

## Sermon – 17/10/2010 am

# Baptism and Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

Study Text: Luke 3:21-38

John the Baptist's mother and the mother of Jesus were close relatives. But Elizabeth lived in the hills of Judea while Mary lived in Galilee; so John probably had little contact with Jesus while growing up. It was by the power of the Holy Spirit that he knew Messiah was coming and by revelation from God that he recognized Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:33).

John was called by God to prepare the way of the Lord. By way of preparation he urged people to repent of their sin and then he would baptize them in the Jordan. As John was preaching and baptizing, and after he had baptized all who came, something amazing happened. Jesus came down from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized by John.

## Baptism

Jesus came to be baptized just like all the other people. His baptism was like all the others, but it was also a baptism like no other. We will firstly look at what happened at the Jordan on this day and then ask why Jesus came to be baptized when he had no sin to confess.

The baptism of Jesus is recorded in all four gospels. Some include more detail than others. Luke is the only one to tell us that Jesus prayed. While he prayed *the heaven was opened* (3:21). What a wonder this must have been. As Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven he saw heaven open up. Was this a sign that God was listening to his prayer? It was as if Isaiah's prayer 'O that you would rend the heavens and come down' was being answered (Isaiah 64:1).

We are not told what Jesus prayed, but God heard him because he answered directly. Heaven opened to receive his prayer, and also to send the answer. The answer came into two ways. It came visibly and audibly. It came in the descent of the Holy Spirit as a dove, and in the words *You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased* (3:22).

This is one of just three times in the New Testament when God speaks audibly to Jesus. On another occasion Jesus was on the mountain praying and *a voice was heard out of the clouds saying this is my beloved Son, hear him* (Luke 9:35). This voice was directed to the disciples who were with Jesus. At the Jordan the voice from heaven was probably heard by John the Baptist and others.

When Jesus prayed God heard him and answered him. Do you believe God hears and answers your prayers? You will not know of course if you do not pray! For God to answer you must first pray! How often do you pray to your Father in heaven? Jesus knew his Father answered prayer. He said the Father will answer your prayer also when you pray in his name. *If you ask anything in my name I will do it* said Jesus (John 14:14).

Remember to ask in the name of Jesus because he is our mediator. We have no right to approach Almighty God and ask anything in our own name. We must come in the name of Jesus, through whom we have access to the throne of grace. Heaven opened when Jesus prayed and it opens when you pray in his name.

If Jesus prayed at his baptism should we not be prayerful about baptism. Baptism is not a mere ritual, something that is good to do for our kids. Marriage is a creation ordinance, by which we

mean it is for people whom God created. Baptism is a sacrament by which we mean it is only for God's redeemed people. It should not just be the minister praying as he sprinkles water on the child. Parents and family should be especially prayerful, and they should keep on praying for this child that the Lord brings under his covenant promises.

As Jesus prayed and John baptized him in the Jordan heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove (3:22). Was this a vision which Jesus or John had? In John's gospel it is clear that John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit descending because this was a sign by which he recognized Jesus as the Son of God (John 1:33). Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit descended *in bodily form like a dove*. It was not a vision by something real, even if difficult for us to comprehend.

At Pentecost there was a similar phenomenon; the Holy Spirit came in the form of tongues of fire. Why in this instance did he come as dove? Some suggest the dove is a symbol of purity and holiness. Some regard the dove as a symbol of peace, a symbol derived from the account of Noah and the flood. A dove is of course a bird flies high in the sky. Sometimes the simplest explanation is best!

This does not mean that Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit before this time. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. The descent of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of his ministry. It was a ministry undertaken in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. All three persons of the Trinity are marvellously united at the time of Jesus' baptism. Through the Holy Spirit an accord is made between the Father in heaven and the Son on earth.

'All three persons of the Godhead are equally concerned in the deliverance of our souls from hell' writes J. C. Ryle. This thought should encourage us whenever we get discouraged, or whenever we get weary in our fight with the world, the flesh and the devil.

## **Beloved Son**

The voice from heaven said *You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased* (3:22). Let us take a closer look at these words for they are words spoken by God directly to his Son. We are privy communication within the Holy Trinity!

The angel said to Mary that her Son would be called the Son of God (1:35). John the Baptist testified that this is the Son of God (John 1:34). The voice from heaven announced this is my beloved Son. Jesus is the only begotten Son of the Father. *He is in the bosom of the Father* writes John (John 1:18). He was with the Father in heaven before being sent into this world. Father and Son share the same eternal glory. The Son is deeply, deeply loved by the Father.

*In you I am well pleased* (3:22). Others probably heard these words as we have mentioned, but the words were spoken to Jesus. The Father was speaking to the Son. He was expressing pleasure in him. This pleasure would be related to Jesus' submission to baptism. This baptism was the beginning of his ministry, a ministry that led to the Cross.

We come to the question of why Jesus was baptized when he had no sin. In the first instance we note that he was obeying his Father. The Father voiced pleasure in him being there. Obedience was enough reason for him to go to John and join the line of sinners being baptized.

A second reason is given in the Scriptures. Matthew writes that John was reluctant to baptize Jesus. He knew Jesus had no need to repent and be baptized like the rest of the crowd, and indeed as John

himself. But Jesus insisted saying *it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness* (Matthew 3:15). Jesus was incarnate of the Virgin Mary. He took on flesh and blood. He was made like his brothers in every way – except for sin (Hebrews 1:17, 4:15). Jesus was born without sin and he never sinned.

Yet here at the Jordan he was baptized like a sinner. He was identifying with the sinners he came to save. Jesus came *in the likeness of sinful flesh ... that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us* (Romans 8:3, 4). ‘Righteous’ and ‘justice’ are the same word in Greek. The justice of God demands that sin be punished.

Jesus knew he was going to take the penalty for your sin and mine. That is why he identified with sinners there in the Jordan. He identified with sinners and became our representative. Jesus knew that penalty was death. He knew his blood must be shed for the forgiveness of sin.

## **Begins His Ministry**

The focus has shifted from John to Jesus. Luke does not even mention John’s name in this account of Jesus’ baptism. He simply writes Jesus *was also baptised* (3:21). Baptism marked the beginning of Jesus’ ministry at the age of about thirty (3:23) – a detail which only Luke includes. In the Old Testament the Levites who were the priests began their service at the age of thirty (Numbers 4:47).

Jesus’ baptism was viewed by John, by his Father in heaven, and also by Satan. After his baptism the Holy Spirit lead him into the desert where John had come from. There he was tempted by Satan to disobey his Father. Satan succeeded getting the first Adam to rebel; now he would tempt the second Adam.

At this point in his orderly account Luke includes the genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth. He takes this genealogy all the way back to Adam, the father of the human race and the one who brought all members of this race under the curse. We will not go into this list of 75 names in detail, but nor will we skip over it.

*Being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli* (3:23). Luke, like Matthew, made it clear that Jesus was not the biological son of Joseph. Matthew wrote *Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom Jesus, who is called the Christ, was born* (Matthew 1:16).

The genealogy given by Luke differs from that given by Matthew in a number of ways. Luke gives the list in the reverse order starting from Joseph and going back to David, to Abraham and all the way to Adam and to God. There is no problem with this reversal but we find some difficulty in matching the names; in particular the names from David down to Joseph.

While we cannot be certain, and there are different ideas, but most people reconcile the differences by saying that Luke gives the line of Mary rather than Joseph. The line of Mary was after all the true line of Jesus. It was not normal to record descent on the female line but this was not a normal birth. Mary was of the line of David, and of Adam of course. This would mean understanding ‘Joseph the son of Heli’ to mean ‘Joseph the son of Heli by marriage’ (the word ‘son’ is not in the Greek).

The genealogy was important for Jewish readers. Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus. Luke was a Gentile but it was still important for him to establish the human lineage of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a real man and not just a demi-god suddenly appearing from nowhere. Jesus was born of a woman; he grew up in a Jewish family.

Jesus could trace his line back to David with whom God made a covenant, and to Abraham with whom he made a previous covenant. He could trace his line all the way back to Adam with whom God made the first covenant. But Adam failed to keep that covenant.

In Jesus we have another son of God, God's only begotten son, not a created son like Adam. Jesus came because of the sin and death that Adam brought into the world. He is referred to in the New Testament as the second Adam. This genealogy ties the New Testament in with the Old Testament to give God's great plan of redemption through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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