

Matthew 3:13-17 (NIV)

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

14 But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

15 Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

40-03-04-The Epiphany of Christ’s Baptism

Epiphany, baptism, identity, Trinity, Incarnation, human condition
Mat 3:13-17

To help us live out our divine identity, God reminds us who we are.

INTRODUCTION: (text as Scripture Reading)

–**HOM.idea.** Sometimes He does this through an *epiphany* or *personal revelation*. *Christ’s baptism by John* is a traditional Epiphany passage, because it portrays Christ being manifested to the world. That’s what *epiphany* means: *manifestation*. But I believe this was *also* an epiphany for Jesus, *a manifestation reminding Him of His identity* as God’s Son.

–*Why did Jesus need an epiphany about His divinity?* To answer that, we must grasp the full impact of His Incarnation. *Christ’s divinity never overshadowed His humanity*. In fact, His divine nature was hidden so well in His human nature, that all He knew about His true identity was *what He learned by revelation* from the Holy Spirit. Remember what it says after His episode in the Temple at age twelve– Luke 2:52, And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

–In the Incarnation, God the Son became so human that He had to learn Who He really was from the other Two Members of the Trinity. God became personally intimate with our human need for His reassurance in our lives. For Jesus, part of that divine reassurance came when...

I. His Baptism Fulfilled the Meaning of John’s Baptism

A. Remember what John said about himself– John 1:23, ...in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” and remember his words about the One whose way he prepared– Mat 3:11, “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

B. John the Baptist had turned a common ritual bath, the mikveh, into an act of repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah.

1. In the *mikveh*, people removed all clothes and were immersed in flowing water, to symbolize *being cleansed so thoroughly* that it restored them to the original naked innocence of Adam and Eve.
2. When John recognized Who Jesus was, he knew Jesus didn’t need the mikveh washing of repentance, but in v.15, Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”

- C. Christ's baptism fulfilled the righteousness in this ancient ritual—
Jesus was baptizing baptism itself to bring it to its full meaning:
1. He entered the water a carpenter and left it a Kingdom-Builder.
 2. He changed baptism from merely being a repentant washing to a voluntary death and burial of the old life.
 3. The mikveh bath didn't bless Jesus; He blessed it by sanctifying the baptismal waters with a meaning far beyond that of washing. (After His resurrection, when converts emerged from the water, it was a sign of their new birth into God's Kingdom, even as naked newborns emerge from the womb into a new life.)

TRANS: At this point in His learning process, Jesus may not have fully known what His submission to John's *mikveh* ritual would do. But His obedience fulfilled the mikveh by uniting it to His identity. We 'follow Christ in the waters of baptism' only because His baptism transformed baptism's meaning. It made our baptism a landmark event, to remind us who we are: the born-again people of a new creation in Christ Jesus. It also became a landmark event for Jesus, when...

II. The Other Members of the Trinity Showed up at His Baptism

- A. Some may doubt the importance of baptism, but where else than at this baptism does the NT report a gathering of the Trinity like this?
1. Tradition calls this an epiphany because Jesus was manifested to to the world as the Son of God. But to Jesus, this was a verifying manifestation, reminding Him that everything He'd learned, in His long years of listening prayer, was absolutely true.
 2. So crucial was this affirmation that Jesus passed it on to all of us by prescribing a Trinitarian baptismal formula— Mat 28:19.
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...
- B. The Father and Holy Spirit's arrival at His baptism indicated that Christ's ministry would be a Trinitarian project.
1. When He told Mary He had to be "in my Father's house," a youthful Jesus may have been off on timing, but He wasn't off in knowing His Father's voice. (Now, at His baptism, He was hearing with His physical ears that voice He'd been listening to in His heart.)
 2. He had felt the leading of the Holy Spirit for years, but now there was a visible epiphany, a manifestation of the Holy Spirit's

descent to rest upon Him. (This wasn't just for *encouragement*, but for *empowerment*. Jesus, the God Who became a real man, had the human task of doing all God's work by the same *power of the Holy Spirit* that all who were to follow Him would need for *doing the work of God's Kingdom*.)

TRANS: Jesus didn't *need* John's baptism. *It needed Him!* His baptism turned baptism itself into a launching point for ministry. In my L&D job, I was often asked to *baptize stillborns*. I'd tell parents that it was similar to Christ's baptism. Jesus wasn't repenting. He was beginning His ministry. Baptizing these little ones was an initiation into their heavenly ministry.] Christ's Trinitarian Family attending His baptism was like a rooting rally before an athletic event. Jesus was soon to wrestle with the devil. **God was reminding Him of His identity beforehand**. And because of our faith-bond to Christ...

III. The Father's Words to Christ Are for Us Too!— v.17, *And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

- A. This also reminds us of who we are as God's children. Hear what Jesus says about it in John 14:23, Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (God makes His home only where there's family! If you love Jesus and make a home for Him in your heart, He moves in, and the rest of the Trinitarian Family does too!)
- B. "But what about the 2nd part? Can the Father say about me, 'with him I am well pleased'?" Here's where our responsibility comes in...
1. Like the love of any parent, God's love makes Him vulnerable either to be "well pleased" or to be *hurt* by our behavior.
 - a. His pleasure is described in 3 John 4, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.
 - b. His displeasure is described in Heb 10:38, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."
 2. If we remember who we are, followers of Jesus, we will follow His path of growing "in wisdom... and in favor with God and men."

CONCLUSION:

—As Jesus did, we will face trials and temptations, but in those times, **to help us live out our divine identity, God reminds us who we are**. We're *His children*, whom He loves, and whose faith pleases Him.