

“YOU ARE MY SON, WHOM I LOVE”

Luke 3:15-38

Key Verse: 3:22

“...and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

In today’s passage we see two baptisms: Jesus baptizes people with the Holy Spirit and fire, and Jesus was baptized with water by John. These baptisms are distinct from John’s baptism of repentance. John’s baptism was limited historically. It was just preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus’ baptisms are also distinct from Christian baptism, which affirms one’s acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior, and testifies to the world. Jesus’ baptisms have deep and profound meaning which reveal his identity as both God and man. Jesus’ baptism also marked the beginning of his public ministry as the Messiah. This was most significant in God’s redemptive history and was foretold long before. We might expect it to have been celebrated with big parades and fireworks. But to our surprise, it was done in a very humble way. Why did Jesus humble himself to be baptized by John, though he is the Son of God? It was to identify with sinners, as the servant who understands our misery and came to bear our agonies under the power of sin and death. We really need Jesus. The power of darkness torments each person’s inner being. We cannot overcome it with our will power, or reason it away. We need help. As this new fall semester begins, there are students on campuses who desperately need Jesus. They may smile and look okay on the outside, but in their hearts they suffer from serious problems which they have no power to solve. This is why some on prestigious campuses commit suicide. This happens nearly every semester and reveals that students, who should be happy and productive, undergo unbearable inner torment. Who can help us and them? Jesus can. Let’s realize who Jesus is and what he can do for us through his baptisms.

First, Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (15-20). Before John the Baptist came, it had been 400 years since a prophet had spoken the words of God to Israel. When there was no word of God, there was no vision, no hope and no direction. But when the word of God came upon John the Baptist, he was inspired to challenge people with the message of repentance. He was bold and courageous to tell the truth and did not compromise. He also

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had a great shepherd’s heart for the people. In this way he prepared the way for the Lord. His ministry was so impressive that people wondered in their hearts if he might possibly be the Messiah (15). How did John answer them? If John had just nodded his head and agreed with them, they would have made him king. However, John was not addicted to power. Rather, he used his moment of fame to introduce Jesus. **He said, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”** (16). John acknowledged his own limits, in terms of identity and works, and magnified Jesus. John knew himself. He also knew who Jesus is and what he would do. He recognized that Jesus is more than a mere man; Jesus is God incarnate. Then he found himself as nothing but a servant. He also realized that his baptism with water was just preparatory. It was acknowledgement that one is a sinner who needs salvation. But it could not solve the sin problem and change people from within. Jesus’ baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire was intrinsically different. It brought forgiveness of sins, rebirth and renewal. Titus 3:5 says, “...he saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

Why do we need rebirth and renewal? The Bible tells us that man’s natural state is that of a condemned sinner awaiting final judgment (Jn 3:17). Without being born again we cannot see or enter the kingdom of God, regardless of social status, achievements, wealth or power (Jn 3:3). Jesus said, **“Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again’”** (Jn 3:5-7). When we accept Jesus as our Savior, he sends the Holy Spirit to change us into a new creation. Peter said in Acts 2:38, **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** The Holy Spirit dwells in us, sanctifies us, and helps us grow to be like Jesus (Jn 14:23). He purifies us from our sinful desires, helps us overcome bad habits, mends our character flaws, and transforms our attitude to be like that of Christ. We need this sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit throughout our lifetimes.

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We can learn a lesson from Israel's history. Though the Israelites had been delivered from Egyptian bondage, they were still like slaves inwardly. When hardships came upon them, they totally forgot God's grace and became unthankful, complained and turned bitter. They blamed God and Moses, their leader. In the same way, even though we are born again, old bad habits like blowing up in anger or talking badly about others behind their backs remain within us. In addition, a deep-rooted sinful nature remains that is characterized by laziness, selfishness, pride, lust, and the like. These inner enemies hinder us from living a godly life. When the word of God challenges us, we really want to overcome these dark things. For example, Ephesians 4:29 says, **“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”** As we hear this word, we may respond with resolution. Resolution is confidence that we will solve this problem by our own effort. We say, “I am going to do that.” This means we have a high view of our willpower and moral ability. If we succeed, we become self-righteous, thinking, “I did this; why can't others?” We become judgmental and critical toward others. On the other hand, we may respond to God's words with resignation. We say, “There is no way I can do that. I might as well not even try.” This means we have a low view of God's grace and become dismissive of his standard. This is another form of self-righteousness. It leads to despair and self-condemnation, communication breakdowns and self-absorption. It causes us to shirk responsibilities, making many excuses. Resolution and resignation both originate in self-reliance. In fact, sin is self-centeredness. We cannot solve our sin problem with our own effort. That is why we need Jesus. When we rely on Jesus, he will baptize us with the Holy Spirit. As baptism symbolizes the death of the old man and the birth of a new person, it well describes the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is powerful enough to put to death our stubborn sinful nature and strong worldly passions. The Holy Spirit enables us to live a godly life as children of God (Ro 8:13b; Titus 2:11-12). Let's ask Jesus to baptize us with the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist also emphasized baptism by fire. This fire functions in two ways. For those who accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, it is a purifying fire. But for those who do not, it is the fire of divine judgment. Living in this world, we have all kinds of trials. When we were not in Christ, these trials were meaningless sufferings which paralyzed us. So we tried to avoid them by any means. But when we are in Christ, these trials have a great meaning.

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Apostle Peter says that **“these have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed”** (1Pe 1:7). All kinds of trials are like a refining fire which burns away false hopes—with which we are so easily entangled—and purifies our faith until living hope in the kingdom of God overflows in our hearts.

In verse 17, John uses the analogy of a winnowing fork to describe Jesus as Judge: **“His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”** These days many people are not familiar with a winnowing fork. When I was a boy, I worked with my grandfather, a farmer, and experienced winnowing. It was fun, but it was hard work. A winnowing fork was used to toss dried wheat stalks into the air. The kernels of wheat fell down while the useless chaff was blown away by the wind. In this way the wheat and the chaff were separated. The wheat was carefully stored, but the chaff was burned in the fire. John called this, “unquenchable fire.” This refers to the fire of hell, which is eternal condemnation. Whether one is like wheat or chaff is a very serious matter. The chaff may seem important for a while, but it has no weight; it cannot resist the wind. God judges people by their fruit. Most of all, this fruit is becoming like Christ. No one can deceive God and sneak through his judgment without this fruit.

Knowing the seriousness of his mission, John exhorted people with many other words and proclaimed the good news to them (18). He also rebuked Herod the tetrarch for his adultery and many other evil things he had done (19). John was fearless. Then Herod locked John up in prison (20). It seemed that evil had triumphed over righteousness. However, from God’s point of view, after a most beautiful and fruitful life of mission, it was time for John to step aside, and for Jesus to begin his ministry.

Second, Jesus was baptized by John (21-38). Though John had exited the scene, Luke takes us back in verses 21-22 to the climax event of John’s ministry. Verse 21a says, **“When all the people were baptized, Jesus was baptized too.”** Jesus was baptized by John. Other people were baptized to repent of their sins. They acknowledged their dark and dirty deeds, thoughts and desires, and trembled before God. No one could stand before the Holy God without a deep sense of shame and guilt. Even John, as he baptized

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people, must have shared their feelings of shame and guilt, for he was also a sinner who needed God’s grace. But Jesus’ baptism was very different. As he was praying, heaven was opened (21b). Wow! Heaven was opened! Heaven means the place of God’s immediate presence. The way to God had been shut tight due to man’s sin. But now, heaven opened. The way to God was opened! It was the beginning of a new era. It was like the rising of the sun at dawn, breaking through the darkness. Luke compared Jesus to the rising sun which shines on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death (1:78).

Then the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in bodily form, like a dove (22a). In this way God anointed Jesus in a special way as the Messiah (Ac 10:38). The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus’ words and his works, as was prophesied (Isa 11:2). God the Father spoke to Jesus: **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased”** (22b). There seems to be a sense of joy and delight in God’s words. God acknowledged Jesus as his Son, and testified that he was in very nature God. This means there was no blemish or flaw in Jesus. Though Jesus was fully human, and had lived for 30 years on earth, he had never made a mistake in his desires, conduct, attitudes or words. He had lived perfectly as man and God. He always did what pleased God. At this moment, the Father confessed his love for and pleasure in Jesus.

As we see this beautiful fellowship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we may wonder what it implies for us. The amazing good news is that Jesus came into this world to draw us into the love relationship that we see in the Triune God. John 1:12-13 say, **“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”** Galatians 4:5-7 tell us that God sent his Son **“...to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.”** Through Jesus we became children of God whom God loves and with whom God is pleased. This is an amazing truth that we need to meditate upon and appreciate and live by each day. Paul tells us how in Ephesians 4:22-24, **“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the**

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new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Now, as we depend on Jesus, we can live as God’s children from the inside out. As we have received so much grace, we are also called to grow in Christ. Let’s consider two things we learn from Christ through his baptism: obedience and humility.

In being baptized, Jesus was taking his place in God’s history as the Messiah. He was obeying God’s will for him. God needed a perfect sacrifice to save people from their sins. According to Hebrews, Jesus said, **“Here I am. I have come to do your will my God,”** and offered his body. He willingly became the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Heb 10:4-7,14; Jn 1:29). This obedience pleased God. Obedience that pleases God comes from knowing God’s heart and purpose. It is surrendering to God willingly, trusting him fully, knowing that God is good.

By being baptized, Jesus humbly identified with mankind who were sinners. Jesus’ act of humiliation began when he left heavenly glory to take on human flesh. His humility was expressed throughout his earthly ministry. Jesus became a humble shepherd for all kinds of people. He never looked down on the poor and needy, but rather had pity on them, embraced them, and cared for them one by one. He gave sight to a blind man. He healed a helpless, paralyzed man. He cleansed a leper. He bore with his proud, selfish and immature disciples until they were changed into great men of God. Jesus diligently taught the word of God to thirsty souls. Jesus taught the meaning and direction of life, how to live in this world, and hope in the kingdom of God. Finally Jesus hung on a cross in order to solve our sin problem permanently. In this way Jesus broke the power of sin and death and gave us freedom and new life. Jesus demonstrated the love of God for human beings through his humility. God was pleased with Jesus’ humility. In Philippians 2, Paul encourages all believers to have the mindset of Christ Jesus in his humility and obedience. We cannot practice these naturally; but we can when Christ dwells in us. When I was young, I was very proud. I did not learn from my senior shepherds well and did not understand and relate to others with compassion. I looked like a brilliant teacher, but no one wanted to listen to me. As I cried out to God, he began to speak into my heart. Through John 1:14, Luke 2:7 and other words, humble Jesus came in and began to change me. I can say for sure that I have been changed, though I still need Jesus

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every day. Please pray for me to continue to grow. And let's all grow in the humility and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The remainder of this chapter is Jesus' genealogy. Luke begins by reminding his readers that Jesus was not the biological son of Joseph. Luke had already stated that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by a man (1:35). So this genealogy is not according to Jesus' bloodline. Legally, Jesus was thought to be Joseph's son (23b). So, this may be the genealogy of Joseph. Luke uses the formula phrase “the son of”—for example, “of Joseph, the son of Heli”—and goes back from Joseph all the way to Adam, naming 75 different men. No one is given distinctive mention, and no women are included. Luke's genealogy is quite different from that given by Matthew. Scholars have struggled to understand and reconcile these two different accounts. One suggestion was that Matthew followed Joseph's line and Luke followed Mary's line. Another is that Matthew followed the king's lines using a kind of representative genealogy, while Luke focused on historical accuracy. Apostle Paul warns us not to speculate too much on genealogies (1Ti 1:4). But we should understand Luke's point. Luke emphasizes Jesus' humanity, by going all the way back to Adam. Luke indirectly introduces the concept of Jesus as the Second Adam, the ancestor of a new humanity. This indicates God's universal offer of salvation. Jesus, “the light to the Gentiles,” came to save all people (Lk 2:32).

Through Jesus' baptisms we find our identity in God. Through baptism with the Holy Spirit, Jesus makes us children of God, whom God loves, and with whom he is pleased. Let's accept Jesus' grace, learn his obedience and humility, and share this good news with students.