

"AFTER YOU, ME FIRST"

MATTHEW 3:13-17

This Week's Core Competency

Church – I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today. Ephesians 4:15-16 *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Most of us look back on the day of our baptism with great joy. Whether it was during a special service, in the presence of family and friends, or perhaps performed in the Jordan River itself, the day we took that step of obedience to identify ourselves with Christ's life, death and resurrection will forever be etched in our mind. I remember my baptism. Holly and I were actually baptized together. Both of us received Christ many years prior yet it was almost a year to the day before we were baptized that God finally stirred our affections to live a life in true honor of him. We still have the pictures that were taken and look back upon that day with the greatest of fondness.

While there is no question that the day of our baptism stands out as one of the most significant and memorable days of our life, I recently became struck by the significance that the God's word and even the early church places upon the impact one's individual baptism has upon the corporate body, Christ's church. "In 1 Corinthians 12:13, [Paul] regards baptism as the means of initiation into one body, i.e. the Christian community." (Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 755). While Paul is ultimately referring to the spiritual baptism we received by the Holy Spirit at our conversion, he is trying to communicate from a practical standpoint of the unity (marked outwardly by the ordinance of

water baptism) that should exist within the collective body of Christ.

While even the best actions of the early church can't be deemed as "infallible," I was captivated to note the import that it placed on baptism. If a person desired to become a part of the Jerusalem church, that one was required to be discipled by a church leader. This season of discipleship could take as long as a year (or more!). Once the individual demonstrated a clear understanding of Christian truth and were living a fruitful life unto the Lord, a time would be dedicated to traverse to the Jordan to be baptized. Immediately following this ceremony, the entire church would convene. The new "members" of the church would partake of the communion elements for the very first time. Up until that moment, prospects seeking to become a part of this Christian community were not allowed to remain in the worship service while worshippers took the communion elements. For them, water baptism served as a rite of passage into the unbridled fellowship within the community of believers. (See further Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, Harper Collins Press).

A Situation for Discussion

Over the past few months, you've had the opportunity to talk with your neighbor Bob about a variety of spiritual topics such as the authority of the Bible, spiritual gifts and even the gospel message of Christ's death and resurrection. Yet last night Bob called with a question that you didn't quite know how to answer. "Remember how we talked a while back
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about Jesus being without sin? You know, born of a virgin and all. Well, I'm reading here that John the Baptist was baptizing people because of their sin against God. Then I read where Jesus comes and gets baptized by John too! So what gives?

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Matthew 3:13-17

13Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. 16As 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. 17And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (NIV(c)1984)

Cf. John 1:29-34

29The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' 31I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." 32Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' 34I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

Journal what you don't understand about Jesus' baptism:

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box each occurrence of the word "then" indicating *timing/sequence*.
- * Highlight the words "Jesus came" and "to be baptized" in v. 13.
- * Circle the word "but" in v. 14 which indicates *contrast*.
- * Underline each occurrence of the word "baptized".
- * Double underline v. 15; beginning with "it is" to "righteousness".
- * Box "as soon as" and "at that moment" in v. 16 indicating *timing/sequence*.
- * Bracket "like a dove" in v. 16. note the use of *simile*.
- * Underline "voice from heaven" in v. 17.
- * Highlight "this is" to "well pleased" in v. 17.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Read John's recording of Jesus' baptism (1:29-34). What features of his are distinct from that of Matthew's account? How does reading both accounts enhance your understanding of this story?
2. What was John's initial response to the prospect of baptizing Jesus? Why do you think he responded in this way? (Consider reading vv. 1-12)
3. Identify three distinct elements from Jesus' response back to John in v. 15.
4. In what sense do you think John's baptism of Jesus was to "fulfill all righteousness"?
5. What contrasting actions do you see in v. 16?
6. What do you make of the Spirit's descent upon Jesus?
7. What significance do you ascribe to the message given from heaven?
8. In what sense can we identify this as a Trinitarian passage?
9. **Discussion:** Playing off the word "identification," contrast Christ's baptism with believer's baptism.

Given that the baptism of Jesus is recorded in all four Gospels (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:29-34), it goes without saying that this event marks a significant point in the life of our Savior. John the Baptist speaks of his mission to officiate baptisms of repentance (Mk 1:4) by stating "the reason I came baptizing with water was that [the Messiah] might be revealed to Israel" (Jn 1:31). This speaks to a desired result of Christ's baptism, yet it doesn't speak to the necessity of Jesus' baptism. (After all, God could have made Israel's messiah known to them in any number of ways.)

Jesus provides John with a direct response as to the need for his baptism; to a) take place and b) be conducted by John. "It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3:15; Italics added). "To fulfill all righteousness" means *to complete everything that forms part of a relationship of obedience to God*. In doing so, Jesus identifies with and endorses John's ministry as divinely ordained and his message as one to be heeded" (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, 81). While Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of the end of John's ministry, "Jesus seems to be suggesting here a need to identify with John's ministry and call to the nation before he goes out to complete what John had started" (Darrell Bock, *Jesus According to Scriptures*, 87).

Others speak of the anointing Jesus received at his baptism. Acts 10:37-38 states "after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power."

After discussing reflections of Christ's anointing from the standpoint of numerous early church fathers, Catholic priest Raniero Cantalamessa comments, "These theologians of the earliest times were not therefore unaware of the Holy Spirit's presence in Jesus from the moment of his human birth; they did however attribute a different and decisive significance to the solemn anointing received by Jesus in the Jordan to mark the beginning of his messianic mission. According to some of them, just as at the incarnation the Word had become 'Jesus,' so at his baptismal anointing he had become 'Christ,' that is to say God's Anointed One, the Messiah" (Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Holy Spirit in the Life of Christ*, 6). "He is called Christ because [he was] anointed with the Holy Spirit by the Father." (Tertullian, *De baptismo*, 7.1).

And last but certainly not least there is the import of two aspects of identification that take place at Jesus' baptism. First, in order for his sacrificial death to legitimately atone for our sins, Jesus had to fully "share in [our] humanity . . . so that by his death he might destroy . . . the devil" (Heb 2:14, 17). Via his baptism, Jesus further identified himself with sin-stricken humanity (Isa 53:11-12) in need of, not only repentance but, a Savior. Second, our text concludes with God the Father's identification of Jesus as his one and only divine Son and Servant (cf. Ps 2:7 and Is 42:1-2). All of these aspects and more serve notice that Jesus' baptism was one of the most significant moments in human history.

The Message of the Passage

Through his baptism, Jesus validated John's ministry, identified himself with fallen humanity, was anointed by the Holy Spirit for his messianic mission and was identified by the Father as his uniquely beloved Son.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage

- Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.

- Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:
 - o Belonging
 - o Becoming
 - o *going* Beyond

“After You, Me First”

(Write the main points from Sunday’s message in the space below.)

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 13 **to the Jordan** "The precise location of Jesus' baptism is disputed. The traditional site is Qasar el-Yahud on the western bank of the Jordan River. However, the scene might instead be identified with "Bethany across [i.e., on the eastern side of] the Jordan" as noted in John 1:28 (*ESV Study Bible*, note on Matthew 3:13).

v. 13 **baptized** (Gk - *baptizo*) In *practice*, the act of being baptized means to "dip," "immerse," or "submerge." Yet, the *purpose* of baptism serves as "a sacred rite that signifies purification, initiation, or identification of an individual with a leader, group or teaching" (*Nelson Study Bible*, NKJV, 1639). "If [the] Messiah were to provide righteousness for sinners, He must be identified with sinners. It was therefore in the will of God for Him to be baptized by John in order to be identified (the real meaning of the word "baptized") with sinners" (Louis A. Barbieri, "Matthew" in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 25).

v. 14 **deter** Cf., "forbade" (KJV); "kept objecting" (CEV); "prevent" (NASB); "tried to prevent" (NKJV); "would have prevented" (ESV). Most likely, John's initial objection to Jesus' request to be baptized was not rooted in the fact that Jesus was without sin. While John knew the Messiah would "take away the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29), he would likely not have had a then present understanding of the *sinlessness* of the Christ. Rather, John's resistance to baptize Jesus was likely a response of humility, knowing that the One who has now come is "so much greater that I am not even worthy to be his slave" (Mk 1:7; NLT).

v. 15 **fulfill all righteousness** Christ's baptism did not in and of itself "fulfill *all* righteousness" (Italics added). Rather, his baptism, which essentially inaugurated his public ministry, was necessary for the fulfillment of all righteousness to one day be achieved - at the Cross (cf. Phil 2:8). "Jesus' baptism was an act of identification with sinners *ab extra*, from outside the realm of sin altogether" Robert Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 525). In Matthew, "righteousness means doing God's will [walking obediently before Him]. From the baptism to the crucifixion, from the beginning to the end of his public ministry, Jesus fulfilled all righteousness" (David K. Lowery, "Matthew" in *The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study: The Gospels*, 46).

v. 16 **like a dove** Lit., "as if." Throughout history, many have sought to postulate the symbolic significance in using "the dove" as a figure of speech for the Holy Spirit's descent. Yet the most likely option seems to be in similarities with the pre-Creation text of Ge 1:2a - "and the Spirit of God was hovering ("watching") over the face of waters." (NKJV, ESV; See also Dt 32:11). Regarding Ge 1:2 one commentator notes that while the earth is still formless "all is kept in check and under the control of the Spirit of God" (Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, 115). Whereas Ge 1:2 deals with God's original creation of the heavens and the earth, Jesus' ministry, beginning at his baptism, deals with our redemption and ultimately the creation of a new heaven and new earth (Re 21:1). As we observe the life of Christ in the Gospels, we begin to see just how significant the Holy Spirit's role is in Christ's ministry (Mt 4:1, 12:28; Lk 4:1, 4:14, 17-18 (cf. Is 42:1, 61:1-2); See also Ac 10:38).

v. 17 **voice** "The heavenly voice cites excerpts of Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1. Both texts were taken as messianic by important segments of pre-Christian Judaism. Together [these sources] point out Jesus' role as both divine Son and Suffering Servant, a crucial combination for interpreting Jesus' self-understanding and mission" (Blomberg, 82).

v. 17 **whom I love** Lit., my "beloved" Son; inherently dear. "The definite article [adds] to the sense of uniqueness to the love the Father has for His only begotten Son (Matt 12:18, 17:5)" (Spiros Zodhiates, *Matthew*, 24).

Connect the **FAMILY**.

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

Jesus spent his entire life doing what his heavenly father wanted him to do. Name a few of the things he did to obey God. Read Matthew 3:13-17. Although some say he didn't have to be baptized since he never sinned, Jesus chose to as a way to please God. Getting baptized is something God wants you to do, also.



Pray it!

Pray God's will for your child by praying scriptures. Insert your child's name in the blanks as you pray.

Father, I pray _____ will know there is one body and one Spirit—just as she was called to one hope when she was called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Eph 4:4-6

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Church – I believe God uses the people in the church to do His work.

Memory verse – "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I" Mt 3:11a

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- *Why didn't John want to baptize Jesus?
- *When was Jesus insisting he wanted to be baptized?
- *How did Jesus' baptism "fulfill all righteousness?"
- *Why was God so pleased with his son, Jesus?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

Hearing stories about their parents' childhood helps children to connect and relate to the family in a deeper way. Share you're your salvation story (and baptism!) with the kids. Be sure to include details like dates, places and influential people.



Challenge

Kids preschool through sixth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.

Family completes **Experience It** _____ Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** _____

Family participates in **Live It** _____ Child memorizes **Memory Verse** _____

Kids can earn extra tokens on Sunday morning by:

Bringing a friend to **The Kid Connection** _____ Completing **KIDZ Bulletin** _____

Child's name _____ Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.