

Baptismal Lessons from the Christ

Mark 1:1-13

¹ The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.^[a]

² It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way”^[b]—

³ “a voice of one calling in the desert,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”^[c]

⁴ And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with^[d] water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, ¹³ and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

ESV:

⁹ (A) In those days Jesus (B) came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he (C) saw (D) the heavens being torn open (E) and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And (F) a voice came from heaven, (G) “You are my beloved Son; [a] with you I am well pleased.”

NASB

⁹ (A) In those days Jesus (B) came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens [a] opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; ¹¹ and a voice came out of the heavens: “(C) You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

I. Lesson of Identification

II. Lesson of Fulfillment (of prophecy)

III. Lesson of Affirmation

IV. Lesson of Beginning (of ministry and suffering)

V. Lesson of Revelation (of Trinity)

Today is Epiphany Sunday. The word “epiphany” comes from Greek and means “appearing” or “manifestation.” In the Eastern Church this festival in honor of the baptism of the Lord Jesus has been celebrated on January 6 since the 3rd. “From the 4th century onward there is ample evidence of the [celebration of] feast, which then ranked with Easter and Pentecost as one of the 3 principal festivals of the Church... In the Western church it became associated with the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles in the person of the Magi, though mention is also made of the Baptism of Christ and of the miracle [at the wedding feast] {of turning the water into wine} at Cana.”¹

In our church we seek to align ourselves with some of the historic traditions of the Church which focus our attention on the great redemptive acts of Christ on a yearly basis. This is spiritually helpful for us because we are regularly reminded of the essentials of the gospel.

Today we will focus on the baptism of our Lord in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. The baptism of Jesus is one of the most amazing events in the ministry of our Lord. It is an event of tremendous significance in the purposes of God for the salvation of his people. There are many important lessons we can learn in this event. It is no wonder that it has been a major feast of the church for about 18 centuries. Those spiritual ancestors of ours who were steeped in the Scriptures recognized its significance and gave it due recognition. It is my hope that through our study today, you will hold Christ’s baptism in high regard, and you will treasure it in a new way.

There are five lessons in the baptism of our Lord that I would like for us to consider today – five great truths that are contained in this event. First of all, it is a....

I. Lesson of Identification

⁹ **At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.**

¹ “Epiphany,” The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Oxford Univ. Press; 1983. p. 465

“At that time,” a loose translation of the Greek words, “in those days,” is a frequent marker in Mark’s gospel...

Notice that Jesus came all the way from the northwest part of the country and made an intentional journey to find the prophet John, who happened to be his cousin, who was baptizing people out in the wilderness of Judea. Jesus came to find John. This was no accidental meeting. But the Lord Jesus came to be baptized. He came as one of the people. This is most amazing. Hear the account from Luke’s gospel:

²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when ^(O) Jesus also had been baptized.... Luke 3:21

What is this? What is going on here? Why would Jesus come to be baptized with these people who were acknowledging and confessing their sins. He was sinless; why did he need to be baptized?

James Brooks says this:

“So potentially embarrassing is the idea that the Christian Lord was baptized by a Jewish prophet in a rite that for others symbolized repentance for their sins that the early church would never have invented the story.” P. 42

In other words, the fact that Jesus was baptized like one of the common sinners who were coming out to John in the wilderness is something that is hard to explain, even embarrassing. The gospel writers could have left out this difficult to explain event, but they didn’t do that. This shows the integrity of their writings; their faithfulness to report the actual words and events of Christ’s ministry.

Some light is shed on this by Matthew’s account. He writes:

Matthew 3:13-15 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. **14**But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

15Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

Jesus stated that he was “fulfilling all righteousness.”

All his life since he was a little boy Jesus had kept the law of God. He learned the law of God from his parents, from the teachers at the synagogue, and from the priests in Jerusalem when he went there three times a year to worship.

We see in this passage that at first John did not want to baptize Jesus. John knew that Jesus was a holy, sinless man and that he himself was a sinner. So in a real sense the roles should have been reversed – Jesus, the holy

one, should have been baptizing John, the righteous man who was still far from perfect and very aware of his own need of cleansing.

But Jesus insisted, saying it was necessary that John baptize him in order to “fulfill all righteousness.” The way that we have come to understand this reply of Jesus is that what Jesus is doing here is identifying with those who he had come to save. He was becoming their substitute. He would die, and be buried, and rise for their justification and forgiveness. He, of course, had no sins of his own, but he came to bear the sins of his people.

So, Jesus’ baptism teaches us the lesson that it marked a time in his life when he publicly identified himself with those he had come to save. This mission was to seek and save the lost and give his life as a ransom for many. He would die and rise for their sake in obedience to the will of the Father.

2 Cor. 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin^[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So the first baptismal lesson we learn from the Christ is that he was baptized in order to identify with the people he came to save from their sin. The second lesson we learn is that it was a...

II. Lesson about Fulfillment

¹⁰ ...As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

Before we consider this lesson of fulfillment, I want us to notice two things here in verse 10.

A. Immersion

Notice here that the text says that Jesus came up “out of the water.” This indicates that he had been down in the water; he had been immersed by John. The very fact that John was baptizing people in the river showed that he needed enough water to immerse them.

1 Pet. 2:21 says:

*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should **follow** in **his steps**.*

Christ is our example: if he was baptized by immersion, we should also be baptized by immersion. Are we smarter than he is? Do we have the right to only sprinkle a person who is being baptized? I think not. We either follow Christ’s example or we do not.

Notice also in verse 10 that this baptismal event was a...

B. ... Radical Happening

a. It was some kind of cosmic event –cf Isa. 64:1

lOh, that You would rend the heavens *and* (A)come down,
That the mountains might (B)quake at Your presence—

The same verb is used here in Mark 10 that is used in Matthew's account of the curtain in the temple being torn in two at the time of Christ's death.

This tearing open of heaven seem to be a way of describing God bursting forth from heaven to earth to do a new thing among the sons and daughters of mankind. The day of salvation was arriving. God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, was bursting forth from heaven do descend in power upon the Son of God.

This is no small matter; it is a great event because it was showing that the time promised in the OT was coming to pass. The prophecies about the coming of the Spirit upon the chosen One of the Lord were coming to pass.

C. Fulfillment of OT

The ancient prophets spoke of the coming of the Messiah – remember, the word “Messiah” means anointed one. One of the chief marks of the Messiah would be that he would be the One upon whom the Holy Spirit would be poured out.

Hear the words of Isaiah some 600 years before the birth of Jesus:

Isa. 11:2

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

Isa. 42:1

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Isa. 61:1

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.

Jesus no doubt knew these scriptures and knew that the Messiah of Israel would be anointed by the Spirit. I believe he was looking for the day when this would happen. Perhaps he knew that the Spirit would be outpoured upon him at his baptism.

But on that day it happened – the great Anointing Event that would crown him with the presence and power of God in the person of

the Holy Spirit. In the power of this Spirit he would exercise his Messianic ministry.

Hear the words of Luke the historian as he summarizes Jesus' ministry in the power of the Spirit:

Acts 10:38: ...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and..he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

So we learn a great lesson from the baptism of Jesus. We learn that when the Holy Spirit came down upon him that the OT prophecies about the anointing of the Spirit upon the Messiah were being fulfilled.

From all eternity the Son of God had enjoyed perfect communion and fellowship with God the Spirit, but now in his ministry on earth as the Mediator between God and man the Holy Spirit crowned him, overflowed him, **inundated** him – that he might go about the dusty paths of ancient Palestine clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' own testimony of his recognition that this was a fulfillment of OT prophecy is seen in Lu. 4:18-19:

⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

There is a 3rd baptismal lesson we learn from Christ's baptism. It is the...

III. Lesson of Affirmation – v. 11

And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Whose voice was it that spoke from heaven? It was the Father's voice because he said, "You are my Son..."

Notice that the Father is speaking directly to the Son and he says, "You are my Son..." This is a personal word from the Father to his Son. He is saying three things here:

1. He is affirming that Jesus is his Son.
2. He is affirming his love for his Son.
3. He is affirming that he is well pleased with his Son. In other words, all that the Son is doing, all that he is teaching and healing and advising and forgiving and promising – all this he has done in such a way as to completely fulfill his Father's will. He delighted to lovingly obey his Father; to please him in all

things by the thoughts of his heart and the words of his mouth and the deeds of his hands. And all that he did pleased the Father, in fact, the Father said that he was “well pleased with his Son.”

What joy and satisfaction this must have given the Son to hear these precious words from his Father.

What assurance and security it must have given the Son. He was assured and confirmed in his unique and special relationship with his heavenly Father. It was a deep and perfectly harmonious relationship. Remember what the Lord Jesus had said, that it was his meat and drink to do the Father’s will. Nothing would have grieved the Son more than to have in any way displeased the Father. And the Father saw this and realized this. What he saw in his Son was a devoted heart and absolute commitment to lovingly obey the Father at all costs. Nothing else mattered so much to the Son as to be pleasing to the Father.

And to hear the Father affirm that indeed Jesus was pleasing him, was the sweetest and most wonderful words he could hear.

The Father is affirming his love and pleasure in his Son. This is an undying relationship. What joy it must have given the Son to hear these words from the Father!

There is a 4th Baptismal Lesson from the Christ. It is...

IV. The Lesson of Beginning - v. 12

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, ¹³ and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

You see, this was the beginning, not only of the descending presence of the Spirit, but also of ministry. The first ministry was that of testing by temptations from Satan. And there was the testing of suffering from hunger because of a 40 day fast.

So ironically, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ did not immediately plunge him into a kind of glorious public ministry, but instead the Spirit sent him out into the desert to be alone, to battle the forces of darkness.

The beginning of Christ’s public ministry was a time of intense testing by Satan. He endured the spiritual assaults of the king of evil and of the forces of darkness. There was no glory in this, but there was intense spiritual battle. So the lesson about beginning for the Christ is the beginning of a public ministry that plunged him into testing and suffering. Why was he willing to do all this? There were two reasons:

1) In order to please the Father.

2) Out of his love for his people, he was willing to pay the price of suffering that it would take to qualify to be the Substitute for their sins.

Heb. 2:10 says that... ¹⁰ In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.

So the suffering of Christ for the salvation of his people began immediately after his baptism. His suffering culminated in the Garden of Gethsemane where he agonized over the looming terror of the cross, the innocent one having to bear my sins and your sins, and when he submitted to the Father's will, he went to the cross and bore God's righteous fury against our sins in his own body. And he experienced something he had never known before: separation from the Father because the Father could not look upon sin, which Christ had become. *God made him who had no sin to be sin^[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (2 Cor. 5:21).

It was a bitter cup that Jesus drank for our sake. And his battle with the evil forces of the universe, at least in a public way, began there after his baptism.

There is a 5th baptismal lesson for us today. It is the...

V. Lesson of Revelation

There are several key texts in the NT that clearly reveal the triune nature of God and the baptism of Jesus is one of them. Here we see the Son of God identifying with sinners whom he had come to save from their sins; we see the Father speaking from heaven, and we see the Holy Spirit descending to anoint the Son of God as the promised Messiah of Israel.

In other sections of the Bible we read of the divine nature of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. So here in the baptism of the Christ we see all three persons of God present. We know from the Bible also that there is only one God.

How do we then understand the nature and being of God. The church has coined the word "Trinity" to summarize God's oneness yet also the aspect of his "three-ness." There is only one eternal God but he exists as three "persons." Each person of the "Godhead," a word we sometimes use to describe God in this totality of his being, each person of the Godhead is equal in power, glory, and in all the divine attributes such as wisdom, dominion, and holiness, each person is equally divine, equal in what makes God to be God, but yet they are distinct in their functions, the things they do in the Godhead. For example, the Father sent the Son, the Son took upon himself humanity, and the Spirit is sent by the Father and Son to fill his people.

At Christ's baptism, we see the three persons of the Godhead present. The triune nature of God was hinted at in the OT, but it is made clear in the NT, this incident is a primary place where we see this. Other incidents follow in the gospels, as

when we see Jesus praying to the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon his disciples.

Applications:

So we see that the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Jordan River by the prophet John was a crucial event in the redemptive ministry of our Savior. In his baptism we learn the...

I. Lesson of Identification

II. Lesson of Fulfillment (of prophecy)

III. Lesson of Affirmation

IV. Lesson of Beginning (of ministry and suffering)

V. Lesson of Revelation (of Trinity)

1. We learned the lesson of Identification...

...that Christ came to identify with us sinners by being baptized. But there is another lesson for us in our baptism: in our baptism we identify with Christ: his death, burial and resurrection become our death, burial and resurrection. He identified with us so we could identify with him in his saving acts.

As he died on the cross, so on the cross our old sinful person is crucified and dies. As Christ was buried, so our old sinful person was buried and perishes. The baptism service is a burial service. We are burying the old man or woman of sin. But it is more than a burial service. It is a resurrection service. As Christ rose up from the dead on the third day, so we also rise up to live in the newness of unending life that Christ won for us through his resurrection from the dead. We rise up to walk in newness of life, indwelt by the Holy Spirit – alive to God, delivered from the kingdom of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son.

As Christ identified with us in his baptism, so we identify with him in our baptism.

2. We also learned the baptismal lesson of fulfillment: at Christ's baptism the long prophesied pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the servant of God, the Messiah, took place.

But at our baptism we also learn a lesson of fulfillment. Hear what the prophet Ezekiel wrote:

Ezek. 36:24-26 - ²⁴ For I will ^(A)take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ Then I will ^(B)sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your ^(C)filthiness and from all your ^(D)idols. ²⁶ Moreover, I will give you a ^(E)new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the ^(E)heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

We read of the water of cleansing here, which is more than just physical water, it is a spiritual cleansing by God. And it involves the implantation of a new heart and a new spirit.

The forgiveness of sins, the new spiritual birth, these are the experiences of God's people that are given to them because of Christ's sacrifice for their sins. By his shed blood on the cross Jesus established the new covenant; i.e., God's commitment, his contract, to save his people totally from their sins, to give them his Spirit and eternal life, to be with them throughout their lives, to bring them into his everlasting kingdom, and to resurrect them from the dead even as Christ was resurrected from the dead.

This is the purpose of God revealed throughout the Bible: that God will be our God, and we will be his people, and he will live in our midst.

At our baptism this great promise of God is demonstrated in a tangible and visible way. In our baptism we see the fulfillment of God's purposes for his people beginning to be manifested.

3. Christ's baptism is also a lesson of affirmation –

the Father affirmed his pleasure and love for his Son.

So in our baptism we see God's affirmation toward us.

1 Pet. 3:21-22 states:

and this water (of the great Flood) symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge^{le} of a good conscience toward God. ***It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,***²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

So at our baptism God affirms to us that he saves us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We do not and cannot save ourselves. But the resurrected Christ, who is alive at this very moment at the Father's right hand, who rules over all things in this universe, he is the one who saves us. God affirms this to us at our baptism.

Gal. 3:26-27 states:

You are all sons of God through ***faith in Christ Jesus,***²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have ***clothed yourselves with Christ.***²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Here's something else God affirms to us at our baptism: it is through our faith in Christ Jesus that God clothes us with Christ. No matter what our background is, no matter what race or sex we are, through faith in Christ we are clothed with him, with his righteousness – and we have shed our old clothes of sin and unrighteousness, and we are clothed with

Christ's perfect righteousness, so that God does not see our sins anymore, but he removes them as far as the east is from the west. He washes us clean from all our sins from the inside out.

Listen to what Heb. 10:19-25 says:

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, *having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.* ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We see from this great text that the shed blood of Jesus has opened up for us entrance into God's very presence and we have a great high priest over the house of God. So we can draw near to God. We can have full assurance of belonging to God and of his faithfulness to us. We know this because he's cleansed our consciences and we've been washed with pure water. I would be remiss if I didn't point out that this "washing with pure water" is, among other things, probably a reference to water baptism.

You see, it's also through baptism that God affirms his faithfulness to us; he gives us great hope for the future. And we also begin our corporate life together in the fellowship of the church. Baptism is our initiation right into Christ's fellowship and the fellowship of his people.

We are saved individually, but saved to be part of his body, of the local church that meets together weekly. We are not meant to walk the Christian life alone, but in union with God's people. We worship together and support one another as we pilgrimage through this world on our way to our final destination in the new earth and heaven where we shall live with Christ and all his people.

4. Day of Beginning

As Christ's baptism marked beginning of his testing and suffering in the wilderness, so our baptism marks the beginning **of our discipleship and service to Christ, including struggles with temptation and suffering.**

There's an example of this in Paul's ministry. The risen Christ appeared to him on the Damascus Road and then the Lord spoke to the disciples Ananias in a vision:

Acts 9:15-16 -¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for ^(W)he is a chosen ^(G)instrument of Mine, to bear My name before ^(X)the Gentiles and ^(Y)kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶ for ^(Z)I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

So Paul suffered much for the sake of Christ, but it was a joyful suffering. When he and Silas were beaten, put in the stocks, and thrown into a dungeon in Philippi, they didn't moan and complain but sang hymns of praise, happy that they could suffer for preaching the gospel.

Lastly, the fifth baptismal lesson we learn is that of the...

5. ...Revelation of the Trinity

The 3 persons of the one God were revealed that day to show us the nature of God's being – he is greater than we are – and so it should be – for he is the eternal God.

And so the church worships the one God in the trinity of his persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: the Father, very God of very God, the Son, very God of very God, and the Holy Spirit, very God of very God. But there are not three Gods, but one God – eternally existent as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Thank God for the great event of Christ's baptism in the Jordan by John. Great lessons are learned about Christ, and lessons for our own baptism.

Do you worship and serve the Lord Jesus Christ who was baptized on that day, identifying with us as he came to suffer and die to rescue us from our sins?

If you believe in him, why not follow him and be baptized in his name? Identify with Christ, and he will identify with you now and forever. Amen.

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