

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XX: THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
3:13-17	1:9-11	3:21-23a		

Lesson Overview

At what appears to be the peak of the baptizing ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus Himself comes from Nazareth to be baptized by John.

Matt 3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

Mk 1:9a And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee,

Lk 3:21a Now when all the people were baptized,

We may state this to be the official beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The word for *cometh* is the same used for John earlier in Matthew (3:1) when he began his public ministry. Hendriksen: *then Jesus made his public appearance, coming from Galilee.*

Matthew states Jesus having come from Galilee, Mark adding it was from Nazareth. The gospel of John records that John the Baptist was baptizing "in Bethabara beyond Jordan" (Jn 1:28), which Hendriksen refers to as Bethany and locates the area approximately thirteen miles below the Sea of Galilee on the east side of the Jordan. This would place the activity about twenty miles south-east of Nazareth. By saying Bethany beyond the Jordan makes it clear that it is not the Bethany where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived.

Some few place an emphasis on *when all the people were baptized* to have the meaning that Jesus patiently waited in line until the very last person had been baptized, therefore showing His humility. I find that hard to accept that Jesus was the last person baptized if that is their emphasis, or even find it necessary to place Jesus as the last baptism of the day. The phrase probably has the sense that this was relatively at the peak of John's baptizing activity.

As stated in previous material, an exact chronology of this period is impossible. *If* we accept 29 AD as the year of the crucifixion, and *If* we accept the Lord's public earthly ministry to have lasted 3½ years, then we may approximate this being latter part of 26 AD or the early days of 27 AD.

Thinking of chronology, here's an example that Luke's account is not written chronologically. Between last week's lesson on John the Baptist and this week's lesson of the baptism of Jesus, Luke adds that Herod had thrown John into prison (Lk 3:19,20), an event we know not to have happened for quite some time.

Matt 3:14,15 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. : John tries to prevent Jesus, persistently denying to perform the baptism. Wuest: "but he kept on trying to hinder Him." John's reasoning is of course by comparison of the two, brought out in the last lesson (see lesson 19). The "I" is emphatic to place a strong contrast between "I ... you," (between John and Jesus). Wuest: *As for myself, I have need by you to be immersed, and as for you, are you coming to me?* His reaction is along the lines of "What! One so high and holy about to be baptized? But certainly not by me, a person so immeasurably lower in rank and sanctity. It must not, it cannot be! On the contrary, I should be baptized by Him!" [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

The question often asked here is why Jesus came to be baptized? The answers are multiple, some verging on blasphemy:

- some deny the fact Jesus was baptized
- some believe a collusion between John and Jesus as if to deceive the people
- that Jesus submitted to baptism due to its acceptance among the people, Jesus using this as a means of acceptance and to elevate Himself in the eyes of the public
- that Jesus was baptized to wash away His own sins, which (a) places a wrong emphasis on baptism itself, it not having the ability to wash sin away, and (b) denies the scriptural testimony of Jesus being without sin.

Some other theories which may be possible:

- since baptism symbolically represents a dying to the old and rising to the new, some hold that Jesus came symbolically dying to His past natural relationship with His parents, neighbors and earthly calling, and devoting Himself to His public Messianic vocation.
- that Jesus identify Himself wholly with sinful humanity rather than above us as our Judge

- that John fulfill the duties which he had been assigned by God the Father
- to authenticate the baptizing ministry of John
- as a biblical example for us

Edersheim however brings a unique view to the scene: “The most reverent of these explanations involve a twofold mistake. They represent the Baptism of John as one of repentance, and they imply an ulterior motive in the coming of Christ to the banks of the Jordan. But the Baptism of John was in itself only a consecration to, and preparatory initiation for, the new Covenant of the Kingdom. *As applied to sinful men it was indeed necessarily a ‘baptism of repentance;’* but not as applied to the sinless Jesus. Had it primarily and always been a ‘baptism of repentance,’ He could not have submitted to it. Again, and most important of all, we must not seek for any ulterior motive in the coming of Jesus to this Baptism. *He had no ulterior motive of any kind:* it was an act of simple submissive obedience on the part of the Perfect One - and submissive obedience has no motive beyond itself. It asks no reasons; it cherishes no ulterior purpose. And thus it was ‘*the fulfillment of all righteousness.*’ And it was in perfect harmony with all His previous life.... The one question with Him was, as He afterwards put it: ‘The Baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?’ (Matt 21:25). That question once answered, there could be no longer doubt nor hesitation. He went - not for any ulterior purpose, nor from any other motive than that it *was of God.* He went voluntarily, because it was such - and because ‘it became Him’ in doing so ‘to fulfil all righteousness.’ “ [Edersheim, *Life of Messiah*]

Hendriksen translates *suffer it to be so now* as *yield to Me this time.* Wuest: *permit it at this time.*

Matt 3:16a And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water:

Mk 1:9b,10a and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water,

Lk 3:21b it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying,

The statement that Jesus *went up straightway out of the water* is typically taken by Baptists to refer to Jesus being brought up from being immersed by John the Baptist. This cannot be proven however since those that sprinkle or pour may just as likely take this to be Jesus went into the water, was baptized (by pouring or sprinkling), then *went immediately (straightway) out of the water* in the sense that He walk out of the river stream. Wuest: *And Jesus, having been immersed, immediately went up from the water.* Some of the confusion is due to the old English, and I have heard Baptists in ignorance state that Jesus *went straightway out of the water* in the sense that the word refers to how John the Baptist lifted Jesus out of the water. The same word is used in Mark 1:12,28 as “and *immediately* the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness ... and *immediately* His fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.” I believe Jesus was immersed by the very meaning of the word baptize, but to use this verse as proof is to force what is being said here.

Who says commentators have no humor? In his reasoning why Jesus immediately departed, Euthymius Zigabenus, a Greek monk of the 12th century, states “They say that John had the people under water up to the neck till they had confessed their sins, and that Jesus having none to confess tarried not in the river.” [quoted in Bruce, *Gk NT*]

Note Luke’s emphasis: not on the baptism but on the prayer and what followed. The baptism is mentioned in passing. Luke alone mentions Jesus was in prayer as He was being baptized / departed the river.

Matt 3:16b,17 and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Mk 1:10b,11 He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Lk 3:21c-23a the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased. And Jesus Himself began to be about thirty years of age.

Note the reference of the entire trinity, the first found in the gospel narratives.

Who were these signs for? The synoptics state the signs were for Jesus. The gospel of John however records that John the Baptist (as he looked back on the scene) stated he was aware of these signs as well (Jn 1:32).

The dove: symbolically portraying the Spirit gently yet swiftly descending upon Jesus? Purity, gentleness? Possibly a reference back to Gen 7:9,10 of Noah’s dove. “It was as if, symbolically, in the words of St. Peter, that Baptism had been a new flood, and He Who now emerged from it, the Noah - or rest, and comfort-bringer - Who took into His Ark the dove bearing the olive-branch, indicative of a new life. Here, at these waters, was the Kingdom, into which Jesus had entered in the fulfilment of all righteousness; and from them He emerged as its Heaven-designated, Heaven-qualified, and Heaven-proclaimed King. As such He had received the fulness of the Spirit for His Messianic Work - a fulness abiding in Him - that out of it we might receive, and grace for grace.” [Edersheim, *Life of Messiah*] Note the contrast between John’s vision of the Spirit as fiery judgement and Jesus’ as the symbol of peace after the judgement has past.

Bruce states the Greek language suggests the idea of the Spirit not merely coming *upon* Jesus but *into* Him, as if to take up its (His) abode. [Bruce, *Gk NT*] This defies explanation and is lost within the mysteries of the trinity and the human / divine nature of Jesus.