The Baptism of Jesus

Illus Have you ever heard of Balthasar Hubmaier? He was born in 1480 AD, near Augsburg, and acquired the degree of Doctor of Divinity, becoming a Priest. He became a believer in Jesus Christ and embraced Protestantism, which was a dangerous thing to do during as the power and might of the Pope’s supreme authority reigned. In 1527, he was arrested and a year later he was put on trial and sentenced to die. What was Balthasar’s crime that earned him this sentence? He taught that baptism was only for the one who had believed in Jesus Christ. In April 1525, Hubmaier followed Jesus Christ in believer’s baptism, and a few days later on Easter day, he baptized over 300 believers.

Would you, Christian brothers and sisters, get baptized if you could be jailed or killed? In countries like Nepal it once meant imprisonment, and for Soviet, Chinese, and Eastern bloc believers, it was akin to signing their own death warrant. In Muslim countries like Pakistan, believer’s baptism is almost always met with death threats.

PP In the early days of the church, “As long as a man gathered with Christians, he was tolerated, but once he submitted to baptism, he declared to all that he belonged to [the church], and immediately he was persecuted, hated, and despised. In baptism...he had burned his bridges behind him.” Mark DeHaan, Our Daily Bread

Christians throughout history have considered it a privilege to follow Christ into the waters. So today, as we prepare for our baptism service this afternoon, let’s look at our Savior’s baptism.

Read Mark 1:9-13

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.” Mark 1:9

Jesus traveled 60 miles south from Nazareth to the Jordan River at Bethany. The Jordan River was 200 miles long if you floated its length. Averages 10 feet deep and at its widest point around 100 feet across. It was in the Jordan that John was baptizing thousands of people and revival was growing. And to see what was driving it, we need to climb into the climate of Israel. They were in subjection to Rome, in bondage to them as they were in Egypt so long before. Picture America being conquered by Iran, and all of our culture, our history, our ideals, slowly being squeezed out of our nation and replaced by middle eastern culture.

Try and imagine this, and gain an appreciation for the misery of Israel, and feel the excitement building that the Messiah was coming onto the scene, maybe, they thought, he was John. John wasn’t the Messiah, he was the forerunner, announcing the imminent arrival of the Messiah. You see, when a king was about to go on a tour or political trip, a forerunner, or courier would be sent out to tell the people to prepare the roads for his trip. John was the forerunner to the King of Kings, Jesus Christ, but the preparation he insisted on was not to repair the roads, but to repair their hearts and lives to receive the king.

And he prepared them, using two methods: preaching and baptism. He preached the same theme in all his sermons: ‘Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand’. The king is coming and He is establishing His kingdom, and if you don’t want to be on the
outside looking in, you must repent
And he baptized them, which was a sign that demonstrated the person’s repentance
Jews didn’t ordinarily baptize, synagogues didn’t have baptismal tanks, and they didn’t organize
summer baptism events
They had purification baths for priests, but they had only one baptism, rarely given, for a Gentile
who wanted to enter into Judaism
He or she would be immersed in water, set apart for spiritual purification, to signify that they
were purified from their former pagan life and entering the clean religion of Judaism
When Jews came to John to be baptized, they were saying, in effect, they were no better in God’s
eyes than a Gentile
That even though they were descendants of Abraham, it wasn’t enough, that it would gain no one
entrance into God’s kingdom, they weren’t ready to receive the king, the Messiah
It was an admission of sinfulness and the need of repentance

John preached “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance”, and what he was saying was that the
first proof of your repentance is your willingness to undergo the same washing that a
Gentile would, a washing of the whole person
You see, the ground is level on the banks of the Jordan, all are in need of God’s forgiveness
Friends, baptism was not able to save any person, rather it was an outward sign of an inward
change of repentance

So here comes Jesus, Who needed no forgiveness, so why did He step into the waters?
Even John was puzzled and tried to talk Jesus out of it: “I need to be baptized by you, and do
you come to me?” Matthew 3:14
Jesus, I believe you are the Messiah and I need to you to baptize me, not the other way around
There is an ancient book called ‘The Gospel According to the Hebrews’ that concluded that Jesus
submitted to baptism in order to please His mother
The Gnostics taught that Jesus was only a man until he was baptized, at which point the Holy
Spirit was infused into Him, and when He cried out, ‘My God, My God, why have You
forsaken Me?’, the Spirit left him to be only a man again
Another heresy arose that said Jesus was adopted by God at His baptism, and many other terribly
flawed reasons have been given for why Jesus submitted to baptized
Still another ancient heresy emerged from outside the Scriptures in The Gospel According to the
Hebrews, stating that His mother and brothers asked him to be baptized, and Jesus said,
“What sin have I committed that I should go and be baptized by him, except perchance
this very thing that I have said in ignorance?” MacArthur

Jesus, the sinless lamb of God, had no sin for which to repent
But it was necessary for righteousness that He would completely associate with sinners and be
placed among guilty humanity
His baptism symbolized what He would fulfill on the cross
He would be fully immersed in the river of death of our sins, and be raised to life out of those
hideous waters, leading the way into the eternal presence of God
He died not for His own salvation, but for ours, not for any guilt He possessed, but for ours
When Jesus died on the cross, God treated Him as if He had lived yours and my life
God punished His Son as if my sin, your sin, was His sin
God treats the believer as if he or she lived Christ’s life, a perfect life in perfect obedience to everything God commanded.

So Jesus, to fulfill all righteousness, to identify with sinners, comes to John to be baptized. And John finally relented: “And when He came up out of the water, immediately He saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove.” — Mark 1:11-12

PP ‘opening’ (Gr. Shizo) means to split, rend, divide with violence. The only other time this word occurs in the NT is when the veil in the temple was ripped from top to bottom at the moment of Christ’s death. And all of a sudden, the Jews who knew their Old Testament, would have remembered Isaiah 64:1, “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down.”

The Father tore apart the sky and the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove. Every Jew knew that a sacrifice of bulls was for the rich, a lamb for the middle class, but most of the people were poor and a poor person’s sacrifice was the dove. The dove is the most gentle of all birds having no talons, a humble bird. It is an extremely loyal bird, mourning over its mate when in distress. And just as the dove in Noah’s day brought him good news that the waters had receded and God’s wrath had abated, the dove of the Holy Spirit was a sign declaring the good news that God was reconciling the world to Himself through Christ.

The Holy Spirit fluttered down upon Jesus and the prophetic words of Isaiah 11:2 were fulfilled, PP “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.”

And then a voice boomed out with a declaration from the Father: “You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.” — Mark 1:11

Abraham was called the friend of God, Ezekiel was called the son of man. Others were called men of God and servants of God. But only Jesus was called the Son of God, and 52 times He is one with the Father, possesses the same nature as the Father and is equal with Him. He is the radiance of the Father’s glory, the exact representation of God’s nature. And all the angels worship Him, and His Father loves him supremely. And here at His baptism, the Father spoke of both His affection for Jesus and His approval: “You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.”

Sometimes, I will lead groups into a time where we take turns to speak blessing into each other. It looks like this: I will often start and throw a tennis ball to a person, and then share with that person one way my life has been blessed by him or her. Very simple, but can be very powerful.

Mark Twain once said he could go for two months on one good compliment. One of the rules however, is that the one speaking cannot speak about that person, but directly to the person.

A good father communicates both affection and approval of his children. Jesus came up out of that water and the sky was violently split open, the Spirit descended and the voice of the Father boomed out His love for and pleasure in His Son.

Friends, a similar event occurred in your life the moment you put your faith in Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God came into your heart and God the Father spoke over you His pleasure.
There is great power to the Christian who truly understands who they are in Christ! And Mark, more than the other gospel writers shows us how important these truths are, for as soon as the Father finishes speaking: “The Spirit immediately drove Him out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And He was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to Him.”

Jesus is baptized, and ‘immediately’ experienced severe testing.

The Spirit drove Him ‘out into the wilderness…being tempted by Satan…He was with the wild animals’

The Jews viewed the wilderness as the anti-Eden, the wild abode of demons and place of danger. It is a metaphor of the world and He was thrust out into it to do battle with its prince, Satan.

The power of His Father’s approval and affection, combined with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit was the preparation Christ needed to endure 40 days of intense difficulty.

Is it possible that Baptism, properly understood and obediently followed, can help strengthen and prepare us to live faithfully to our God?

I believe so!

When the Christian comes up out of that water, her knowledge that she is united to Christ produces a greater confidence that all the blessings of Christ are hers as well.

There is a greater peace and assurance that she belongs to her heavenly Father and that the Spirit of God has sealed her in salvation.

She does not travel through the wilderness of this world alone or in her own power!

She is in good company, united to the Son, rested upon by the Holy Spirit and showered by the love of the Father.

Jesus humbly submitted to baptism, signifying His entire willingness to stand in the place of sinners and suffer and die for them.

Out of those waters, the Holy Spirit anointed Him for ministry, His Father declared His love.

And from His baptism, the Spirit propelled Him into intense suffering on His way to the cross.

At our baptism service, we will be baptizing 15 men, women and children, who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

You will hear in each, a testimony of God’s saving power.

Baptism is, in essence, a joyful funeral!

It is a public declaration that the person I was before is dead and buried, and I now a new person in Christ.

As they are lowered beneath the waters, it is a declaration that their old sin nature has died.

As they are completely brought below the water, they declare the permanency of that burial.

As they are brought back up, they declare they are a new creation in Christ, having the Spirit of God inside them to power them to a new life!
All this, not because of baptism, but because of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection!

And while you will not see a dove fluttering down upon them, know that God is pleased with their obedience through baptism, working powerfully His grace in their lives. And encouraging those who are there to stand as witnesses of the mighty saving work of Christ!

Do you remember how we began with Balthasar Hubmaier, who was willing to die because of his belief in believer’s baptism? On March 10th, 1528, after being tortured on the rack in Vienna, he was burned at the stake. In order to make these executions more interesting, they would often rub gunpowder into the beard and hair of the victims. The fire would ignite the powder when it reached the head to erupt like a human sparkler. As they rubbed it into Balthasar’s hair, he is recorded to have said, “O dear brothers pray God that He will give me patience in this suffering. I will die in the Christian faith.” And as the fire neared his beard, his final words were, “O Jesus, Jesus!” His wife, who was near, shouted encouragement for him to hold steadfast to his faith, and her reward was given three days later as she was thrown into the River Danube with a large stone tied around her neck.

Pray