

The Baptism Of Jesus

Luke 3:21-22

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In Luke 3:21-22, Luke says, “When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.” The only time the Scriptures speak of Jesus praying at His baptism is in Luke’s Gospel. “And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him...” that is, “Christ” “...and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.’”

We come today in our study of Luke’s Gospel to the inauguration of Christ for His public ministry. There are so many things that are implied in the baptism of Jesus, but primarily it’s His inauguration, His commission, His anointing, as He will begin His public ministry. And before that, we’ll see the genealogy and the temptation of Christ, affirming that He is the Son of Man and the Son of God.

G. Campbell Morgan said about this baptism of Christ that “The 30 years of privacy merged into the three years of publicity by way of the solemn and significant ceremony.” The solemn ceremony was the baptism of Jesus by John the baptizer. John had already been preaching down by the Jordan River for about six months, it’s believed, when Jesus came from Galilee down to the Jordan River to be baptized by John.

The baptism of Jesus by John is recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels—in Matthew 3, in Mark 1 and in Luke 3. In John’s Gospel, chapter 1, there is reference to Jesus going to John to be baptized and the Spirit coming from heaven to alight on Jesus, but there is no real record of John saying, “I baptize Him” or that He was baptized. So primarily this event is recorded in the synoptics. And the word “synoptic” means “to see together.” Matthew, Mark and Luke see the life of Christ together.

Luke’s focus was simply on the facts. The facts are that the Son was baptized while He was praying—only Luke notes He was praying—the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended, there was the vision of the Holy Spirit and the Father’s voice spoke saying, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.” This is the Father’s testimony of the Son; it is divine confirmation of Christ.

This is an important event in the life of Christ for many reasons. But one of the most important is that in this event is revealed to us the Triune nature of God, which is my main focus today. What do I mean by “the Triune nature of God”? We believe in the Trinity, the fact that there is one God; Christians are monotheistic. We know that the Bible teaches there is only one God, but that one God is manifested in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

You might say, “I don’t understand how that works.” I say, “Welcome to the club.” No one can fathom the infinite God, His greatness and vastness. But we accept that because it’s revealed

to us in the Scriptures. We sing, "God in three Persons, blessed Trinity." So I want to focus on the concept of God revealed in Scripture as being Triune.

What do we mean by one God in three Persons? This is the doctrine of the Trinity: They are one in essence being divine, but three Persons. They are God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

This is not tritheism, three gods; and this is not modalism, where God the Father becomes God the Son and God the Son then becomes God the Holy Spirit. The Oneness Pentecostals teach that, but that's not Biblical. Rather, this is one, eternal God in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Now I want to break this passage down by looking at each Person of the Triune Godhead. We will look at the baptism of God the Son, the descending of God the Spirit and the voice of God the Father.

First, let's look at the baptism of God the Son, verse 21. "When all the people were baptized..." or "being baptized"; it's in the present tense. The crowds were there, thousands were there to be baptized. "...it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized." So notice when Jesus was baptized. He was baptized when everyone else was there. He didn't call John and ask, "Can I have a private baptism all by Myself? Get rid of the crowds, so it's just you and Me and maybe a few family members." No. He came when the multitudes were already there. One of the reasons for His baptism was for Him to sympathetically identify with sinners. So it is fitting that He was baptized with sinners.

Backing up to verse 20, there's a little footnote. John had been put in prison by Herod Antipas. So these verses are not in chronological order. Actually verse 20 comes after verses 21 and 22. Obviously if John's in prison, he couldn't baptize Jesus. Luke summarized the end of John's life in verse 20, so chronological order is not in this passage.

Now Jesus came from Galilee down to the Jordan River, but we don't know where along the Jordan River He was baptized. It could be just north of the Dead Sea.

Why would Jesus be baptized? People ask, "If John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, why would Jesus, the pure and holy Son of God, submit to this baptism?" First, let me tell you why He would not be baptized. Jesus would not go to John to be baptized because He had to repent and be forgiven of sins. The Bible is very clear on this. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says concerning Jesus, "who knew no sin." 1 Peter 2:22 says of Jesus, "who committed no sin." So Jesus was not being baptized because He was a sinner and needed to repent and be forgiven of His sins.

Baptism does not wash away your sins. The Bible is very clear in stating that "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves..." salvation is not of yourself "...it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Being dunked in water cannot wash away my sin. So even if you're not the Son of God and sinless, baptism in

water will not cleanse you from your sin.

I've had people tell me when I'm baptizing them, "Hold me down a long time; I've got a lot to bury." Baptism is an important thing to do, but it is an outward show of an inward work. If you haven't been born again, if you haven't been regenerated in the Spirit, given new life, which is what it means to be saved, then you're not a Christian.

Quite often when I ask someone, "Are you a Christian?" they say, "Well, I've been baptized, I go to church." A Christian is one who has the life of God in their soul, not one who has been baptized or goes to a particular church. If you've been regenerated by the Spirit of God, you then identify with your death and resurrection in Christ, being "buried" in baptism.

I don't believe the Bible teaches infant baptism. I believe it should be for an adult who knows they're a sinner, they've repented and believed in Jesus and they've turned from their sins. I believe baptism should be done by total immersion—but it doesn't matter—and when you go under the water, the picture is that you're buried under the water in your old life, and when you come out of the water, you rise with newness of life in Christ.

Even Jesus when He was baptized is picturing His death and Resurrection, and our being in Christ is identifying with His death and Resurrection as He goes in the water and comes out of the water.

So you say, "Then why was Jesus baptized?" Number one, it was to show His approval of John's ministry. To show His approval of John's ministry, Jesus came to John to be baptized.

Number two, Jesus was baptized for John to know who He was. You say, "Well, weren't they cousins? Didn't they know each other?" Actually John was headed out into the wilderness at a very young age, and he probably lived his whole life out there until he came to baptize, so he never knew his cousin, Jesus. Now Jesus is 30-something years old and probably had a beard and had more hair than when He was younger. They were both infants when they were separated and went different directions in life.

So God told John the Baptist, in John 1:33-34, that "Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." This would have been the identifying mark for John the Baptist, that he should begin to point people to the Lamb of God. Remember that John said of Jesus, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

John no doubt would have said that after the baptism, because he had the confirmation when the Spirit descended upon Jesus and the Father's voice identifying Jesus as the Messiah. So John pointed to Jesus, as every good preacher should. "That's the Man you should follow, the one who 'takes away the sin of the world.'"

Number three, Jesus was baptized in order to "sympathetically" identify with sinners. Jesus wasn't a sinner but symbolically and sympathetically, He came to be identified with us in our

sin, so Jesus agreed to be baptized.

And the primary reason, number four, that Jesus was baptized was to fulfill “all righteousness.” Matthew 3:14-15 says, “Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him.” This Scripture gives us some insight we don’t get in Mark or Luke.

Think about this. John the baptizer—filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother’s womb, the flaming preacher calling out sin and calling people to repentance, who exposed Herod Antipas’ sin of stealing his brother, Philip’s wife—is feeling his own sin and unworthiness to baptize the Son of God. Can you imagine? You’re baptizing sinners and the Savior comes to be baptized! John was saying, “No, no; I need You to baptize me!” John had said, “One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose” (Luke 3:16). That was the job of the lowest slave. So John felt a sense of unworthiness in the very presence of Jesus.

But when Jesus told John that it was necessary that John baptize Him, it was to fulfill the law. Not only was Jesus born of a virgin, so He had no sin nature; not only would He live a sinless life, but He would die a substitutionary death; yet His sinless life, in keeping the law when born under the law—He was circumcised—was because He came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). So this was indicating that Jesus came to live a sinless life and to die a substitutionary death.

Sinless life = substitutionary death. Jesus lived a sinless life but died a substitutionary death. If Jesus was a sinner, He couldn’t have died a substitutionary death for us on the Cross. Jesus took our place on the Cross, thus it was a substitutionary death. Jesus didn’t just die to show you His love; He actually died to pay the penalty for your sins. It was the substitutionary death of Christ, atoning for our sins.

So Jesus, being sinless humanity and living under the law perfectly, was qualified to go to the Cross and take our sins upon Himself. He died and then rose from the dead, and now His righteousness was imputed to us for righteousness.

It’s so important for you as a Christian to understand the terms of salvation, such as substitution and imputation. So Jesus died a substitutionary death, and His life of righteousness was imputed to us. And that’s why He submitted to baptism: to “fulfill all righteousness.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him...” that is, “Christ” “...who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” So we have substitution and imputation. Jesus went to the Cross in my place, He gave me His righteousness, which was imputed to me.

So you can’t get to heaven by being good, by your own works. You must by faith in Christ have His righteousness imputed to you, so that when God the Father looks on you, He sees the

righteousness of Jesus Christ the Son. Jesus died on the Cross in our place, so that He could give us His righteousness.

Someone said that “God the Father treated God the Son on the Cross as though He lived your life. Now God the Father treats you as if you lived Christ’s life.” That’s pretty cool! What I could not achieve on my own, Christ gives to me by His grace through faith.

The second thing we want to look at is the descending of God the Spirit, verse 22. “And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him.” It isn’t an actual dove; it’s the Holy Spirit in the manifested shape of a dove that alighted on Jesus. And Jesus was praying at the time. Then Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit.

I don’t know what Jesus was praying. I wish Luke had recorded it. What do you think He was praying? Maybe it was, “Father, thank You for Your love, and help Me to have strength to fulfill Your mission. Anoint Me with Your Spirit. Help Me to be obedient to You and go to the Cross to die for the sins of the world.” It would have been so cool to have the Spirit of God include in Luke’s translation here what the Son of God was praying. We don’t know what Jesus was praying, but it gets my curiosity going.

But the Bible does tell us that “the heaven was opened.” In the Bible whenever the heavens opened up, that’s a reoccurring phrase that always means God is going to manifest, God is going to speak or God is going to appear. Here “the heaven was opened,” and God came, in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is the third Person of the Godhead. We have God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Number one, the Holy Spirit is a Person. He’s not an “it.” He’s not a force like “May the Force be with you.” He’s not the force we use for our own purposes. He’s not a power. He has a will. He can be grieved. He can be blasphemed. He can be lied to. He can lead and guide you. Jesus called Him “the Comforter.” He is referred to in the personal pronoun—“He.” “He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

So as much as we recognize God as the Father and God as the Son—we understand their personalities as being Father and Son—the Holy Spirit is equally a Person and equally a divine Person. That means that all the same divine attributes possessed by God the Father and God the Son are also possessed by God the Holy Spirit. They all equally possess the same divine attributes.

The vision, or manifestation of God the Holy Spirit, in bodily shape like a dove is only recorded for us here in Luke’s Gospel. It’s an interesting insight. In Matthew 3:16, it mentions that the Spirit came and “alight[ed] upon Him” meaning “Jesus.” Some see a parallel in Genesis 1:2, where it says, “The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” The word “hovering” would be the same word, like a bird hovering.

What’s the significance of the Holy Spirit descending upon Christ? Number one, so John would know Him. I’ve already established that. It was the Spirit’s testimony to who Jesus is, in John 1.

Only the Holy Spirit can show you the things of Christ. I like that idea. The Holy Spirit's number one job is to glorify Jesus Christ. It's not His only job; it's His number one job. Jesus Himself, speaking of the Holy Spirit, said, "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14).

Whenever you watch a ministry or minister or someone serving the Lord or watch that person's life, you will always know that the Holy Spirit is at work when Jesus gets the glory. When a distraction causes the focus to go away from Christ to His instrument, that's not the Holy Spirit; that's the flesh. The Holy Spirit always glorifies Jesus Christ, so in our thoughts, attitudes and actions, if the Holy Spirit is filling our lives, then we will honor, magnify and glorify Jesus Christ.

And when you read the Bible, which is all about Jesus, the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to you. The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors; they all wrote by inspiration of the Spirit. And when you read the Bible, you should pray and ask the Spirit of God to give you insight to see the Son of God. Then He does the transformation of our lives into the image of Jesus, the Son of God. So it's all about the Spirit glorifying Jesus in our lives.

The Holy Spirit also anointed Jesus to empower Jesus for His Messianic mission. Remember that Jesus was not only God, He was truly human. In His humanity, He would need to rely upon the Holy Spirit to keep and fulfill His mission. So God the Father sent God the Son into the world through the Incarnation. In becoming a man or becoming flesh, Jesus had to trust in, be filled with, guided by, anointed by and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And this is not Christ's only encounter with the Holy Spirit. He had a pretty good beginning to His life; He was conceived in the womb by the Holy Spirit. In Luke 4:1, it says that He was "filled with the Holy Spirit...and was led by the Spirit." Notice in Luke 4:14 that "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit" after His temptation. And in verse 18, Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." When He went to the synagogue in Nazareth, opened the scroll and read from Isaiah 61:1-2 that "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me," it was so. This was His anointing for His Messianic mission and ministry. In Isaiah 42:1, God said, "I have put My Spirit upon Him." And in Acts 10:38, Luke said, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."

Why do I emphasize this? Because we can't minister for the Lord without the power of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Be filled with the Spirit." In the Greek, that's a command, it's an imperative, so it's not optional. "Oh, I don't think I'll do that. Those are crazy, Spirit-filled Christians!" No; it's commanded of us.

And in the Greek, that command is called "all inclusive." That means it is directed toward all believers; no one is exempt from this command. All are to "be filled with the Spirit." In the Greek, it's also in the passive voice, meaning "Let the Spirit fill you." You can't fill yourself, but let the Spirit fill and empower you. And it's also in the present tense, which means we are to be continually filled with the Spirit. That means we are to continually yield to, surrender to the Spirit of God by walking in obedience to His Word. And it takes the Word of God and the Spirit

of God to transform the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

So if Jesus prayed, so should we. If Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit, so should we.

I'm not sure why the Holy Spirit came as a dove, other than the fact that doves are gentle. The Holy Spirit is gentle and pure. He came upon Jesus and anointed Him for His ministry.

It's interesting that there are three offices in the Old Testament in which oil was poured on someone who was commissioned for their office. It was the office of the prophet, the priest and the king. Jesus held all three offices. When the anointing came upon Him, He became our Prophet, our Priest and our King. He came not only to die for the sins of the world, He came as the voice of God because He is God. He came as the Priest who died and bridged the gap between sinful man and a holy God. And He was the King who would reign on the throne of David, at the Second Coming, forever. So Jesus' anointing speaks to us of the threefold office of Jesus' ministry as Prophet, Priest and King.

The third thing that is recorded after the Son of God was baptized and the Spirit of God descended was the voice of God the Father speaking, Luke 3:22. "A voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.'"

You say, "Pastor John, it doesn't say it was the Father." Who else could it be?! The voice came from heaven. The voice described Jesus as His "Son," so it was the Father who was speaking.

In the Bible, quite often thunder is likened to the voice of God. I like to hear and feel the power of thunder. It's so awesome! So when Jesus was baptized, I think that everyone heard and felt the thunderous power of the voice of God!

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain before Peter, James and John, God also spoke, and He said, "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him" (Mark 9:7). That was the second time. And then a third time was when Jesus was praying before the Cross and said, "'Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came from heaven saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again'" (John 12:28). So the Father is confirming the Son, that He is the "beloved Son" in whom He is "well pleased." How marvelous!

Someone said, "God the Son submitting, God the Spirit descending and God the Father confirming." I like that. From the vision of the Spirit to the voice of the Father, saying, "This is my beloved Son."

In the statement of the Father, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased," there are two statements spliced together that are taken from remarkable verses in the Old Testament that are Messianic. You might say that the Father is actually quoting Scripture. That's interesting, because when Scripture speaks, God speaks. Whenever the Bible says, "Thus Scripture says," that's God speaking. So you can't separate the Word of God from the voice of God. This was an audible voice from God the Father.

The first of the two verses that were put together was Psalm 2:7, which says, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You." That seems to be the verse that was used by God the Father. And Gabriel's words to Mary, in Luke 1:35, say that He "will be called the Son of God."

I want to make it clear that whenever Jesus is called the Son of God, that's a claim or title of full deity. Some say, "Well, He wasn't God; He was the Son of God," as though He were lesser than the Father. Not so. Jesus said, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). That means one in essence; they are both God.

When Jesus was asked by the chief priests and scribes, "Are you then the Son of God?" He said, "You rightly say that I am" (Luke 22:70) and they ripped their clothes and said that was blasphemy. "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (John 10:33). Jesus was God.

Now don't misunderstand the words "Son" and "begotten Son." That doesn't mean that Jesus was generated or created; it means "unique" or "one of a kind." Jesus is the only unique, divine, Son of God. In Hebrews 1:8, the writer says, "But to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.'" In this verse, God the Father is calling God the Son "God."

The second verse in this statement from God the Father from heaven is drawn from Isaiah 42:1, which says, "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him." What a beautiful statement. Jesus is the Father's Elect, His Servant, His soul delights in His Son and He has put His Spirit on Jesus.

What exactly is the Father pleased with when He said, "In You..." meaning "Jesus" "...I am well pleased"? Number one, in retrospect, the Father was pleased with His Son's humble Incarnation and 30 years of earthly life. Jesus is now about 30 years old. Luke 3:23 says that Jesus was "about thirty years of age." This was the age that a priest would start his service. We think that 33 was the latest at which Jesus started His ministry. He was crucified about 36 years of age. And it was interesting that the Father was "pleased" with Jesus' 30 years of living as the God-man on earth. I think it's pretty cool if you can live 30 years and have God the Father say, "I am well pleased" with you! Jesus was perfect in every aspect.

And not only in retrospect was the Father pleased, but in prospect, looking forward, was He pleased. The Father was pleased with His Son's coming suffering on the Cross. He knew that His Son would faithfully go to the Cross. He knew about Gethsemane; He knew He'd be in agony. He knew He'd pray, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matthew 26:39). But the Father also knew His Son would fulfill His mission to die on that Cross. So the Father looked back and was pleased, and He looked ahead and was pleased; that His Son would suffer and die on the Cross for our sins.

It's interesting that the "Servant...in whom [His] soul delights" (Isaiah 42:1) is the same suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:10; that "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him." The Servant in Isaiah 53 is the same Servant that the Father delighted in who would be bruised upon the Cross for mankind's

sin. So the baptism of Jesus was a picture of His death and Resurrection.

By way of conclusion, Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father..." there's God the Father "...of our Lord Jesus Christ..." there's God the Son "...who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing..." there's God the Holy Spirit "...in the heavenly places in Christ." Sometimes we forget, as believers, that all three Persons of the Godhead were active in our salvation. In Ephesians 1, after stating that we are blessed in the heavenlies from God the Father, from God the Son and from God the Holy Spirit, Paul says in verse 4 that God the Father "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world."

The longer I study the Bible, the more I'm overwhelmed with the truth that God chose me. He chose me not because I'm special. If anything, the Bible says, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world" (1 Corinthians 1:27). I qualified. To think that He chose me! Why did He reach down and save me? Why did He open my heart? Why did He draw me to Himself? Why did He grant me repentance? I can't believe how good God is!

The Bible then goes on in Ephesians 1 to say that God the Son died for me, that He redeemed me on the Cross, that He bought me out of sin. Then it says that God the Holy Spirit regenerates me, indwells me and seals me unto the day of redemption.

So God the Father chose you, God the Son died for you and God the Holy Spirit gave you new life and sealed you "until the redemption of the purchased possession" (Ephesians 1:14). Praise God from whom all blessings flow!