

## **The Baptism of Jesus and Our Baptism Matthew 3:13-17**

Let us pray,,,,,"Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as the Scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Silence every voice but your own in us, so we may hear and obey. Amen.

Today we're going to look at an event that made it into all four Gospels - every author of every gospel found this event so inspiring and important that it was included. It narrates the inauguration of Jesus into ministry. It was His coming out party - His grand opening, so to speak. And, it begins the launch sequence of Jesus toward His eventual crucifixion. That makes it really powerful to think about.

It's an unusual story because, depending on what you think about baptism, there doesn't seem to be any reason for Jesus to be baptized. There's a little confusion about baptism. Some people think it's the event that makes one a Christian. I'll ask people if they are Christ Followers and they'll say, "Well, I was baptized when I was seven." Being baptized when you're seven is okay, but Scripture doesn't teach that baptism saves you.

It reminds me of the story about a poor drunken soul, who stumbled upon an old fashioned Baptist baptismal service one Sunday afternoon down by the river. It was way down south, back in the day, and this person staggered right down into the water and stood next to the Preacher. The minister turned and noticed the old drunk and said, "Friend, Are you ready to find Jesus?"

The inebriated person looked back and said, "Yes, Preacher. I sure am." The minister then dunked the stranger under the water and pulled them right back up.

"Have you found Jesus?" the preacher asked. "No, I haven't!" said the drunk. The preacher then dunked again, and held them under for a bit longer, brought the straggler up and said, "Now, good friend, have you found Jesus?" "No, I haven't Preacher." The preacher in disgust jammed the gasping soul back under the water, and held them under for at least 30 seconds this time, brought them out of the water and said in a harsh tone, "Friend, are you sure you haven't found Jesus yet?" The old drunk wiped their eyes gasping for breath and said to the preacher, ..."Naw preacher, are you sure this is where he fell in?"

Baptism isn't where you find Jesus; it's what you do once you've found him. But that doesn't answer the question, "Why would Jesus seek to be baptized by John?" I think it's important that we realize John didn't just come up with this baptism idea on his own. It wasn't as if John was preaching one day and said, "Hey, let's go into the water and I'm gonna dunk some of you guys. It'll be fun!"

There's a story behind this story.

We have two key players here: Jesus and his cousin, John the Baptist. John's ministry was to prepare the way for the Messiah. His message was simple and straight forward: "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" (Matthew 3:2). When people repented, he baptized them. The Jewish people were looking for a *deliverer* to make things right in their country.

They were a people whose land was occupied by an oppressive foreign Roman government, and they longed for freedom. But it was more than that. It was a people whose relationship with God had grown cold.

God had chosen the Israelites forefather Abraham, to be the patriarch of His people hundreds of years before. Like many relationships, it started out strongly but through the years complacency set in. Familiarity breeds contempt, they say. Israel started taking God for granted, and God won't tolerate that for long in relationship with us.

I read a true story once about a businessman who good-naturedly started a conversation with a young man who crowded into the airplane seat next to him. "Are you traveling on business or pleasure?" the businessman asked. "Pleasure," the young man replied. "I'm on my honeymoon."

"Your honeymoon?" the businessman asked, mystified. "Where's your wife?" "Oh, she's a few rows back. The plane was full, so we couldn't get seats together." The plane hadn't started rolling yet, so the businessman said, "I'd be happy to change seats with her so that the two of you can be together." "That's okay," the young man replied. "I've been with her all week." Familiarity breeds contempt . . . and, you all know what happened in this case, the young groom would be now, sleeping on the couch.

His new bride would not put up with that attitude, nor does God with us.

A brief history of God's relationship with Israel: God blesses and Israel enjoys, Israel becomes lazy, takes God for granted, and they turn their back on Him. God gets Israel's attention through tragedy.

The Israelites repent and relationships are restored. And then the cycle begins anew. John the Baptist comes along during a down cycle of Israel's relationship with God. They had become flippant, taken God for granted and, again, turned their back on Him, and God had allowed them to experience discomfort in order to get their attention. (Honestly, He does that with us sometimes too.)

And because God had always provided a **deliverer** in the past, people like Moses and David, there was great anticipating for the next manifestation of **deliverer**. John, as the preparer of the way, says what has to be said, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" It makes perfect sense, doesn't it? The people had to turn their hearts back on God in order to experience deliverance. This occupation by an 'outside force' is the method God is using to get their attention. And John uniquely adapts a common practice of his day to teach his people about humility, commitment and identification.

Judaism was very popular during the times when God was blessing. Other nations and other people took note. They wanted their piece of this 'blessing pie' as well, so, occasionally, Gentiles petitioned to become Jews. It's just human nature - most of us want to identify with a winner. It's like when a sports team does really well, it's amazing how many people start wearing their gear. You see Blue Jays caps in NY

- though there's nobody from New York that has ever been to Canada. But the Blue Jays win and people buy their stuff.

That's why I truly appreciate the Toronto Maple Leafs fans - they are the real deal. When I see someone wearing a Leafs hat or jersey I know they are dedicated.

It's not as if the Buds have given you anything to be proud of in the past ten or fifteen years, but the fans are diehards, and I commend and respect that.

Here are a couple smiles for you diehard Leaf fans for your next gathering...Question: What do the Toronto Maple Leafs and opossums have in common? Answer: Both play dead at home and get killed on the road. Question: What do you call a Maple Leaf player with a Stanley Cup ring? Answer: A thief.

The Gentiles who wanted to become Jews were called **proselytes**. In the simplest sense, that means convert. In our context, a **proselyte** is a Gentile becoming Jewish. You will hear this word a few times in this message this morning. For a Gentile to become a full fledged Jewish person (and any Gentile could do this) there was a three-step process that had to be completed.

The first was to offer a sacrifice. A heifer or a pair of turtledoves were brought to the priest and given as a burnt offering to God. Obviously there was an expense involved and the lifeblood of the animal was spilled. It's all sort of gruesome really. The next was circumcision. For a Jewish boy, this was done when he was 8 days old, thus the pain wasn't remembered. But an adult male, who wanted to become a Jewish **proselyte**, had to undergo this procedure, regardless of his age.

I would think this would've prevented anyone from jumping into this religion without a great deal of thoughtful consideration.

Men certainly didn't "impulse buy" Judaism. They didn't see a magazine at the checkout line of their local bazaar or market with the headline, "Is it Time for Your Extreme Jewish Makeover" and think, "Hey, that sounds like something I should get right in on." I would suspect this element of the process left more than a few men out - the cost was a bit too much.

Circumcision was unique to the Jewish people. It was their distinguishing, permanent, irreversible, identifying mark on their body that designated them as the only people on earth who were in covenant relationship with God.

Finally, after the circumcision wound had healed, the **proselyte** went through the final step of baptism. The person stripped off all of their clothes. They then went into the water, and dipped themselves under the water making sure to fully immerse their entire body, being careful that not one bit of flesh remained dry.

When males were baptized, the priest was present. When females were baptized, they were only attended by other females; no rabbis were present. Can you imagine the level of humility that would take? Becoming a member of the Jewish faith wasn't a walk in the park - it was something one did with exceptional contemplation.

Once this process had been completed, the **proselyte** was now considered Jewish in every way. They had fully renounced their previous life, their previous nationality, their previous allegiances; he or she was fully Jewish, physically and spiritually. Their identity completely changed.

This wasn't just an "add on" to your life. You didn't add Jewishness to your old identity. God didn't become just another among many gods in your life. In a sense, the Gentile died when they went under the water and a new person with a new name, and a new identity was born when he or she came out of the water. John adopts this **proselyte's** baptism and morphs it into a baptism of repentance. **Matthew 3:5-6**, Then [people from] Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were flocking to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.

Remember now these are Jews. John's task wasn't to get people into Judaism; it was to get God's people to realize their sin and turn back to God - to turn from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. This baptism was a moment of humility, commitment and identification; it was the time a person could look to and say, "That's when I did it; I made my commitment public that day."

We have those sorts of ceremonies today: graduation is kind of a stepping into adulthood event in the lives of young people. A wedding ceremony is a public declaration that some-thing in your life has changed.

It's like the preacher's wife who asked her husband how the wedding had gone. The preacher said, "Well, it was going great until I got to the part where I ask the bride if she was willing to obey her husband. She said, 'Do you think I'm nuts' and the groom said, 'I do' and it all really went downhill fast from there."

That bit of tongue in cheek humour is a nice lead-in to the answer of why Jesus was baptized; His was a baptism of humility. If you'll recall, amidst the many objections from John the Baptist, Jesus explains why He has come for baptism. **Matthew 3:15**, Jesus answered him, "Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him [to be baptized]. Jesus humbles Himself to do what God asks - it's obedience to God. Jesus does this because God requires it. He lived a life of complete obedience to God - that's why we can say about Jesus, and no other person who ever lived, that He was sinless. I can't say that, and you can't say that; only Jesus can.

Obedience to God is all God's ever asked for. Back when God was getting this whole thing started, He had a conversation with Abraham where He said, (**Genesis 17:1-2**). "I am God Almighty. Live in My presence and be devout. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you greatly"

Remember I said that the nation of Israel got in trouble when they, "became complacent, took God for granted and turned their backs on Him?" What is that descriptive of - disobedience right?

Baptism was another in a series of acts of humility and obedience on the part of Jesus. It began with his coming to earth as a helpless infant baby boy; it ended with His crucifixion, and in between Jesus obeyed His Father.

One of the most powerful expressions of this is found in Philippians 2:6-8. Speaking of Jesus it says, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as some-thing to be used for His own advantage.

Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death -- even to death on a cross.

Have you ever been put in a position to do something, and you've thought, at least to your-self, "That's a little beneath me"? I said it about changing diapers when we first started having kids . . . unfortunately Donna didn't think it was beneath me.

This was also a baptism of commitment. This launched Jesus' ministry that would eventually lead to the cross. He knew where this thing was headed. For three and a half years, Jesus did His thing and it ended with crucifixion. This inauguration began that process. It was a commitment to God's plan and to you and to me. Finally, Jesus' was a baptism of identification: he affirmed John's ministry and identity with the people He'd come to save.

I remember taking our daughter Kate to the doctor once - she wasn't feeling up to snuff and the doctor diagnosed that she needed a shot to make her better. I remember her looking at me with those big beautiful eyes and saying, "Daddy, is it going to hurt?" I thought to myself, "You can bet your boots it's gonna hurt.

You're gonna come outta here crying like a stuck pig!" But I said, "No Sweetie, there's nothing to it." And I asked the doctor to give me a shot first to show her that it wasn't too bad. I put myself in her shoes to show her the way.

You do see my point.

Jesus took this step of obedience to show us the way - to identify with those of us who do need to repent and turn back. Humility, commitment, and identification: that's really what baptism is all about. But what does that mean for me and you?

I love catchy , well thought out advertisements. Many of us can't wait for Super Bowl Sunday every year, because they always have new innovative ones. People won't eat or drink anything while the Super Bowl is on because they don't want to have to leave the room while the commercials are on. However, with all this advertising, and estimates are that we may view as many as 3,000 in a day, we've naturally developed a consumers mentality. Our attitude becomes, "What can this do for me?" Even about spiritual things. What can church do for me? What can Jesus do for me?

In author Dennis Waitley's book, Empires of the Mind, he reports that although there are approximately 450,000 words in the English language, around 80 percent of our conversations use only about 400 words. It probably comes as no surprise that the most common words in the English language are. . . "I," "Me," "My," and "Mine." There's little question this is the "Me" generation.

But there's so much more to following Jesus! There are incredible benefits to following Jesus: - - unreserved acceptance, limitless love, God's unmerited favor - grace, forgiveness for all our sins, and purpose in life. Those are powerful benefits to following the Lord. It pays to follow Christ. But following Christ is more than benefits; it also entails responsibility.

The "more" of Christianity, has to do with humility, commitment, and identification. The **proselyte's** baptism was about humility, commitment and identification. Jesus' baptism was about humility, commitment and identification. And the baptisms that Caleb performs today are about humility, commitment and identification. It's humbling have the water in the Font, displayed in front of everybody. It's an act of humble obedience to Jesus. He once said, **Matthew 28:19-20** "Go, there-fore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

It's also an act of commitment and identification. When you're baptized and people see you, the expectation level goes way up. People will expect you to walk the walk and talk the talk. You're identified with Christ, and just like He was baptized to identify with us, we're baptized to identify with Him. He was buried and rose again, and guess what? We get 'buried', so to speak from the consecrated water from the baptismal font, and then we rise again .

Do you remember what happened when Jesus came out of the water? **Matthew 3:16-18**, 'After Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on Him. And there came a voice from heaven: This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him! Humble obedience and commitment to God and identification with God always lead to His affirmation . . . Always.

Thanks be to God, AMEN