

The Baptism of Jesus: Commentaries by Warren Wierbse

Matthew 3:13-17 (NLT)

13 Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?"

15 But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.[a]" So John agreed to baptize him.

16 After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened[b] and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

(4) His obedience (vv. 13–15). Jesus was not baptized because He was a repentant sinner. Even John tried to stop Jesus, but the Lord knew it was His Father's will. Why was Jesus baptized? First, His baptism gave approval to John's ministry. Second, He identified Himself with publicans and sinners, the very people He came to save. But mainly, His baptism pictured His future baptism on the cross (Matt. 20:22; Luke 12:50) when all the waves and billows of God's judgment would go over Him (Ps. 42:7; Jonah 2:3).

Thus, John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus Christ as the Son of God and also as the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Because of John's witness, many sinners trusted Jesus Christ (John 10:39–42).

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT (3:16)

The coming of the Holy Spirit like a dove identified Jesus to John (John 1:31–34), and also assured Jesus as He began His ministry that the Spirit's ministry would always be His (John 3:34). The dove is a beautiful symbol of the Spirit of God in its purity and in its ministry of peace. The first time we see a dove in Scripture is in Genesis 8:6–11. Noah sent out two birds, a raven and a dove, but only the dove came back. The raven represented the flesh; there was plenty for the raven to eat outside the ark! But the dove would not defile itself on the carcasses, so it came back to the ark. The second time the dove was released, it returned with an olive leaf, a symbol of peace. The third time, the dove did not return.

There may be another picture here. The name Jonah means "dove," and he too experienced a baptism! Jesus used Jonah as a type of Himself in death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 12:38–40). Jonah was sent to the Gentiles, and Jesus would minister to the Gentiles.

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3. THE FATHER (3:17)

On three special occasions, the Father spoke from heaven: at Christ's baptism, at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3), and as Christ approached the cross (John 12:27–30). In the past, God spoke to His Son; today He is speaking *through* His Son (Heb. 1:1–2).

The Father's statement from heaven seems to be an echo of Psalm 2:7—"The Lord hath said unto me, 'Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.'" Acts 13:33 informs us that this "begetting" refers to His resurrection

from the dead and not to His birth at Bethlehem. This statement ties in perfectly with the Lord's baptismal experience of death, burial, and resurrection.

But the Father's statement also relates Jesus Christ to the "Suffering Servant" prophesied in Isaiah 40—53. In Matthew 12:18, Matthew quoted from Isaiah 42:1–3, where the Messiah-Servant is called "My beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased." The Servant described in Isaiah is humble, rejected, made to suffer and die, but is also seen to come forth in victory. While the nation of Israel is seen dimly in some of these "Servant Songs," it is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is revealed most clearly in them. Again, we see the connection with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection.

Finally, the Father's statement approved all that Jesus had done up to that point. His "hidden years in Nazareth" were years of pleasing the Father. Certainly, the Father's commendation was a great encouragement to the Son as He started His ministry.

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Mark 1:9-11 (NLT)

9 One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. 10 As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him[a] like a dove. 11 And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."

The Father and the Holy Spirit are Mark's final witnesses to the identity of God's Servant (vv. 9–11). When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit came on Him as a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven and identified His beloved Son. The people who were there did not hear the voice or see the dove, but Jesus and John did (see John 1:29–34). The word *beloved* not only declares affection, but it also carries the meaning of "the only one." The Father's announcement from heaven reminds us of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.

You will want to note these references in Mark's gospel to Jesus Christ as the Son of God: Mark 1:1, 11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 12:1–11; 13:32; 14:61–62; and 15:39. Mark did not write his book about just any Jewish servant. He wrote his book about the very Son of God who came from heaven to die for the sins of the world.

Yes, Jesus is the Servant—but He is a most unusual Servant. After all, it is the servant who prepares the way for others and announces their arrival. But *others* prepared the way for Jesus and announced that He had come! Even heaven itself took note of Him! This Servant is God the Son.

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Luke 3:21-22 (NLT)

21 One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying, the heavens opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.[a]"

THE FATHER AND THE SPIRIT (3:21–38)

One day, after all the others had been baptized, Jesus presented Himself for baptism at the Jordan, and John at first refused to comply (Matt. 3:13–15). He knew that Jesus of Nazareth was the perfect Son of God who had no need to repent of sin. Why then was the sinless Son of God baptized?

To begin with, in His baptism He identified with the sinners that He came to save. Also, His baptism was the official start of His ministry (Acts 1:21–22; 10:37–38). He was "about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23), and the Jewish Levites began their work at age thirty (see Num. 4:3, 35). But our Lord's words tell us the main reason for His baptism: "for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15 NASB). In what way? In the way pictured by His baptism in the Jordan. Many Bible scholars agree that New Testament baptism was by immersion, which is a picture of death, burial, and resurrection. *Our Lord's baptism in water was a picture of His work of redemption* (Matt. 20:22; Luke 12:50). It was through His baptism of suffering on the cross that God "fulfilled all righteousness." (The "us" in Matthew 3:15 does not mean John and Jesus. It means the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.)

When our Lord came up from the water, the Father spoke from heaven and identified Him as the beloved Son of God, and the Spirit visibly came upon Jesus in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22). Those who deny the Trinity have a difficult time explaining this event.

This is the first of three recorded occasions when the Father spoke from heaven. The second was when Jesus was transfigured (Luke 9:28–36), and the third was during His last week before the cross (John 12:28).

Only Luke mentions that Jesus was praying, and this was only one of many occasions (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28–29; 11:1; 23:34, 46). As the perfect Son of Man, Jesus depended on His Father to meet His needs, and that was why He prayed.

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John 1:29-34 (NLT)

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.' 31 I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel."

32 Then John testified, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. 33 I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' 34 I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.[a]"

4. LAMB OF GOD (1:29-34)

This is the second day of the week that the apostle John recorded, and no doubt some of the same committee members were present to hear John the Baptist's message. This time, he called Jesus "the Lamb of God," a title he would repeat the next day (John 1:35-36). In one sense, the message of the Bible can be summed up in this title. The question in the Old Testament is, "Where is the lamb?" (Gen. 22:7). In the four gospels, the emphasis is "Behold the Lamb of God!" Here He is! After you have trusted Him, you sing with the heavenly choir, "Worthy is the Lamb" (Rev. 5:12).

The people of Israel were familiar with lambs for the sacrifices. At Passover, each family had to have a lamb, and during the year, two lambs a day were sacrificed at the temple altar, plus all the other lambs brought for personal sacrifices. Those lambs were brought by people to people, but here is God's Lamb, given by God to humankind! Those lambs could not take away sin, but the Lamb of God can take away sin. Those lambs were for Israel alone, but this Lamb would shed His blood for the whole world!

What does John's baptism have to do with Jesus as the Lamb of God? It is generally agreed by scholars of all denominations that, in the New Testament, baptism was by immersion. It pictured death, burial, and resurrection. When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, Jesus and John were picturing the "baptism" Jesus would endure *on the cross* when He would die as the sacrificial Lamb of God (Isa. 53:7; Luke 12:50). It would be through death, burial, and resurrection that the Lamb of God would "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

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