

# The Baptism of Jesus Christ

Matthew 3:13-17

The first words directly spoken by God the Father in the first book of the New Testament are given here at Jesus' baptism. The son of Abraham and son of David is announced as the beloved Son of God. But why is He baptized for repentance? And why does the Holy Spirit descend on Him, since He already possessed Him (Lk. 1:15)? Matthew teaches us that Jesus is our Christ. And this means His baptism, His repentance, and His power, and pleasure of His Father are ours as well.

## To Fulfill All Righteousness

John the Baptizer has already announced that Jesus will come after him, baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire, so this is what we expect to happen (v. 11). But instead Jesus comes to John to be baptized by him (v. 13). This even throws John for loop, and he strongly opposes Jesus, saying he needs to be baptized by Him, not the other way around (v. 14). In Scripture, the lesser is blessed by the greater (Heb. 7:7), and it's even stranger to have the servant baptizing the Lord. Jesus tells John to permit it now because it is fitting in order to fulfill all righteousness (v. 15). See the humility of the highest: "Then he allowed Him" (v. 15). We have not heard a specific command from God to be baptized, but so far in Matthew's Gospel Jesus has been "fulfilling" the words of the prophets—conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virgin (1:23), born in Bethlehem (2:5-6), fleeing Herod to shelter in Egypt (2:15), and growing up in Nazareth (2:23). All of these occurred without His knowledge at the time, but now He is an adult, taking deliberate action to do the will of His Father, to fulfill all righteousness. As a lone individual, Jesus does not need to repent, hence John's point. Why would the sinner baptize the sinless? But He is new Adam, a new covenantal head of a new human race come to lead His people out of sin and death and into new life. He identifies with His people. Matthew has been telling us Jesus is the new Israel. What does Israel do, but get baptized?: "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:1-2). Israel identified with Moses when they were dry-baptized, walking through the Red Sea on dry ground. Jesus will go through the wilderness and into the land, but first He is going through the Jordan to be baptized. Jesus is our repentance. We don't repent, become worthy of grace, and then come to get grace for whatever stuff we have left! A thousand times NO! This is a subtle but wicked way to deny the fullness of Christ's salvation, the greatness of His grace. This is how you become the kind of Christian who thinks there's only a certain type of person who can become a Christian. And this is how churches muzzle the gospel and turn the people of God into a respectable club where everyone is supposed to get sorted out first and then they are welcome to come. Jesus says to repent and believe, but you are not worthy to follow Him because you did this. He died for you before you ever even thought of it, while you were dead in sins and trespasses. He is your repentance. Therefore, you can repent and believe. And when you do so, you are receiving all of Him.

## The Father's Pleasure

At Christ's baptism, the heavens are opened up and we see the three Persons of the triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—revealed in a historical scene. The savior of the world is embarking on His mission and here is the archetypical and perfect Father-Son relationship. We'll consider the meaning of the Father's actions, but first the structure. Note that the Father is there; He shows up. Then, He makes Himself known by sending the Spirit to His Son, by blessing and empowering Him. Third, He speaks and communicates three things: 1) He claims the Son as His own; 2) He expresses His love; 3) He expresses His pleasure: "This is My beloved Son, in whom

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I am well pleased” (v. 17). This is who the Father is, and this is what His Fatherhood is like. He is there. He is abundantly and helpfully generous. He identifies with His Son. He speaks His love. And He makes it known that He is well pleased with Jesus. Is this what comes to mind when you think of God your Father—presence, blessing, identity, love, and pleasure? Fathers, is this how you strive to be with your children? We live in a broken world at a time when fatherhood is particularly misunderstood and neglected. Instead of reasoning from who He is to what fatherhood ought to be, we reason from what we think fatherhood is to what He must be like. And we can’t do this without distancing ourselves from Jesus, the one in whom the Father is well pleased. If we are in Him, that is, baptized into Jesus, then the Father receives us in Him: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Rom. 6:3). The pleasure of the Father is not confined to Jesus. This is our Christ. We are Christians. Like Him, we serve in order to hear “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Lk. 25:23). That will be the crowning moment derived from His pleasure all along the way: “The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love” (Ps. 147:11).

## The Father’s Power

The Father proclaims His pleasure, and He bestows His power. The dove reminds us of the one that returned to Noah after world was baptized in the flood (Gen. 8:11-12; 1 Pet. 3:18-22), and the way the Spirit “hovered” over the water at the original creation (Gen. 1:2). The Spirit descends upon Jesus to empower Him: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Is. 61:1). Jesus will soon be resisting the devil in the wilderness, calling disciples, proclaiming the good news, healing multitudes, fending off persecution, and ultimately going to the cross to die alone. The Spirit strengthens Him for the work: “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles” (Is. 42:1). When we see Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, He is not empowered like Thor. He is human like us, but relies perfectly on the Spirit, the same Spirit who led Him into the wilderness and all kinds of situations where His weakness was matured by the Spirit’s strength. Jesus identified with us and was baptized in repentance, so we need not foolish and proudly avoid coming to God in true confession for what we’ve done. He was empowered by and delighted in by the Father at the beginning of His mission so He would be victorious. Baptized into Christ, we will too, knowing His pleasure and living faithfully to the end.