

Part Two: A River, a Voice and a Dove

Bible Focus: Baptism and Trinity; meaning of the Holy Spirit

We recognize what Christ was willing to do for us and He fills us with the Holy Spirit and His grace.

Lesson and Verses

Part of the significance of certain events in Christ's life deals with how they reveal who He truly is.

One such **event** proclaims Him as the true Son of God: **His Baptism in the Jordan River.**

The Baptism of Jesus is a story of preparation. Here Jesus is beginning His earthly ministry. Prior to Christ came John (second cousin of Jesus), who came beforehand to announce the Messiah, and then baptized Him in order to prepare Him for His ministry.

Who was John and how did he know his place? Like Jesus, John the Baptist was born under miraculous and specific circumstances and lived a unique life.

Matthew 3:1-3 (referencing Isaiah 40:3)

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea² and saying, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*”³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

*“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”*

John knew, though, that he was appointed to make way for Jesus. When questioned about who he was, John made sure to point the way towards Christ, the true Messiah:

Matthew 3:11:

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Jesus knew that He should first be baptized to set the stage for His earthly work and to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). **He submitted to John’s baptism (which was for sinners) in order to affirm His identity with sinners.** It sets the stage for everything He does as the Christ and points to His death on the cross. In addition, **through the event of His baptism, we see all three elements of the trinity in one place.**

Matthew 3:13-17:

13 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?”*

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

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

In a wild (and admittedly confusing) moment, we see **Christ the Son in flesh**, in the water. **His Father, God, speaks as the Spirit, in the form of a dove**, descends. We know that **the three persons of the Trinity are “co- eternal and co-equal”**

We cannot separate the parts into three distinct lords or put one above another. Here, though, we have all elements of the Trinity coming together to verify and show the significance of who Jesus was. This scene is also the culminating act and purpose of John the Baptist, who declared why he came and how he knew Jesus is Messiah.

John 1:29-34:

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ 31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

32 Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

John’s mission in life all along was to proclaim and prepare for the Messiah. Having seen and baptized Jesus, he knew that Jesus was the one. Through the Word of God and His amazing work within us we know that Christ is the only way to salvation. Whether or not we can entirely wrap our heads around every facet of the Trinity, our faith simply believes in Christ and trusts His Word that He is the way, the truth and the life.

Follow-up Questions:

Why was it important for Jesus to be baptized?

The baptism of Jesus completes His taking on the role of humanity. When He died on the cross, He did so in place of us, to suffer and take on our sins. Baptism is similar in that although He was not sinful, He became washed as a sinner would, allowing our Baptism to have meaning. Martin Luther wrote, “[Christ] accepted [baptism] from John for the reason that He was entering into our stead, indeed, our person, that is, becoming a sinner for us, taking upon Himself the sins which he had not committed, and wiping them out and drowning them in his holy baptism” (Luther’s Works 51:315).

Is it important for us to be baptized? Why? What does it mean?

Our Baptism is essential and significant in allowing God's grace to reign supreme in our lives. Luther writes in the Small Catechism: "Baptism works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe."

According to Christ's Great Commission (Matthew 28:19), we are to make believers and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. When we are baptized, it is not an act that we do but it is what God has done for us. Without our faith and God's work, it is a meaningless ritual (Luther's Large Catechism). We may as well take a shower. Baptizing is God's work of salvation to and for us.

Do we ever try to turn away an invitation of Christ, like John did?

Of course we do, probably without even realizing it in some cases. John tried to refuse Christ, deeming himself "unworthy," when truly Jesus was blessing John by making him worthy.

How can we, like the Baptist, tell others boldly of who Jesus is?

We can live as ambassadors and proclaimers of Christ, unashamed and fearless to declare that He is God. We do this in casual conversation with others as well as bold personal statements when appropriate. As we live out our faith, we will find ourselves in contexts to share the gospel. In these times, we cannot be nervous about consequences of our faith; however, it is also critical to remember that we are called to love. Whenever telling someone about Jesus, we ought to bear in mind an attitude of love and consideration, rather than a purely judgmental condemnation.

Who is the Holy Spirit and what does it do for us?

The Holy Spirit is the living, breathing element of Trinity that works through Word and Sacrament and bestows Christ's gifts on us. It is helpful to look at Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed in the Small Catechism: "The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

Weekly Challenge: Making changes...

Baptism is a re-birth, a formal proclamation of salvation. Consider taking an attitude of daily re-birth and re-dedication, constantly submitting to God and recognizing that HE works through us in all things.

Maybe there are elements of faith that you feel are "yours," that somehow your actions and words secure salvation.

Sometimes we get the attitude that "Christianity is in the bag" and we stray from God. Examine your heart to find areas where you struggle in this. Seek to uncover an aspect of faith that may be more difficult for you to comprehend and pray about it. Trust that God knows your need and that He will care for you no matter what.

