

The Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23a

DIG: What is significant about Jesus being baptized at the same time as all the people? What three things happen at His baptism that make it unlike the others? What meaning do you think these events have for Him? In the context of Chapters 3 and 4, what do you think Matthew 3:17 meant to Yeshua? How does this set the stage for His ministry to begin?

REFLECT: How has Jesus been like a "new Adam" for you - giving you a fresh start at life? How has ADONAI affirmed you as His child in Christ? When Messiah calls you, He calls you to come and die. Since becoming a believer in Yeshua, in what areas have you died to self? Was the Lord immersed in the water or sprinkled? What changes could you make in your daily activities and typical priorities in order to cultivate a heart that continues to be stunned by His desire stoop to our level?

Matthew picks up the story at the next vital transition in the preparation of the Messiah. If **Yeshua** is indeed the promised King and redeemer of Isra'el, then he must go through a final preparation for **His** holy task. Since *mikveh* (ritual immersion) must play an essential role, **Matthew** shares the historical details leading up this highly symbolic event.²⁵⁶ In AD 29, eighteen to twenty years after **Jesus** became a son of the Covenant, **His** first act was to make **baptism** a symbolic doorway to a new kind of life, through which **He** would be the first to walk through.²⁵⁷

At last **the Lord** had come to a parting of the ways. Those years of patient, dutiful service to the family, after the death of Joseph, were now complete, and **He** needed to leave **His** loving mother to the care of the younger half-brothers, the oldest of which had already come to a responsible age. How much the companionship of **Mary** now mature in her wisdom and experience of forty-some years, and her **Son**, strong, yet tender and thoughtful, meant to each other. How she could, secretly in her heart, wish that **He** might remain at home and go on with **His** ordinary tasks of a carpenter, while **He** continued **His** splendid gift of teaching in the local synagogue and personal ministry among **His** countrymen in Nazareth.²⁵⁸ But it was not to be.

The baptism of **Jesus** was the last act of **His** private life, and the first act of **His** public life. It was here that **the Holy Spirit** officially anointed the public ministry of **Yeshua**, although it would not officially start until the first cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem (**John 2:13-22**). Six months earlier **the Lord** was actually identified by **John** as **the**

Messiah. Yochanan had already begun a ministry of preaching, announcing that the coming of **the Meshiach** was very near. People were to prepare themselves to receive **Him**. To prepare for **the Lord, John** taught three principles: First, they needed to repent and come back to **God**. Secondly, they needed to believe the message that **King Messiah** and **His Kingdom** would soon come. Thirdly, they needed to publicly verify their repentance and faith in **the Messiah** and **His Kingdom** by being **baptized** by **John**.²⁵⁹

When all the people were being baptized, **Jesus was baptized too**. It was not a triumphal entry heralded by a trumpet fanfare. **He came alone from Nazareth in Galilee**. **Nazareth** was an obscure village never mentioned in the TaNaKh, the Talmud, or the writings of Josephus, the well-known first-century Jewish historian. **Galilee**, about 30 miles wide and 60 miles long, was the populous northernmost region of the three divisions of Palestine: Judea, Samaria, and **Galilee**.²⁶⁰

He came to the Jordan to be baptized openly by **John (Matthew 3:13; Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21a)**. Here we have a man with a common name, from a common town, to participate in a common practice, and share a common experience with humanity. The root word *bapto*, means *to dip*, or *to dye*. In Greek literature it was used in taking a piece of cloth and dipping it into a vat of dye to change its color; hence, to change its identification. It had to go all the way into the dye. From the root word *bapto*, a second Greek word, *baptidzo*, came to mean *to baptize*, or *I baptize*. Once again, it means to totally immerse, but it always carries with it the idea of identification. The Church knew nothing of sprinkling or pouring for **baptism** until the Middle Ages, when the Roman Catholic Church introduced it.

God fearers and proselytes in the TaNaKh were **baptized** when they wanted to identify themselves with Judaism. Therefore, it was a Jewish practice long before it became a practice of the Church that identifies the one being **baptized** with the death, burial and resurrection of **Jesus Christ (Romans 6:1-23)**.

Yeshua had no need to come back to **God**. Nevertheless, **He** took **His** place with the righteous of Isra'el and submitted to **baptism** by **John**. Because **Yochanan** was fully aware of the sinlessness and deity of **Jesus** that **he tried to deter Him**. The imperfect tense, **he tried to deter**, means that **he** kept on trying to **deter Him**, saying: **I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me (Matthew 3:14)?** It was as if **John** was saying, "I am only a prophet of **ADONAI** and I am sinful like everyone whom I **baptize**. But **You** are the **Son of God** and sinless. Why, then, do **You** ask me to **baptize You?**"

John resisted **baptizing Yeshua** for exactly the opposite reason that **he** resisted baptizing the Pharisees and Sadducees. They were in great need of repentance but were unwilling to ask for it and gave no evidence of having it. **John**, therefore, refused to **baptize**

them, calling them a **brood of vipers (Matthew 3:7)**. **Jesus**, by contrast, came for **baptism**, though He alone had no need of repentance. **Yochanan** refused to **baptize** the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were totally unworthy of it. Now **he** was almost equally reluctant to **baptize Jesus**, because **He** was too worthy of it.²⁶¹

It is easy to understand **John's** concern. **His baptism** was for confession of sin and repentance (**Matthew 3:2, 6 and 11**), which **John** himself needed. But **he** recognized that **Yeshua** was the **Meshiach** and so did not need to repent. In **Yeshua's** first recorded words since the age of twelve, when **He** told **His** parents: **Didn't you know I had to be in My Father's house [or about My Father's business] (Luke 2:49)?** **Yeshua** replied: **Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. Then John consented (Matthew 3:15)**. With that final act, **John the Baptist's** ministry was finished. But along with that, **his** fate had been sealed.

Jesus did not deny that **He** was superior to **John** and sinless. The phrase: **Let it be so now** was an idiom meaning that the act of **His baptism**, though not seemingly appropriate, was indeed appropriate for this special time. Whatever may be their ultimate relationship, it was the right course of action **for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness**. And **Yeshua** will be, **now**, as throughout the *Gospel*, perfectly obedient to the will of **ADONAI**. For **God's** perfect will to be fulfilled, it was necessary for **Jesus** to be **baptized by John**.

If **Jesus** was sinless why did **He** submit Himself to baptism? There are seven reasons. First, **to fulfill all righteousness**, or to identify Himself with **righteousness**. Specifically, **He** was showing in a visible way that **He** was going to fulfill the **righteousness** of the Torah. **Isaiah 53:11** speaks of **the servant of ADONAI** as **the righteous one who will make many righteous** by bearing their sins.

Secondly, to identify Himself with the kingdom of **God** that was the object of **John's** preaching. **Yochanan** was not only preaching repentance (something that **Jesus** did not need to be identified), but **he** was preaching about the coming **King** and **His** Kingdom.

Thirdly, to be made known to Isra'el. On this occasion **Jesus** would be publicly identified as **the Messiah Himself**. **Matthew's** readers familiar with the Scriptures would know that **Yeshua** fulfilled the prophetic Scriptures by identifying with Israel's history and completing Israel's destiny.

Fourthly, **Jesus** subjected **Himself** to **baptism** to be numbered and identified with the Jewish believing remnant being prepared by **John**.

Fifthly, **Yeshua** was immersed to be identified with sinners. Not to be identified as a sinner, but to be identified *with* sinners. **God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21).**

Sixthly, to receive the special anointing by the **Ruach HaKodesh** for His mission found in **Acts 10:37-38 . . .** You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached - how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him. Since the Holy Spirit came down on Him at His baptism, and connecting what happened in **Acts 10:37-38**, it is clear that this was when He received His special anointing.²⁶²

And lastly, what an opportunity for leadership. Before His ascension to the Father in heaven, He would say: **All authority . . . has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-19).** Jesus never asks us to do anything that He Himself hasn't done.

For the first time in the New Covenant, all three Persons of the Trinity are present together at Christ's baptism. The mystery of the Trinity is beyond the capacity of our very finite and limited minds to comprehend in its fullness. The Trinity is antimony; that is, it seems to us that for God to be three Persons and, at the same time, that God is one contradict each other, but both are true. The Bible teaches that there is a plurality in the Godhead, and that this plurality is a unity of only one God. At the same time there is no more, and no less, than three Persons. From the TaNaKh, the evidence is that only three Persons are called God, and no more than three Persons are ever seen together (**Isaiah 42:1, 48:12, 61:1 and 63:7-14**). In the New Covenant there are three major lines of evidence of the Trinity of the Godhead.

First, only three Persons are ever called God (here in **Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19; John 14:16-17; First Corinthians 12:4-6; Second Corinthians 13:14; First Peter 1:2**).

Second, only three Persons have the attributes of God: everlasting (**Psalm 90:2; Micah 5:2; John 1:1**); omnipotent, or *all-powerful* (**First Peter 1:5; Hebrews 1:3; Romans 15:19**); and omniscient, or *all-knowing* (**Jeremiah 17:10; John 16:30, 21:17; Revelation 2:23; First Corinthians 2:10-11**); omnipresent, meaning *God is everywhere* (**Jeremiah 23:24; Matthew 18:20, 28:20; Psalm 139:7-10**).

Third, only three **Persons** do the works of **God**: the work of the creation and the universe (**Psalm 102:25; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13** and **Psalm 104:30**); the work of the creation of man (**Genesis 2:7; Colossians 1:16; Job 33:4**); and the work of inspiration (**Second Timothy 3:16; First Peter 1:10-11; Second Peter 1:21**). As was true with the creation of the universe and man, three **Persons** are credited with the work of inspiration, which is the work of **God**.

God the Son was seen in the person of **Jesus** standing in the water. Just as **Yeshua** was praying, and was baptized, **He** immediately (the Greek adverb *euthus*, omitted in the NIV, is the first of 41 occurrences in **Mark**) came up out of the water (**Mark 1:10a**), which indicates that **He** had been all the way into the water. **John** was baptizing where there was much water (**John 3:23**), which would have been unnecessary if only sprinkling were used.

At that moment heaven was being torn open (**Mark 1:10b; Ezekiel 1:1** and **Isaiah 64:1**). The forceful Greek verb being torn open, or *schizomemous*, means to split or to divide. This is where we get the word schizophrenia, or *split personality*. It reflects a metaphor for **God's** breaking into human experience to deliver **His** people (**Psalm 18:9** and **16-19, Psalm 144:5-8; Isaiah 64:1-5**).²⁶³

And **God the Holy Spirit** descended upon (*eis*, not *epi*) **Him** visibly in bodily form like a dove (**Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10c; Luke 3:21b-22a**) just like the Lord had promised (**John 1:33**). The **Ruach HaKodesh** wasn't a dove, but descended like a dove. This is the only time in the Scriptures that a dove is represented in this way. To the Jewish mind of that day the dove was associated with sacrifice. Bulls were sacrificed by the rich, lambs by the middle-class, while the poor could only afford a dove.

The descent of the **Spirit of God** recalls well-known prophecies in **Isaiah**, which say that **ADONAI** will place **His Spirit** upon **His** chosen servant (**Isaiah 11:2, 42:1, 48:16, 61:1-2**). The **Spirit** came upon the ancient prophets for special inspiration and guidance in the beginning of their prophetic ministries. Upon **Jesus** **He** came without measure.²⁶⁴ This is not to say that **Yeshua** had previously been without the **Spirit**, since **Matthew** has already attributed **His** birth to the **Ruach HaKodesh** (**Matthew 1:18** and **20**). But now as the **Spirit** descended upon **Him** **Yeshua** is visibly equipped and commissioned to undertake **His** messianic mission.²⁶⁵ It is important to understand that **Jesus' baptism** did not change **His** divine status. **He** did not become the **Son of God** at **His** baptism. Rather, **His baptism** revealed that **He** was the **Son of God**.

Interestingly, this is the same symbolism for the Holy Spirit seen in rabbinic literature. One passage of the Talmud, in dealing with the Creation account of **Genesis 1:2**, states that, "The Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters - like a dove

that hovers over her young without touching them” (Tractate Hagigah 15a). In another Talmudic expression, the text says that a voice from heaven testified, “This is my son, whom I love, I am well pleased with him.”

All three Persons of **the Trinity** participated in the baptism of Yeshua. The Son had confirmed that He was the Messiah by saying: **It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness** (Matthew 3:15), and the Ruach HaKodesh had confirmed that He was the Anointed One by resting on Him (Matthew 3:16). And then the voice of **God the Father** came from heaven and said: **You are My Son** (Matthew 3:17a; Luke 3:22a). **The rabbis taught that when God speaks in heaven, “the daughter of His voice” the bat-kol, or an echo, is heard on earth. After the last of the prophets, it was considered that God provided the bat-kol to continue to give guidance to the people (Tractate Yoma 9b).** How very interesting that the *bat-kol* testified, after the last of the prophets and before the New Covenant was established, that Yeshua is indeed **God's Son**. To **Matthew's** audience, this was a **voice** to be taken very seriously. **ADONAI** is said to have a **Son** according to **Psalm 2, Proverbs 30, Isaiah 9:6**, and elsewhere. At that time, **the Messiah** had come to Isra'el and started His priestly ministry in the traditional way of baptism.²⁶⁶

While it is true that all believers are, in a sense, **children of God** (John 1:12b), Yeshua is so in a unique way - **His one and only Son** (John 1:18a). Two other passages also emphasize this point: one in which **Adam** is referred to as **God's son** (Luke 3:38), and also: **Adonai said to Me, “You are My Son; today I have become Your Father”** (Psalm 2:7). When combined with **First Corinthians 15:45**, in which **Jesus** and **Adam** are further compared, these verses show us that when we think about **Christ** and His ministry we must keep **Adam** in mind. This is especially important in **Luke Chapter 4** where the Adversary tempts Yeshua like he tempted **Adam**.²⁶⁷

All we need to know about our relationship with **God** and with each other is summed up in this statement: **Whom I love** (Matthew 3:17b; Luke 3:22b). **God the Father** affirms **God the Son** by saying, “I claim You, I love You, I am proud of You.” How simple! How basic! To belong, to be loved, to be praised! Nothing more is needed with our relationship with **God**, our families and with each other. Each of us has a desperate need to belong. If that need is met, we have the strength of self-identity. We know who we are and no one can take that identity from us. But if our need to belong is not met, we wander as lost and unclaimed souls.²⁶⁸

With You I am well pleased (Matthew 3:17c; Luke 3:22c; also see **Isaiah 42:1; Ephesians 1:6; Colossians 1:13**). **ADONAI** repeated these words about **Christ** on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). **He** will be a king, **He** will be sacrificed willingly, and **He** will suffer. No sacrifice in the TaNaKh, no matter how carefully selected, had ever been truly pleasing to **God**. It was not possible to find an animal that did not have some blemish or

imperfection. Not only that, but **the blood** of those animals was at best only symbolic for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin (Hebrews 10:4).

Three different times in the ministry of **Jesus, God the Father** spoke audibly from heaven. The first time was at His baptism (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22b), the second time was at His transfiguration (Luke 9:35), and the third time was after the triumphal entry and **Jesus** predicted His death (John 12:27-29). So **Jesus** now has the divine conformation of **God the Father** as well as the divine empowerment of **God the Holy Spirit**. Because **Yeshua** is no earthly king, and His is no earthly kingdom, only **God** crowned Him, while **people** watched. Whether or not they also heard **the bat-kol** is not clear. But the Gospel writers seem most concerned that we have heard of **God's** pronouncement.²⁶⁹

Luke alone tells us that **Jesus himself was about thirty years old when He began His ministry (Luke 3:23a)**. If the Lord was born during the reign of Herod (Matthew 2:1-19; Luke 1:5) who died in 4 BC, **Yeshua** would indeed have begun His ministry in His early thirties. There does not seem to be any reference or allusion to David's age when he began his reign, at **thirty years old (Second Samuel 5:4)**, and there is even less likely an allusion to **Genesis 41:46** or **Numbers 4:3**. This was simply a general statement by **Luke**.²⁷⁰

From this point on, the Gospel readers had no excuse for failing to understand the significance of **Yeshua's** ministry, regardless of how long it took them to understand that **He** was **truly the Son of God (Matthew 14:33)**. It would be this crucial revelation of who **Jesus** was that would immediately form the basis of the first testing that **He** would undergo in the wilderness. **If You are the Son of God . . .** And there, as in the account of His baptism, **Jesus' Sonship** will be revealed in His obedience to His Father's will.²⁷¹

Let us re-examine our baptism in light of **Yeshua's** baptism for us. **We were buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:4)**. **We were baptized into Jesus' death**. If we die with Him, we also rise with Him, forgiven and filled with the **Holy Spirit**. Everything has been given to us in **Messiah**. We must only continue, daily, to surrender to **the Lord** and look to the work of **the Spirit** in our lives.