

There is no doubt this event marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Matthew tells us that Jesus came for baptism, "from Galilee". Mark is even more specific, stating that Jesus came from "Nazareth of Galilee" to be baptized by John (Mark 1:9). Nazareth was the place chosen by Joseph and Mary to raise Jesus to adulthood (Matthew 2:23). John the Baptist also made it clear that his ministry merely preceded a greater one to come. In a sense, this event was the pinnacle of John's ministry. All of his preaching led up to this moment when the Spirit revealed the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. When he saw Jesus, John realized, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Fulfilling all Righteousness (3:13-15)

Jesus' initial appearance to John the Baptist seems to be described in John 1:26-37. This passage picks up where we left off in Matthew 3:11-12. John is preaching about One who would come after him. The very next day, He sees Jesus and boldly proclaims Him to be the Lamb of God, the One of whom John had been prophesying. This was clearly a revelation of the Spirit of God, working on both sides of the equation. Jesus was led to come and be baptized. John's eyes were opened to recognize His appearing.

Why was it necessary for John to recognize the identity of Jesus before baptizing Him? Compare Matthew 3:7-8 with verse 14.

Every other baptism administered by John was performed after evidence of repentance was given. Those who tried to come without showing evidence of repentance were rejected. Jesus was the exception because He had no sin. God had to reveal Jesus to John, as evidenced by his initial hesitation to perform the baptism. This ran contrary to John's understanding of the purpose of baptism.

The idea of baptizing Jesus was initially offensive to John. Who was he to baptize the Son of God? In fact, John felt he needed to be baptized by Jesus. Do we have evidence that John was ever baptized? No, there is no evidence in Scripture to suggest that John was ever baptized.

Why was Jesus baptized? John the Baptist knew that this was the sinless Son of God in the flesh coming to him. He initially resisted administering the baptism because to John, baptism was only for repentant sinners. He did not yet realize the fullness of this act. Jesus instructed John to do so in order to fulfill all righteousness. This means that it was a necessary part of the Father's plan for Jesus to enable Him to be the sinless Lamb of God and to realize all that the Father had for Him. The purpose of God was not revealed to John at this time but his obedience was required anyway. We must learn to act with such faith! Let's look at a few reasons that may explain the reason for Jesus' baptism.

- His ministry was "bookended" by first submitting Himself to the hands of man in the **symbol** of His death, burial, and resurrection, and then by the **actual acts**. (Read Acts 2:22-24)
It is interesting that His ministry began with this symbol of what was to come. Neither act was understood by those who knew Him (See Matthew 3:14, 16:21-23) but He understood it to be the will of His Father and He willingly submitted Himself. Both were followed by glorification.
- An act of **submission** to His Father. (Read Hebrews 5:8-9)

The Gospel of Matthew

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS (3:13 - 3:17)

- To provide an example of **obedience**. (Read Matthew 17:24-27)
Even though Jesus did not need to be baptized by virtue of His purity, His obedience to His Father is an example to us. Just as He paid taxes (though He is King of Kings), He desires that His children submit joyfully to the commands of His Father.
- Receives the Spirit in **fullness** for the ministry ahead of Him (Read John 3:34 and Ephesians 4:7)
We are given a measure of the Spirit of God when we are saved. This giftedness enables us to fulfill our role within the body of Christ. Jesus, however, received the Spirit without measure, meaning that He received the complete capacity of the Spirit, which is limitless. Perhaps this is related to His statement, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18)
- He fully participated in the **ordinances** of His church
Two ordinances are committed to the church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism predated the ministry of Christ by virtue of God's calling to John and His purposes in preparing a people for His Son. The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ (1 Cor. 11:23-26) Himself. Baptism identifies us with Him and the Lord's Supper is fellowship with Him.
- An act of commitment (engagement) to His **bride** (Read John 3:28-30)
The Scriptures prophesy a wedding that is to take place some day between the bride (church) and the bridegroom (Christ). See Revelation 19:7-10. John distinguishes between Himself and the bride. He implies that He was preparing the bride for the bridegroom. Baptism appears to be a part of that preparation, indicating a commitment to identify with and follow Christ. Jesus' baptism may have been an act of dedication to her.

The Heavens Opened (3:16-17)

The Gospels of Luke and John provide us with a few details about the actual baptism of Christ that were not included in Matthew's account. Read Luke 3:21-22 and John 1:29-34.

- Jesus' baptism appears to have taken place **after** John baptized others who came forward.
- Jesus was **praying** during His baptism.
- John had received prophecy from God that He would see the Spirit **descend** upon the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Did anyone witness the heavens opened and the descent of the Spirit except for Jesus and John?

Compare this event with the transfiguration that is recorded in Matthew 17:1-6.

It appears that John was the only one who witnessed this spiritual event. He saw it and testified of it to others. Also, at the transfiguration, God instructed the disciples to "hear Him". This instruction was not given at this juncture. While John could learn much from Christ, He had to continue in His ministry.

The Spirit of God descended upon Christ in the form of a dove. Why did the Spirit descend in this form? Compare this to the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. Read Leviticus 5:5-7; Song of Solomon 5:2, 6:9; Isaiah 42:1-4; Matthew 10:16, 11:29; Luke 4:18-19; and Acts 2:1-4.

The dove is a symbol of purity, harmlessness, and was also a common sacrifice in the Old Testament . All o f these components of a dove were a reminder of the way Jesus came (purity), the way He worked (harmlessness), and what He came to do (sacrifice). This is the work He was empowered to do by the Spirit of God.

What is the significance of the voice from heaven, the Son's baptism, and the descent of the dove?

We witness here at the baptism the three members of the trinity working separately but harmoniously in the effort to reach out to lost mankind through the work of Jesus Christ. The Son submits, the Spirit empowers, and the Father demonstrates His approval.

God the Father provided a Divine affirmation to Jesus' baptism when His voice was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." What is the significance of this statement?

No one could better attest to the sinless perfection with which Jesus began His ministry than His Father. If there had been spot or blemish upon Jesus from the previous 30 years of life, I don't believe this voice would have been heard. It also signals His approval with Jesus' submission to His ministry, which officially began with this act. It attests to His great love for His Son. This love sustained and motivated Jesus during the three and a half years of ministry. His Father was with Him from start to finish, only withdrawing during the suffering of the cross, which made the agony that much deeper for Jesus.