of who he is as the Son of God and a definite understanding of the task God the Father had given him to do.

Jesus heard that John was baptising in the Desert of Judea by the river Jordan. When he heard about John's ministry he knew the time had come for him to begin his work. John the Baptist was preparing the way for him; now he had to take up his work his Father had given him to do. This marks the beginning of Jesus public ministry as the Messiah; he was about to begin his work of salvation for his people.

We will see how Jesus was:

1. Baptised by John.
2. Anointed by the Holy Spirit
3. Commended by the Father

1. JESUS WAS BAPTISED BY JOHN

a. Initially John **objected to the request of Jesus**

We don't know how well Jesus and John knew each other. They were related. Mary the mother of Jesus had stayed with Elizabeth the mother of John during her pregnancy and after that the two women must have kept in some contact with each other, and they must have told their sons about the prophecies the angel Gabriel had spoken about each of them.

John had objected to baptising the Pharisees because they refused to repent, but he objected to baptising Jesus because he knew that Jesus did not need to repent! He knew enough about Jesus to know that there was no sin in him to require such a baptism of repentance.

"So John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptised by you and do you come to me?'"

b. But Jesus gave John an explanation (verse 15): "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness."

"Let it be so now", said Jesus, or, "Permit it at this time" (NASB). Jesus admitted that this was an unusual situation, a unique event. But, even so, it was necessary; "It is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness".

"To fulfil all righteousness" was to obey the will of His Father. By this Jesus made a public commitment to obey his Father's will and do the task His Father had asked him to do. It was the will of His father that Jesus should become a man, live a righteous life and then suffer and die for his people and for their salvation. Jesus was ready to do all this.

In this Jesus fulfilled the words of Psalm 40:7-8,

"Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come –
It is written about me in the scroll.
I desire to do your will, O my God;
Your law is in my heart'."

With this explanation John agreed to baptise Jesus. In this baptism Jesus did not repent of any sin; rather, he identified with us in our sin. He showed the people of Israel that he had come for them; he was one of them; he was a son of Abraham, a Son of David, a member of the house of Israel.

He was fulfilling the words of Isaiah 53:12 where the prophet said that he was "numbered with the transgressors".

The Apostle Paul wrote, "God made him who had no sin to become sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

By identifying with us Jesus set out on a course that would take him to his death. It's interesting to note that Jesus referred to baptism for himself in only two other places and each time he was referring to his death.

When James and John asked if they could sit at his right and left in his kingdom Jesus asked them, "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?" (Mark 10:38).

On another occasion he said to his disciples, "I have a baptism to undergo and how distressed I am until it is accomplished" (Luke 12:50).

This is why Jesus came. He was, as Matthew emphasises in this gospel, a great teacher, and he was also a perfect example, but he also came to be the saviour of his people.

He would do that by giving up his life for us, for everyone who believes in him. This is what we remember in every Lord's Supper service, that he loved us so much that he laid down his life for his friends.

This was the significance of his baptism, because here Jesus was committed himself to this course of action, in obedience to the will of his Father, which would take him to the cross.

2. JESUS WAS ANOINTED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

a. "As soon as he was baptised Jesus went up out of the water. **At that moment heaven was opened.**"

There are only a few other times in the Scriptures that the heavens are opened: in Ezekiel where the prophet is given a great vision of God (1:1); in Acts when Stephen is given a glimpse into heaven as he is stoned to death (7:56); and in the book of Revelation where the Apostle John is given wonderful visions of heaven. When heaven is opened people are given a vision of God in all his glory.

Here too, immediately after the baptism of Jesus "heaven was opened". This highlights the immense importance of this occasion.

b. "Heaven was opened, and he saw **the Spirit of God** descending like a dove and lighting on him."

There is a parallel here with Genesis 1 because the Holy Spirit was there at the first creation of the world and of Adam; now the Spirit of God appears at the beginning of God's work of re-creation and the arrival of the second Adam, the Lord Jesus.

This is also in fulfilment of Is 61:1; "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."

Jesus was about to begin his ministry and he was given the Holy Spirit to help him in this great task. He was the Messiah, which means “The Anointed One”, and he was anointed by the Holy Spirit to fill the offices of Prophet, Priest and King.

To do his work the Holy Spirit would equip him with power. As the Son of God, and through the Spirit, he would be able to do great miracles, even raising the dead.

The Holy Spirit would also equip Jesus with the gifts he needed in his teaching and preaching ministry so that people would say, “we have never heard anyone speak like this man.” The people who heard him recognised that he spoke with authority.

The Spirit would also equip him with compassion, gentleness and love; Jesus had all the fruits of the Spirit in their perfection and fullness.

This is probably why the Spirit appeared, for the first time in the Scriptures, as a Dove. This is a picture of the love and compassion of the Spirit that would mark the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is the same now as he was then, so you have every reason to go to Jesus for help and grace because he is full of compassion, kindness and mercy.

Towards the end of his ministry on earth Jesus assured his disciples that after he had left them he would send them the Holy Spirit and so would be with them.

After he had completed all his work on earth in his teaching, suffering, death and resurrection then he returned to heaven. After that he sent the Holy Spirit to be with us, to fill us, to help us understand the Scriptures, to work in us his fruits, to equip us with his gifts. All these come from the Risen and ascended Lord Jesus through his Spirit.

Jesus was baptised by John to show that he was ready to do the will of his Father, he was given the Holy Spirit to equip him for his task, and thirdly,

3. HE WAS COMMENDED BY THE FATHER

a. A voice spoke from heaven.

This was the voice of God the Father; again this emphasises the importance of this occasion. For the past 400 years there had been no word of God through the prophets, not until the preaching of John the Baptist. The last time God had spoken like this to his people was on Mt Sinai at the giving of the law. Now, 1500 years later, God speaks again.

This voice of God marks the beginning of a new phase in God's plan; the "last days" prophesied in the Old Testament have arrived; this is the age of the Messiah, of the kingdom of Christ and of the church of the Lord Jesus. This is the age we are living in.

b. God said, "This is my Son, whom I love"

These words fulfil Psalm 2:7, "I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'You are my Son'". Psalm 2 is one of the great messianic psalms - a psalm about Jesus as the Lord, the King, the Ruler over the whole earth. Jesus is the Son of God, the second person the trinity, the eternal Son of God, who has always been in a unique relationship to his Father. Here the Father declares his love for His Son, not least because the Son is willing to obey his Father.

Think about what this means for us: that the eternal Son of God, this great King of the universe, was prepared to suffer and die for those who believe in him! That God the Father, so loved the world that he gave His One and Only Son! All for your salvation and mine!

c. The immense sacrifice of Jesus comes though in these next words: "with him I am well pleased."

This is a reference to Isaiah 42:1, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight."

This quote is part of the servant songs of Isaiah. Jesus, the great King, was also going to be the suffering servant, ready to do His Father's will, ready to be rejected, ready to suffer, ready to be obedient to death, even death on a cross.

This is why he came: To open the eyes of those who are blinded by the darkness of Satan, to free captives from their slavery to sin, to release those bound in the dungeon of eternal death (Isaiah 42:7).

At the beginning of the ministry of Jesus all three persons are present. From eternity the three persons of the trinity had planned the work of salvation and how that would be achieved and even who would be saved. It was the eternal plan of the triune God to send Jesus to save and redeem those whom they had chosen.

Now, as Jesus was ready to begin his ministry all three persons are together to demonstrate that what they had *planned* in order to save the people of God would now be *achieved* through their triune almighty power!

This was to be the work of God the Father, through his Son the Lord Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit!

The baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of this great work of Jesus Christ. This was the beginning of His public ministry; this was his ordination to his task, his commissioning to his work.

Here he took up the work his Father had given to him; he committed himself to being obedient to God's will, he received the anointing of the Spirit so that he could do this work for us, for you and me, his people, for our salvation.

Amen