

The Baptism of King Jesus

Matt. 3:13-17

Intro. Matthew's purpose for writing this gospel was to build an air-tight case that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and king. Each section in **chaps.1-4** contributes something to his argument. The genealogy demonstrates His right to the throne of David. The Christmas narrative reports His Incarnation and deity by means of the virgin birth. As the narrative continues, his birth was announced by an angel / signaled by a star / and celebrated by magi from the east. If anyone you know had a birthday like Jesus, the world needs to hear about it.

The magi worshipped, but Herod worried. Intimidated by this child some were calling the king of the Jews, he tried to kill the infant Jesus. But God protected His Son. Through an angel's warning, Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt to escape Herod's madness. Then when an angel told Joseph the coast was clear, they returned to the little town called **Nazareth**. When attempting to describe how denigrating it was in those days to be called a Nazarene...I asked you to imagine some back woods town in rural America without mentioning the town's name out loud because somebody seated near you might have relatives there. Guess what I forgot...I forgot that our brother, Fred Salem was born in the very Nazareth we're talking about! I hammered his hometown! The only time I take my foot out of my mouth is to change feet!" Thankfully, Fred is gracious. In fairness to our brother, the Nazareth he grew up in is nothing like Nazareth in the days of Jesus. Today it's the Arab capital in Israel.

Throughout **chap. 2**, Matthew presents the linkage between Israel and Jesus by quoting several OT prophecies. Like Israel, Jesus was hated by a ruler / called out of Egypt / and miraculously preserved. And just as God sent prophets to declare Israel's unique place in God's program, God sent one final OT prophet...John the baptizer. John's role was to introduce Jesus and prepare the way for Heaven's king. He fulfilled **Mal. 3:1** which says, "**See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before Me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,**" says the **LORD Almighty**. Heaven was silent for 400 years. The silence was dramatically broken by John the baptizer who also fulfilled **Isa. 40:3 - A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.**

Chap. 3 opens with a time notation...**In those days...**Jesus was no longer an infant or even a young man. **Lk. 3:1-3** says, **In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar--when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea...the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** From this historical marker scholars have determined John's ministry began in AD 29. Since, Jesus was 6 months younger and John was 30 when he began his ministry, Jesus was probably 30 when he came to be baptized. OT Law specified 30 to 50 as the age when men could serve in the Tabernacle. **Num. 4:3-4 - Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work in the Tent of Meeting.** So in keeping with the Law, John and Jesus began their ministries when priests began their service at age 30.

So Matthew wrote this to prove Jesus is the Messiah, the servant of God who is worthy to be the world's savior and king. We can mess up and be off base about a million things...but we must not make a mistake concerning the One to whom we trust our lives and eternal destiny. Am I right about that? **Acts 4:12 - "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** So in keeping with Matthew's purpose, I've outlined **3:13-17** according to the various witness statements given the day Jesus was baptized by John.

1. The witness of John's reluctance - vs.13, 14 - Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Up to this time, Jesus lived in obscurity in the little town of Nazareth. For Fred's sake, we'll say Nazareth was "small but very nice." We're told nothing of his early years except for the time at age 12 when His parents found Jesus conversing with the rabbis at the Temple in Jerusalem. Luke sums up those years in a single verse. **Luke 2:52 - And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.** Even though John and Jesus were cousins, they grew up in different towns and probably had little contact. After the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to explain the nature of her pregnancy and identity of her child, she went to the hill country of Judea to meet with Elizabeth, John's mother. Something very unusual happened that day. **Luke 1:41 - When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.** When John was still in his mother's womb, John recognized Jesus! Though John and Jesus were seldom together, everything he observed confirmed Jesus was the Christ he believed him to be. Jesus was unlike anyone John had ever known. We need that background to understand **v.14.**

So there came a day when Jesus heard the news about John's ministry. John's preaching ministry took place in the wilderness of Judea, about 80 miles south of Nazareth. **3:5, 6** say, **People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.** Crowds came to repent of sin and be baptized. God was moving in a mighty way. News of this wilderness revival couldn't be contained. It soon spread north as far as Galilee. For Jesus, the key moment had arrived.

William Barclay put it this way... *"For 30 years Jesus had waited in Nazareth, faithfully performing the simple duties of home and the carpenter's shop. All the time he knew that a world was waiting for Him...and He grew increasingly conscious of His waiting task. The success of any undertaking is determined by the wisdom with which the moment to embark upon it is chosen. Jesus must have waited for the hour to strike, for the moment to come, for the summons to sound. And when John emerged, Jesus knew the time had arrived."*

So Jesus made the journey to the desert region above the place where the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea. Because He was fully human, each step of his journey was no doubt charged with anticipation. He left heaven and came to earth for this reason. Dr. Luke reports the event this way... **When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. (Lk. 3:21)**

As we often say in baptismal classes and services, *"the key word in understanding the meaning of baptism is identification."* Several different baptisms and ceremonial washings are found in the Bible. In proselyte baptism, Gentiles identified with Israel's God who is holy. By means of John's baptism, Jewish believers identified with the Lord's command to repent of sin in preparation for the Messiah's coming. Today in the church age, believing sinners identify with the saving work of Christ and are baptized in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized. He identified completely with sinners He came to save. But notice...John protested. **v.14 - But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"** Don't miss this. John is like a witness who has been sworn in. Even though he was a prophet, he knew he was a sinner who needed baptism like everybody else. But Jesus was different. He wasn't a sinner. He stood apart from the crowd because He had no sin to confess....none!

Later when Jesus stood before the Sanhedrin and Roman authorities, Pilate said **"I find no basis for a charge against him."** (Jn. 18:38). After Judas led soldiers to arrest Jesus he said, **"I have**

betrayed innocent blood." - Matt. 27:4 Then as Jesus was crucified, the thief hanging on the cross next to Him said, **"We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." (Lk. 23:41).**

No matter how flawless a person may appear before men, everyone is flawed and sinful. If you probe deeply enough, everybody has a skeleton in their closet...everybody has a failure they'd rather not talk about. But not Jesus! The NT declares Him to be the spotless Lamb of God. He was made like His brothers, yet without sin. Even the demons confessed Jesus was pure and without sin. In **Mark 1:24** they said, **"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!"**

A simple reading of **v.14** reveals two things. First, John knew something about Jesus before Jesus was baptized. Second, John knew this baptism of repentance didn't apply to Jesus. So he struggled with the inconsistency of it all. He knew the OT and he no doubt knew the principle declared in **Prov. 17:15 - Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent-- the LORD detests them both.** So in his protest we have John's testimony. He said, *"I tried to stop Jesus from being baptized because He didn't need it. He didn't need it because He had no sin to confess...no sin to repudiate and turn from ...nothing from which to be cleansed!"* Let me ask...how good does a person have to be to not need repentance and baptism? Bear in mind, the law is a unit...even one violation breaks the whole law. Just one sin disqualifies us from life in God's presence. In effect John said, *"Cousin Jesus, You are as good as God!"* This is the testimony given by the last prophet of the OT.

2. The witness of the Son's Obedience – v. 15 - Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

A variety of reasons are offered to explain why Jesus came to be baptized. I think we've made the question more difficult than it needs to be. Jesus answered the question in **v.15**. As Larry Moyer says about evangelism...*"It's not easy, but it's not as hard as you're making it."* So let's unpack the verse.

Notice first, Jesus said, **"Let it be so now..."** In other words, Jesus said, *"My baptism is fitting or appropriate for this moment in redemptive history."* He went on to say, **...it is proper for us to do this...** Notice, He didn't say, it's proper for Me to do this. He said this **is proper for us...**for you, John and for Me, Jesus. God commissioned John to baptize repentant sinners so it was **proper** for him to do that. And Jesus who always did His Father's will was directed to take His place beside them. Jesus said, this **is proper** (or the will of God) **for** (both of) **us**. Then comes the purpose clause...the statement of reason...**"it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."**

If this phrase explains why Jesus was baptized, we need to know what the word **righteousness** means. In a general sense, **righteousness** is behavior that is right according to God's standards ...right in God's sight. We also know **righteousness** is often equivalent to salvation. A righteous person is a saved person. From the NT letters we know imputed righteousness brings perfection and holiness to believing sinners. So the variety of meanings can lead us several different directions. The solution is found when we ask...what does **righteousness** mean in Matthew's gospel? I need you to trust me on this because we don't have time to consider each instance where the word appears. But **righteousness**, throughout Matthew's gospel means **doing the will of God**.

Here's some support for that conclusion. First, consider **Matt. 6:10** where Jesus taught His disciples to pray this way...**your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.** The coming kingdom will be an economy where the will of God is done universally.

At the end of this same chapter Jesus said, **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (6:33)** Here **righteousness** is synonymous with

doing God's will...righteousness should be sought and it should be the focal point of our prayers. Second, remember the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? **Matt. 26:42** - "**My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.**" Along with this verse **Heb. 10:7** sets forth the most basic motivation behind everything Jesus said and did. **Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'**

So **righteousness**, as defined in Matthew, is doing the will of God. So what did Jesus mean when He said, "**it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.**" He meant this...it was God's will for Him to be baptized by John....period! Did it make sense to John? No. Does it make sense to us? No. Did Jesus have any sin to confess? No. But just as it was God's will for John to baptize Jews who were willing to confess their sin, it was God's will for Jesus to identify with sinners and be baptized. Did Jesus need a sin offering when He was born? No, but Joseph and Mary offered one. Did Jesus need to be circumcised the eighth day? No. But He was. Did Jesus need to keep the Passover? No...He is the Passover! He submitted to these rites to **fulfill all righteousness**. His baptism was God's will and a vital of God's redemption plan.

But think about this...if Jesus confessed some failure (and He didn't)...His confession would have been thorough. If Jesus repented of sin (though He didn't)...his repentance would have been a complete turn around. Let's face it...the average confession is padded by excuses and extenuating circumstances. Repentance is seldom complete and 180 degrees. Listen to King David when his pride was thoroughly demolished...**Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me!**" (**Psa. 51:5**) He confessed and said, "*God, I'm rotten from cradle to coffin!*" Rarely is somebody as broken as David or as Isaiah who in the presence of the holy God said, "**Woe to me!**"..."**I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips.**" We tend to rationalize and make excuses. We defend ourselves. Am I right about that? Here's how a truly humble sinner should respond when accused of some minor offense ...(I'm just throwing this out at no charge) "*I'm sorry for what I did but let me assure you, I've done worse than that!*" In most cases, that's the truth, isn't it?

At Christ's baptism, confession was perfect though unnecessary. Repentance was entire but irrelevant! If Jesus committed to walk with God and do His will (and He did), His consecration held nothing back...he was all in. You see, Christ's baptism according to the will of God is the perfect model for sinners like us who really need to confess / repent / and commit ourselves to God's will. I love the simplicity of **Luke 3:21** - **When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.** Luke tells us Jesus identified with sinners. Question..."Are you willing to humble yourself and be identified with Him? Are you willing to obey the will of God when it makes perfect sense for you to do so? Why then, do so many who profess to be Christians postpone baptism / feel it's unnecessary / or argue their baptism as an infant is good enough? Listen...if you can't remember sharing your testimony publicly before being immersed in some body of water...it's not good enough! Baptism isn't optional for those who want to follow King Jesus! After trusting Him to save us, baptism is the first step of obedience. It's a special moment in a Christian's life. Like the day we go public with the person we love and commit to spend our lives with, it signifies union with Christ and His people.

So what testimony did Jesus give by His baptism? He humbled Himself and proved He came to do the will of God, His Father. He is unlike any king we've ever heard of. He is God's obedient Son.

3. The witness of the Spirit's Anointing – v.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 lighting on Him.

Notice how the mode of baptism is clearly affirmed here. It's baptism by immersion. Jesus **went up out of the water**. Some theology questions are admittedly difficult, but not this one! The Greek word **baptizo** means to dip or immerse. In NT times the word was used of dying fabric. Ladies...would you

change the color of a piece of material by sprinkling or pouring dye on it? No you wouldn't! You'd immerse it in the dye. The cleansing accomplished by faith in Christ's death, burial and resurrection is thorough and complete. But sprinkling results in something spotty. It doesn't portray the thoroughness of Christ's finished work on our behalf. You can decide for yourself if this matters, but the NT precedent for immersion is well established.

v.16 says, **heaven was opened**. This takes a sanctified imagination greater than mine. When the phrase appears in the Bible...sometimes heaven is opened in judgment. That's the situation in **Gen. 7:11, Ezek. 1:1** and **Rev. 19:11**. On other occasions, heaven is opened in blessing as in **Psa. 78:23-24** and **Mal. 3:10**. As Stephen lay dying, he said, "**Look...I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.**" In a trance like state, Peter **saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. – Acts 10:11**

An **open heaven** is a dramatic situation where God pulls back the curtain and allows people to view sights in heaven that can't otherwise be seen. From this open heaven, Jesus **saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. Jn.1:32** says John saw it too! **Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.** The plain sense of the language leads us to conclude people on earth actually saw things in heaven...things that can't be seen unless and until God pulls back the curtain.

In the OT, prophets / priests / kings / and judges were anointed by God. The Spirit came on them to provide enablement for their assigned task. Jesus is God's ultimate and final prophet, priest, king, and judge. His anointing was prophesied in **Isa. 11:1, 2 - A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—** You know what a shoot is. Even after some trees are cut down, they refuse to die...shoots come up around the stump. Jesus was like that. Despite Israel's near-death experiences, Jesus came forth. From the roots of Jesse He grew to be the righteous **Branch** that bears fruit. By the way, the fruit is you and me and all who have trusted Him. But notice, **the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him.** From this moment on, the life and ministry of Jesus were empowered by God's Holy Spirit. If John had any doubts at all, they were erased by the sights and sounds he witnessed that day.

You may wonder why the Spirit appeared **like a dove**. A clue may be found in something Jesus said to his disciples. **Matt. 10:16 - I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.** We've been chased by geese and trumpeter swans. We've had robins and blue jays swoop down at us. But we've never been harassed by a dove. Am I right? Doves are gentle and peaceable not aggressors. Jesus said they're **innocent**. The dove that returned to Noah with an olive leaf in its beak brought a symbol of new life. In the same way, the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus for a quiet, peaceful ministry where trusting Him is voluntary. He didn't force Himself on anybody. His invitation was "**Come to Me...for I am meek and lowly...you will find rest for your souls.**" **Isa. 42:2 - He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.** Everything Jesus said and did was done in the dovelike power of God's Spirit. Because Jesus is God, His need of the Spirit's filling should remind us how powerless we are apart from the Spirit's filling! The opened heaven and the Spirit's descent, testified to the fact that Jesus is God's anointed One.

4. The witness of the Father's Commendation – v. 17 - And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Like an open heaven, it was very rare for God's voice to be heard by people on earth. God spoke through prophets and angels but we know He spoke audibly at Sinai when the Law was given. The smoke, trumpets, thunder and the sound of God's voice had such dramatic effect, the people said to Moses, "**Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us**

or we will die." - Ex. 19:19. God's spoke again when Jesus was transfigured. **Matt. 17:5** says...a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" Less familiar is **Jn. 12:28-30** when God spoke from Heaven in response to the prayer of Jesus. **Father, glorify your name!** Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine." On these rare occasions, people actually heard the voice of God. And listen... when God speaks, nobody doubts it God! Nobody says, "Whose voice was that?"

We can't know how many people came to the Jordan that day. It could have been 10 or 110. We can't say. But every person gathered at the Jordan that day saw something they'd never seen before. They heard something they'd never heard before. They saw heaven opened / they saw the Spirit descending like a dove / and they heard the voice of God the Father.

In the ancient Middle East it was common for a reigning king to introduce his son as his successor and heir. When his father said, "*You are my son*", it meant the new king wasn't an imposter / a criminal / or somebody who climbed to throne by deceit or violence. Here the voice from heaven said, "**This is my Son, whom I love.**" In other words, God said, He's the One! Remember **Psa. 2:7? I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son..."** This portion of **Psa. 2** was fulfilled the day Jesus was baptized.

But there's more to God's announcement because He said, "**...with him I am well pleased.**" Now stay with me a moment longer. Find **Isa. 44**. In this chapter Israel is called the **servant of God** at least 3x's. We see it in **vs.1, 2** and **v. 21**. As the **servant of God**, how did Israel do? Not so well! Did they submit to God's will and obey His commands? Not so much! Could God commend them? No.

Now let's turn back a page to **Isa. 42**. Let's read **vs. 1-4** As we read this, notice the pronouns used with reference to God's servant. "**Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.**" Do you see what I see? Here God's servant is a **he**...a singular male. Now the \$64,000 question...Who was Isaiah talking about 600 years BC? Jesus! **v.1** says, **my chosen one in whom I delight...** This is just another way of saying "**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.**"

OK...let's put this together and we're finished. **Witness #1** takes the stand. His name is John. He's the last prophet of the OT. Jesus came to the Jordan with a bunch of sinners. He came to be baptized and John said..."*I can't do it!*" Why not? Because Jesus had no sin to confess / no failures from which to repent / no need to be cleansed of anything sinful. John testified that Jesus is not like any other man. Because He's perfect, Jesus alone qualifies to save us...and oh, what an awesome king He is!

Witness #2 is Jesus Himself. Just as it was God's will for the Jewish people to come to the Jordan to be baptized, Jesus traveled 80 miles. He humbled himself to do the will of God. By the way, did I tell you this... **Jordan** means **waters of judgment?** Just as God passed through the Red Sea to deliver His people / and just as God again gave them safe passage across the Jordan...Jesus entered the Jordan...He accepted the judgment we deserved and tasted death to safely carry us across. **Jn. 5:24** - "**I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.**"

Witness #3 is the Spirit of God who descended on Jesus. When God set apart a man for some special ministry, the Spirit of God anointed him. The Spirit came on Bezalel who built the Tabernacle. The Spirit came on Gideon and Jehu. The Spirit then anointed Saul and David. When the Spirit came on Saul the people were surprised. It seemed strange to them. They said, "Is Saul among the prophets?...he wasn't even regular in Sunday School! Is he prophesying...really? Saul? But it wasn't so strange when the Spirit came on David and it wasn't strange at all when the Spirit came on Jesus. The Spirit's anointing fulfilled what was prophesied about Israel's Messiah. The Lord said, **I will put my Spirit on him.** So by His anointing, the Spirit testified that Jesus is the One.

Witness #4 is the Word of God, spoken audibly. **And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** The voice of God was so clear, there's no way to misidentify the voice or misunderstand the testimony God gave concerning His Son.

From the start of our study, we made reference to a bumper sticker that says..."*The solution to our problems will never come from the minds of those who caused them.*" If we can never change ourselves to be good enough...(and that's a conclusion I hope you've accepted)... we need a Savior who is as good as God requires Him to be. Matthew says, I know His name...He is Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah, the chosen One...the sinless, holy, righteous Spirit-filled servant who came to earth to do the will of God, His Father. Consider the witnesses. Each testimony given the day Jesus was baptized was in perfect agreement with the others. Two or three witness are enough to make the case but God has given us four. If we refuse to embrace heaven's king, we are without excuse!