

The Baptism of the Lord

Text: Luke 3:15-22 (NIV)

¹⁵The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. ¹⁶John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷His 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." ¹⁸And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. ¹⁹But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, ²⁰Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison. ²¹When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²²and 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."

Theme: *Jesus Takes the Plunge*

Last week we looked at Jesus' obedience to both God and those with authority over Him such as Mary and Joseph and the government. Jesus was perfect. He never committed a single sin in His entire life. He did everything that was expected of Him. But as I said last week, His obedience and submission to God's will went a step further than what God wants from any of us. We can't even obey the 10 Commandments. Jesus did, but God's will for Him was that He would give His innocent life to redeem us from our sins. Today in His baptism Jesus takes the plunge, and begins His journey to the cross.

I. He takes the plunge to become our Savior.

Until this time Jesus never preached a sermon or did a miracle. He was a carpenter like Joseph. He went through the same trials, temptations, and joys that we have in life with one great exception. He was perfect. John the Baptist had been preaching at the Jordan River for some time. He called the people to repentance in preparation for the coming Savior. Many people came to receive this baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of all of their sins.

Then suddenly one day Jesus stood in that line of sinners. Luke simply writes, "*When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.*" He stood in a long line of sinners, even though He had no sin. He didn't have a single sin to confess. He didn't need any sins to be washed away. But by taking this plunge into the water of the Jordan River, Jesus accepted His office to be our Savior. The Sinless One was ready to take all of our sins upon Himself. He was ready to accept His calling to bear the sins of the whole world.

This calling would not be easy. Right after this the devil would tempt Him to look for another way. The people that He would come to save would reject Him. Even His disciples wouldn't understand His mission. They were looking for glory without the cross. As the time came nearer, He prayed with all His might that there might be another way. When He was hanging on the cross, with nails in His hands and feet, bearing all the sins of the world, people all around Him were taunting Him, challenging Him to come down from the cross if He is the Son of God. Jesus took the plunge to take

on the most difficult mission that has ever been undertaken. That is His great love for us, that He stood in line to take our place to offer His innocent life to redeem us from all of our sins.

II. It was fitting that He took this plunge in prayer.

Luke writes that as Jesus was praying heaven opened. It is important to note that at every major event in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is praying. For example, He prays at His baptism; He spends the entire night in prayer before choosing the 12 apostles; it is while He prays that He is transfigured; His dying words are a prayer.

But what did Jesus pray for? I spent some time this week thinking about that. It doesn't say exactly, but we know what it was because the prayer was answered right away. Heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove. In the Old Testament the judges were filled with the Holy Spirit and given the gifts that they needed to carry out the tasks that God had given to them. Prophets, priests, and kings were often anointed with oil through which the Holy Spirit came upon them to give them the gifts that they needed to carry out their offices. Jesus stood in the Jordan and prayed for the Holy Spirit. God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and the power to heal all who were under the power of the devil. (Acts 10:38) Jesus looked at the mission that was before Him, and He knew that it would only be accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is a great example for us. As Christians God has given each of us a calling in life. While we would like it to be something glorious, it always involves a cross that we bear as we follow Jesus. Too often we think, "I can do this," but we can't. We need God's Spirit. He gives us the gifts and the strength that we need as we bear our crosses. For Christmas I received a book with BC cartoons, called, *"I Did it His Way."* The opening cartoon is very interesting. It says, *"Prayer is allowing God to have His will in your life on His terms."* We often think that prayer is trying to change God's mind, so that He does what we want. Actually, through our prayers, we come to desire what God wants. That is shown especially in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed that there would be another way three times, but He ended by submitting Himself to His Father's will. He said, *"Nevertheless not my will, but yours be done."* He prayed that His Father's will would be done in His life, and that the Holy Spirit would give Him the gifts that He needed to carry out His Father's will. God answered that prayer. He also answers our prayers when we pray, "Thy will be done."

III. He took the plunge with the Father's approval.

As He stood in the Jordan River, the Father said, *"You are My beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* No one else was ever allowed to bear the sins of someone else. Moses offered his life after Israel worshiped the golden calf, but God didn't accept His offer. (Ex 32:32) There was only one person who could bear our sins. That was Jesus Christ. He was the perfect Lamb of God. If anyone missed John's testimony earlier that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, they heard it now right from heaven. Jesus began this mission with the Father's approval, and He finished it with the Father's approval. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, Luke tells us some interesting words from Jesus. The first was, *"Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing."* The second word was to the repentant criminal, *"Truly, today you will be with me in paradise."* How could Jesus forgive sins and even promise heaven to a repentant criminal? He could do it only with the approval of His Father.

When Jesus died, Luke also writes that He died in peace, knowing that His Father had approved of His sacrifice for all of our sins. He said, “*Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit.*” Many people think that when Jesus died, His Spirit went to hell. It didn’t. His body was buried, but His Spirit was taken to His Father in Heaven. Then three days later the Father’s approval was shown in an even greater way than His voice at Jesus’ baptism. He raised Jesus from the dead. His resurrection was the proof to all of hell and all of earth, that He has redeemed us from all of our sins.

At His baptism, Jesus took the plunge. He jumped into the same dirty water as all of these sinners, so that He could make us clean. He began His mission, filled with the Holy Spirit and with the approval of God the Father. It is because Jesus took the plunge in His baptism, that the water of our baptism washes away our sins, fills us with the Holy Spirit, and makes us also into beloved children of God. We thank Him this day and every day that He never turned back after He took the plunge to go to the cross, so that in our baptism we have been plunged into His death and resurrection to be reborn to a new life in Him.

Amen.

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