

The Significance of Jesus' Baptism

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As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. 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 granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added to them all by shutting up John in prison. ²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:15-22)

1. The Importance of Rituals

Our lives are marked by events and the rituals that become part of who we are. We express our joy and sadness during the rituals. Worship, holy communions, baptisms, birthdays, weddings, and memorial services are marked by the rituals. Through ritual we are comforted, refreshed, renewed, and revitalized.

Today's passage reminds us of one of the most important rituals in Bible times, baptism.

2. The Baptism of Jesus

This Sunday, we mark the end of the Christmas season and remember the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. All four Gospels record Jesus' baptism. During Jesus' time, Zechariah's son John was known for living in the wilderness. He preached to the people along the Jordan Valley, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**" (Matt. 3:2).

Luke 3:4 tells us that what John the Baptist was doing was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3. "**A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord; make straight paths for him.'**"

During the time, a king would regularly send out messengers proclaiming and preparing the people for the arrival of the king. John the Baptist in the same way proclaimed to the people that the Lord would soon be on his way to meet them.

Luke 3:15 and the following tell us that the crowds wondered if John the Baptist might be the Christ. Israel had not seen a prophet for more than 400 years. Many of the people believed that John was the long-awaited Messiah.

John denies this claim and tells people that he is preparing the way for the true Messiah. John explains that he baptizes with water, but that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

One day, Jesus travels from Galilee to be baptized by John. Matthew's gospel tells us that John the Baptist refused initially because he didn't feel qualified. But Jesus says, "**Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness**" (Matt. 3:15).

Many people ask, why did Jesus get baptized if he was sinless? Was Jesus admitting that he wasn't perfect? No. We see here that in being baptized, Jesus is showing others that he is both God and human. Jesus understands the state of every human being, even though he is perfect, and he takes those sins upon himself as the Savior of the world. In the Gospel of John 1:29, John says to his followers, "**Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**"

According to Exodus 29:38-39, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple every morning and in the evening for the sins of the people. Just as Isaiah 53:7 says, "**like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,**" Jesus would be led to the slaughter like a lamb, as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world.

3. The Difference of Jesus' Baptism

How did John and do we know that Jesus was the lamb of God? John knew this when Jesus was baptized. His baptism was quite different from the baptism of other people.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus was baptized, a dove descended on Jesus symbolizing the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Jesus would become "the Anointed One." In Jewish tradition, the Messiah is believed to be one of "the Anointed Ones." In the Old Testament, kings, priests, and prophets were anointed with oil. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the king, high priest, and the prophet for the world.

God also confirms during the baptism of Jesus that Jesus is the one that is sent by God. As the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus, God's voice is heard in heaven. "**You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased**" (3:17). God confirms that Jesus is God's son. After the baptism Jesus would officially begin his ministry as God's beloved Son, the Messiah.

4. Presence of the Trinity

One of the important things to remember from Jesus' baptism is the presence of the Trinity. We see the Holy Spirit, God the Father, and Jesus the Son all in the same place. We don't find the literal term "trinity" in the Bible. But

the church affirms the doctrine of the Trinity; one God that exists in three persons who are coeternal, coequal, and of one substance. We can't explain adequately this unique relationship between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Trinity is one of God's incomprehensible mysteries. However, this morning I would like to try to explain the Trinity based on the passage in the Book of Isaiah.

5. God's Love in Isaiah 43

Isaiah 43:1 says "***But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.***" Here God encourages Israel and affirms the intimate relationship between God and Israel. Yet we need to remember that chapter 42 ends with the lamentation of God. Isaiah says, "***So he (God) poured out on them his burning anger.***" God would be upset since the Israelites do not repent and live according to the will of God. However, in chapter 43, God reminds Israel that the Lord created, redeemed, and called them. God promises their restoration from captivity. God declares to the Israelites, "***You are mine.***" God affirms that Israel belongs to God.

In Isaiah 43:4, God says to Israel, "***You are precious in my sight and I love you.***" We love to recite John 3:16, "***God so love the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.***" We must keep in mind that this is what the writer of John's gospel says about God's love. But when we read Isaiah 43:4, we hear what God says to Israel and us. "***You are precious in my sight and I love you.***" This is the expression that we use for our spouse and our children. We need to remember that this is what God says to us.

The coming of Jesus is the expression of God's love. God affirms that he sent Jesus to save the world and redeem the sins of everyone. The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus and us to follow after Jesus as we prepare for the return of Christ in the future.

The doctrine of the Trinity helps us to understand better the nature of God. God has a close relationship with every person. He does everything he can to save us and bring us to the Lord. God is all in to love us.

We are God's top priority. Two weeks ago, I took a week off when my children came. Pastors' kids and wives tend to think that they are the last priority to their father and spouse. I wanted my kids to think that sometimes they can be my top priority. We went to a movie and played a game together.

In the baptism of Jesus, God affirms his greatest love by baptizing Jesus to do God's mission which is saving us from sins and death, descending the Holy Spirit to empower Jesus, and confirming who Jesus is, his beloved Son, the Messiah.

When we were baptized, we may not notice the dramatic happenings as Jesus experienced. However, our baptism has such a significant meaning. God affirms that God loves us and will provide anything for our new life journey.

6. Conclusion

The baptism of Jesus tells us about the identity of Jesus and the relationship between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. For many of the Jewish people, Jesus was a rabbi, one of teachers of the law. For non-believers, Jesus is seen as a great human being. But the four gospels tell us that Jesus was more than just a teacher or a great person. Jesus is the one sent by God to save His people. The Holy Spirit anoints Jesus and empowers him to do miracles, feed the hungry, and to teach God's people. In Jesus' baptism we see the fullness of God's commitment and love for his people. This is the same God that is still always with us through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

7. Application

When we face times of trouble, we wonder where God is and what He is doing. There are times when we may not be able to see or understand what God may be doing, but we are reminded that God cared for us from the beginning and continues to care for us in every aspect of life.

Isaiah 43 reminds us that God knows each of our names and has a personal relationship with each of us. Despite there being over 7 billion people on the earth, God knows our names because God created us, redeemed us, and sustained us. We are God's beloved children. God will keep taking care of us.

Jesus says to his disciples, "***Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid: you are worth more than many sparrows***" (Matt. 10:30-31). Jesus wants us to know that God knows everything about us and truly loves us. Praise the Lord! Let us give thanks to him. Amen.