

The Baptism of Jesus

Mark, in telling of the baptism of Jesus with the subsequent bestowal of the Holy Spirit and the Father's commendation, in the Gospel for today, assures us that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Nowhere does Scripture prescribe the mode of Baptism - whether by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling. Rather, it concerns itself with what God does for us through Baptism

John the Baptist's activity and proclamation were signs to Jesus that the hour had come for Jesus to enter upon His redemptive work. Thus He left Nazareth and went to John at the Jordan River without being compelled or summoned. He asked John to baptise Him and thus to inaugurate Him into His office

As we know from the gospel of Matthew, the baptism of Jesus presented a problem for John, for Jesus did not need "*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*" (Matthew 1:4; 3:14). Jesus assured John that it was proper for Him to be baptised and for John to perform the baptism "*to fulfill all righteousness*" (Matthew 3:15). It was John's obligation as God's messenger and Jesus' obligation as the Promised One to inaugurate God's plan of salvation. By insisting on being baptised, Jesus deliberately took our place as God the Father had sent Him to do. "*God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Officially the work of redemption began here and was completed on Calvary.

When Jesus stepped on shore after being baptised by John, God Himself gave His sanction and approval to Jesus' action. First of all, the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove. This was not just a vision granted to Jesus but was seen by John and the bystanders, for in John 1:32, John the Baptist testifies he saw the Spirit descend on Jesus. What was the purpose, and why was this necessary?

The purpose we learn in Acts 10:38: "*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.*" With this, God publicly set Him apart for His great task. At the same time, with the Spirit at His side, He was also empowered to carry out that task. This was necessary, for we read in Philippians 2:7-8 that Christ Jesus "*made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!*"

This explains much of His agony in Gethsemane and lets us understand how He was able to overcome though a true human being, our substitute. Here the coming of the Holy Spirit on Him is also the Spirit's designation that this human being is indeed the promised Saviour, the Son of God.

Then came the Father's voice from heaven. The Father clearly identified Jesus as His Son. With the word *love*, He did not express a sentimental attachment but expressed His complete approval of what Jesus was undertaking for the descendants of Adam and Eve. The Father also expressed His complete confidence in Jesus by saying, "*With You I am well pleased.*" He publicly acknowledged He had not made a mistake in assigning this task to Jesus. God thereby also acknowledged that Jesus' previous life - in Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth - had been without fault. He had not become guilty of the mortal error into which Adam and Eve had fallen. Thus Christ's credentials were perfect. We are to know that, even as Jesus Himself was assured of that at His baptism.

Finally, we want to note that God at the baptism of Jesus is clearly revealed as three persons - the Father speaking from heaven, the Son standing on the shore of the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descending from the opened heaven. Neither John the Baptist nor others present raise any questions about that. Though the Old Testament clearly states, "*The Lord our God, the Lord is one*" (Deuteronomy 6:4), it also reveals that there are three persons in the Godhead. Those who reject that teaching of the Old Testament Scripture reject it because they reject Christ. How God is one and at the same time three is not revealed. But the truth is revealed so that we may without hesitation believe that Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer, is God the Son.