

# BAPTISM



Matthew 6:13 *Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. 14 But John didn't want to baptize him. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?"*

*15 But Jesus said, "It must be done, because we must do everything that is right.\*" So then John baptized him.*



God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit to do his mediating work between God and the people. At his baptism Jesus was identified as the one who would bear the people's sins; Jesus was baptized to identify himself with sinful people. Likewise, we are baptized in order to identify with Jesus' act of obedience. We follow his example by making a public confession of our commitment to God's will.

### **JESUS' RESURRECTION COMMAND TO BAPTIZE**

In Jesus' final words to his disciples we find the true basis of the church's practice of baptism (Matthew 28:19). As already stated, the disciples had stopped employing it, so the institution was reconstituted as an ordinance based on the death and resurrection of Christ. It was no longer a forward-looking phenomenon but was now an activity centering on the gospel message and certified by the risen Christ. It also is an essential aspect of the discipling activity, as seen in the use of the participle "baptizing" after the main verb "make disciples." Finally, we might note that the act signifies the entrance of the believer "into" union with (literally "into the name of") God.

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If you have not been baptised by immersion as a follower of Jesus Christ, can I encourage you to take this next step of obedience and faith. If you would like to talk further about baptism, please contact the office to speak with Scott or one of our Pastoral Leadership Team.

Baptism is the public announcement of a personal experience. It is a Christian act of obedience and a public testimony of a believer's willingness to identify with and follow Christ. Jesus gave us his example and his command to teach us about baptism. John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, leaving us an example to do the same as a public statement of our faith. Likewise, Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize other believers. (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is a picture of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. It is an outward picture of a person's inward change. The believer leaves behind the old way of life in exchange for new life in Christ. Baptism is a symbol of salvation -not a requirement for eternal life. However, as an act of obedience, it also is not optional for Christians. Baptism indicates our willingness to tell our church and the world that we are committed to the person of Christ and his teachings.

The term for baptism, from the Greek word, "baptizo", generally means, "to dip" or "immerse." However, it represents a group of words used to signify a religious rite for ritual cleansing. In the New Testament, it became the rite of initiation into the Christian community, and it was interpreted as a dying and rising with Christ. John the Baptist preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). The Gospel accounts agree that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance (Matthew 3:6-10; Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:3-14). We recognize baptism as a picture of our redirection in life. We repent from our old way of living in sin and disobedience. We change course and get a fresh start.

## THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

This marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Few scholars dispute that John the Baptist baptized Jesus. However, the purpose and significance of Jesus' baptism remain controversial. John the Baptist proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and that God's people should prepare for the Lord's coming by a renewal of faith toward God. For John, that meant repentance, confession of sins, and practicing righteousness. That being so, why was Jesus baptized? If Jesus was sinless, as the New Testament proclaims (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22), why did he submit to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? The Gospels provide the answers.

## THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Mark presents the baptism of Jesus as a necessary preparation for his period of temptation and ministry. At his baptism Jesus received the Father's approval and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:9-11). Mark's focus on Jesus' special relation to the Father, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you" (Mark 1:11), brings together two important Old Testament references. Jesus' messiahship is presented in a radically new way, in which the ruling Messiah (Psalm 2:7) is also the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1). Popular Jewish belief expected a ruling Messiah who would establish the kingdom of God, not a Messiah who would suffer for the people. Mark intended to show that God's appointed time for the fulfillment of his purpose had come with Jesus' arrival.

The statement that the heavens opened at the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:10) may proclaim the arrival of the "end times"

Jesus as the divine representative of the people, had identified himself with them in his baptism.

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The fourth Gospel does not say that Jesus was baptized but does say that John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus (John 1:32-34). The account emphasizes that Jesus went to John during John's preaching and baptizing ministry; John recognized that Jesus was the Christ, that God's Spirit was upon him, and that he was the Son of God. John also recognized that Jesus, unlike himself, baptized with the Holy Spirit (John 1:29-36). John the Baptist described Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The closest Old Testament parallel to that statement comes from the "servant of the Lord" passage (Isaiah 53:6-7). It is possible that "Lamb of God" could be an alternate translation of the Aramaic term "servant of God."

The sense of Jesus as the one who bears the sins of the people is obviously in view in the fourth Gospel. The Gospel writer implies that John the Baptist understood Jesus was the promised representative and deliverer of the people.

## THE GOSPELS' CONCLUSIONS

In the four Gospels it is clear that the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism to enable him to do the work of God. All four Gospel writers saw that Jesus had been anointed by God to accomplish his mission of bringing salvation to the people. Those ideas provide a key to understanding why Jesus was baptized. On that occasion at the beginning of his ministry,

The context in Luke also sheds some light on the purpose of Jesus' baptism. Luke, unlike Matthew, places the genealogy of Jesus after his baptism and just before his ministry begins. The parallel to Moses, whose genealogy occurs just before his primary work begins (Exodus 6:14-25), seems more than coincidental. It is probably intended to illustrate Jesus' role in bringing deliverance (salvation) to God's people just as Moses did in the Old Testament. At his baptism, by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him, Jesus was equipped to do the mission God had called him to do. Following his temptation (Luke 4:1-13), Jesus entered the synagogue and declared to the people that he had been anointed by the Spirit to proclaim good news (Luke 4:16-21). That Spirit came at Jesus' baptism to anoint him (compare to Acts 10:37-38).

In his Gospel account, Luke tried to identify Jesus with the common people. This is seen in the birth story (with Jesus born in a stable and visited by lowly shepherds, Luke 2:8-20) and through placing the genealogy (stressing Jesus' relation to all of humanity, Luke 3:38) right after the baptism. Thus, Luke saw the baptism as Jesus' first step in identifying himself with those he had come to save. Only someone who was altogether like us could stand in our place as our substitute for sin's death penalty. Jesus identified with us in order to show his love for us. In the Old Testament the Messiah was always inseparable from the people he represented (see especially Jeremiah 30:21 and Ezekiel 45-46). Although the "servant" in Isaiah is sometimes viewed corporately (Isaiah 44:1) and sometimes individually (Isaiah 53:3), he is always viewed as the representative of the people to the Lord (Isaiah 49:5-26), as well as the servant of the Lord. Evidently Luke, along with Mark and Matthew, was trying to show that

(the time of fulfilment and the establishment of God's kingdom). The Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 64:1 at that time held that in the last days God would open the heavens and come down to his people. In Jewish thought the rending of the heavens was also associated with hearing God's voice and the bestowal of God's Spirit.

### THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism has more detail than Mark's. It begins by noting John's reluctance to baptize Jesus (Matthew 3:14). John was persuaded only after Jesus explained to him that the act was "fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15, RSV). Although the full meaning of those words is uncertain, they at least suggest that Jesus' baptism was necessary to accomplish God's will.

In both the Old and New Testaments (Psalm 98:2-3; Romans 1:17) God's righteousness is seen in his salvation for his people. That is why the Messiah can be called "The Lord Is Our Righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6; compare to Isaiah 11:1-5). Jesus told John that his baptism was necessary to do God's will in bringing about salvation for his people. Thus the Father's declaration at Jesus' baptism is presented in the form of a public announcement. It emphasized that Jesus was God's anointed Servant about to begin his ministry, bringing the Lord's salvation.

### THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Luke passes over Jesus' baptism quickly, placing it alongside the baptism of others who came to John (Luke 3:21-22).