

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

As He prepared to enter His public life, Jesus began by approaching John the Baptist with a request to be baptized. We read,

¹³Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” ¹⁵But Jesus answering said to him, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he permitted Him. ¹⁶After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, ¹⁷and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”

THE DIVINE DECISION

In Matthew’s account, we have no mention of Jesus between the time He was taken to Nazareth as a small child and the time of His baptism. Luke 3:23 informs us that Jesus was “about thirty years of age” at this time. He traveled from “Nazareth in Galilee” (Mark 1:9) to the place at the Jordan where John was baptizing at Bethany (John 1:28), in order “to be baptized by him” (Matthew 3:13). At first, John was hesitant to baptize Jesus (v. 14). Matthew was the only gospel writer to record John’s reluctance to baptize Him. This fact should not cause us to doubt the accuracy and validity of the text. There is substantial historical support for its inclusion. This incident was mentioned by Ignatius early in the second century.¹ Justin Martyr also made reference to it.²

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THE DIVINE PURPOSE

Jesus answered John by saying, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (v. 15). As mentioned previously, John was baptizing “for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4)—but Jesus “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21; see 1 Peter 2:21, 22). He did, however, have to be completely obedient to the righteousness of God so that He could become “to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:9).

THE DIVINE TESTIMONY

After Jesus was baptized by John, He “came up immediately from the water . . .” (Matthew 3:16).

¹Ignatius *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 1:1.

²Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* 88.

From this text, it is necessarily inferred that He was fully immersed, which is the meaning of the word “baptize.” At that time, “the heavens were opened, and [John] saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him” (v. 16). This was the sign that John had been given to identify the One whose way he was preparing. Although he said at that time, “I did not recognize Him,” he only meant that he did not know Jesus as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:33, 36). Since they were relatives (cousins) and their mothers were close (Luke 1:39, 40), it is improbable that they had had no prior contact. This incident also fulfilled prophecies made by Isaiah: “the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him” (Isaiah 11:2a) and “I have put My Spirit upon Him” (Isaiah 42:1b). This was the Holy Spirit, who was anointing Christ to be King over God’s kingdom.

THE DIVINE PRESENCE

All three members of the Godhead³ were present on the occasion of Jesus’ baptism. Christ was in the water with John. The Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and lighted upon Jesus. While these things were happening, God spoke out of heaven to proclaim His pleasure with His Son: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (v. 17). This was the first of three times when God declared His Son’s divinity (see Matthew 17:5; John 12:28–32). The presence of all three members of Deity at Jesus’ baptism is an insurmountable problem for anyone who denies the Trinity. While the Bible never uses the word “Trinity,” many Scriptures confirm the concept as being valid (Matthew 28:19; John 1:1–3, 14; 17:1–26; 2 Corinthians 13:14; see Mark 12:29). Jesus was God but became a man and dwelt among us (John 1:1, 14).

LESSON

THE TRINITY (3:16, 17)

The term “Trinity” implies that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Chronicles 17:20; Psalm 86:10; Nehemiah 9:6; numerous Old Testament passages address this subject), or spiritual

³The three Greek words which can be translated “Godhead” appear only one time each in the Scriptures (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9; KJV). The term “Trinity” is not found in the Scriptures but is often used as an explanation of the nature of God.

essence, with three distinct persons or personalities. That within itself makes it difficult to explain. Our inability to explain it does not negate its truthfulness. Harold Hazelip wrote,

The Trinity is mysterious to us, and yet it is not completely mysterious. An explanation of God’s very being which is crystal clear to our limited minds would be suspect. We may speak of God rather easily as if he were completely analogous to human beings, but the very concept of Trinity tells us that his nature is complex to us.⁴

While the KJV uses the term “Godhead” three times to identify the fullness of Deity (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9), the NASB employs the words “Divine Nature” (capitalized only in Acts) and “Deity.” Sellers Crain

⁴Harold Hazelip, “What Is God Like?” in *Discipleship*, 20th Century Sermons Series (Abilene, Tex.: Biblical Research Press, 1977), 12.

FULFILLED PROPHECIES

“Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

“A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children;
And she refused to be comforted,
Because they were no more”

(Matthew 2:16–18; see Jeremiah 31:15).

VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE USED IN THIS STUDY

KJV — King James Version

NASB — New American Standard Bible,
updated edition

NKJV — New King James Version

Phillips — The New Testament in Modern
English, by J. B. Phillips