

Matthew 3:13-17

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Jesus arrives from Galilee in order to be baptized by John. John recognizes Jesus as the Messiah and baptizes Him. As soon as Jesus comes up from the water, God's Spirit descends as a dove and lands on Him. A voice from Heaven announces that Jesus is the Son of God.

The parallel accounts of this event are found in Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-23.

Matthew's narrative introduction of *Jesus* the Messiah, the son of David and heir to the throne (2 Samuel 7:13), reaches a climax with the arrival of *Jesus* the Messiah. He tells us that *Jesus* arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John (the Baptizer.) Matthew has already explained how *Jesus* came to hail from Galilee (2:22-23). John (the Gospel writer) tells us that this event of Jesus' baptism took place the next day (John 1:29). Unlike those who had come from Jerusalem, Judea, and the district around the Jordan to be baptized by John, *Jesus* was from about a hundred miles (roughly a five-day journey) to the north in region around the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus's baptism *at the Jordan* has two allusions to Old Testament figures. The first is Moses, the giver of the Old Law. Moses ended his ministry *at the Jordan* River. Jesus, the fulfiller of the Old Law and Giver of the New Law, begins His ministry *at the Jordan* River.

The second Old Testament allusion is Moses's successor, Joshua. Joshua led the children of Israel across *the Jordan* and into the Promised Land. The names *Jesus* and Joshua in Hebrew (and Greek) are the same. In Hebrew their names are Yeshua, which means "YAHWEH saves." The first public actions of their ministry for both *Jesus* and Joshua occur *at the Jordan* River and both these acts are sealed with divine signs or miracles (Joshua 3).

The Greek name Ἰησοῦς (G2424) can be translated as either Jesus or Joshua. It is a transliteration of the Hebrew, names: "Yehoshua" and "Yeshua". The name for Joshua in Hebrew is יהושוע, (H3091 – pronounced: "Yeh-hoe-shoo-ah"). Jesus's name in Hebrew is ישוע. (H3442 – pronounced: "YEH-shoo-ah").

Yeshua (H3442) is an abbreviated form (with some possible Aramaic influence) of Yehoshua (H3091). Both names mean "YAHWEH saves". All this to say the name Jesus and Joshua are one and the same. But in Jesus's day (and post Babylonian exile) it was abbreviated from "Yehoshua" (H3091) to "Yeshua" (H3442).

Jesus is both the second Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-16) as well as the second Yeshua. Moses gave the law, Jesus will fulfill the law and restate it in spiritual terms, to be written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-33). Joshua led Israel to conquer the land. Jesus will come again to conquer the land (Revelation 19:11-19).

Jesus was also the second Adam ([Romans 5:12-21](#) and [1 Corinthians 15:44-49](#)). By succumbing to the temptation of the enemy, Adam caused sin to enter into the world, and could no longer completely fulfill his God-given role. *Jesus*, as Messiah, resisted temptation and will completely fulfill His God-given role as Savior of the world.

John is taken aback by His cousin's request. John's reception of *Jesus* completely contrasts his earlier rebuke of the *Pharisees and Sadducees*. Instead of shaming *Jesus*, John appears to be ashamed. *But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"* John's response is in keeping with what he earlier said about his own unworthiness in comparison to the Messiah.

In His response, *Jesus* gently acknowledges John's reservations and his *need to be baptized by Jesus*. The Messiah tells his baptizer, *Permit it at this time*, also explaining that *in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*.

It is interesting to note that John 1:33 indicates that John did not know prior to baptizing *Jesus* that He was the Messiah. God had told John He would know the Messiah when he saw the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him. That did not occur until *Jesus* came up from being baptized. That means that John's question to his cousin, *"I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"* was based on his personal knowledge of *Jesus*' righteous walk. John knew that *Jesus* did not need to repent of anything.

What could *Jesus* be referring to when He stated *in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*? It seems clear *Jesus* did not need to be baptized as a symbol to demonstrate repentance for His sins. So why did He need to be baptized?

It is important to note that *Jesus* said *us*. John has a role to play, as does *Jesus*. The baptism has a specific purpose, to *fulfill all righteousness*. The word translated *righteousness* is the Greek word "dikaiosune" (G1343). It can also be translated "justice." The idea is that everything is working as it is supposed to be. The Apostle Paul likened "dikaiosune" to a human body, where all parts are working together according to the design of each part (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:12-31). The Greek philosopher Plato similarly described "dikaiosune" as all persons in a city state doing what they do best for the benefit of the whole.

It seems *Jesus* is saying to John, "We need to do this together because this is each of us playing our proper role, the role God gave us." To John's credit, he consents, even though at that point it was apparently not clear to him how baptizing his righteous cousin would be *fulfilling all righteousness*, when he has up to this point been baptizing repentant people.

How did *Jesus*'s baptism by *John* fulfill their respective roles? John was the forerunner of *Jesus*. The primary role assigned to him was to prepare the way for *Jesus*. This baptism serves as a special anointment before the Messiah King proclaims His Kingdom. In this regard, *Jesus* is like Jesse's son, David, who is anointed as king by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-13). In this case, *John the Baptist* is the prophet. Rather than anointing *Jesus* with oil, which would be a sign that He was being appointed king, *Jesus* is baptized. This might be an indication that *Jesus*' initial ministry will have a spiritual rather than earthly focus.

It is also possible that God intended to demonstrate that Jesus was intended to serve as an example. If the subjects of the Kingdom are asked to be baptized in preparation of the Kingdom of Heaven, it would also be fitting for the King to prepare in similar fashion. This aligns with what Hebrews says of the Messiah's priestly role:

"He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17).

After hearing Jesus's response, John *permitted* Jesus to approach and be baptized. But *after being baptized*, something miraculous occurs as *Jesus came up from the water*. Matthew draws special attention to this fact with the words *and behold*, as if telling the reader "And pay close attention to what happens next." *The heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."* *The heavens were opened* could mean it suddenly started to rain, or it could mean that the skies began to supernaturally reveal a glimpse into Heaven itself. Whatever occurred, it was a sign that something special had just taken place. However, this was not the only sign.

And he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him. This is the second reference to the third member of the Holy Trinity in this chapter. Matthew tells us that John saw the *Spirit of God* descend and land upon Jesus in the form of a dove. Doves in the Bible symbolize peace. It was a dove that returned to Noah with an olive branch after God's wrath destroyed the earth in flood (Genesis 8:8-12). The landing of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove showed God's approval of the work that Jesus was about to undertake. It is not clear whether or not this dove, or God's presence, was visible to everyone. But it is clear it was visible to John. The Gospel writer John records that John the Baptist said,

"I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:32b-34).

It is at this point that John knows Jesus is the promised Messiah, when he sees the sign. John already knew Jesus as his cousin. He knew Jesus lived well, as evidenced by him telling Jesus he needed to be baptized by Jesus, not the other way around. But he did not know his cousin was the Messiah. We have no indication that John even suspected Jesus was the promised Messiah. So far Matthew has explained how Jesus was the heir to the throne, although that was held in obscurity. He fulfilled the prophecy to be born in Bethlehem of a virgin, come out of Egypt, yet be raised in Galilee. Now the veil begins to lift, and Jesus' identity begins to be revealed. The prophet John the Baptizer is witness to Jesus' office as the kingly Messiah, the promised one of Israel.

Matthew further grabs the readers attention with a second *and behold* this time to tell us that *a voice out of the heavens* began to speak. This is what the *voice* said, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" The *voice* is God the Father. The Bible does not make it clear who

exactly heard the *voice*, whether it was everyone or only Jesus and John. Mark and Luke's accounts say that the *voice* spoke directly to Jesus saying "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased" (Mark 1:11b; Luke 3:22b). Matthew and John indicate that at least John the Baptist heard it as well, but it used *This is* (the third person singular pronoun) referring to Jesus. Others may or may not have heard this voice. It is possible that one voice spoke and Jesus heard it speaking **to** Himself even as John (and others) heard it speaking **about** Jesus.

What is clear is that all four Gospel writers verify that something was said, which affirmed that Jesus was God's Son.

It is worthwhile to note that God was *well pleased* with His *son* for the thirty or so years He has lived to this point. Jesus has done no "full-time ministry" we are told about before now. Jesus has been a son to Mary and Joseph, a "tekton" (G5045) or craftsman, likely working with his adoptive father, and a member of the community. After Luke describes how Jesus amazed the scribes as a boy (probably around 12 years old) he tells us that Jesus "... kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). The fact that Jesus was living daily life consistent with the principles of God and in obedience to His commands caused God to say He was *well pleased*. This is consistent with Biblical admonitions to do all we do as "unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:23-24).

Jesus' baptism marks one of the few places in the Scriptures, that explicitly makes mention of all Three Persons of the Godhead all at once. Here are some others:

- Genesis 1 mentions God the Father, the Spirit, and the spoken Word.
- On the night He was betrayed, Jesus tells disciples about the Helper—the Holy Spirit who will come after Him (John 14), before praying to His Father a short while later (John 15).
- Also, in some translations 1 John 5:7 says: "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one." (NKJV)

The Trinity's appearance at Jesus's baptism is a significant event, not only making it clear that Jesus is God, but also inaugurating the life and ministry of *Jesus*. Matthew uses this moment to place a divine seal upon Jesus and underscore his Gospel's central theme: "*Jesus* is the Divine Messiah who has come to proclaim His Kingdom."

Biblical Text

¹³ Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan *coming* to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. ¹⁶ After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him, ¹⁷ and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."