

# Mark 1:9-11

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*Jesus arrives from Galilee to be baptized; the Holy Spirit descends on Him and the Father approves. The Spirit's descent is visible evidence that Jesus was equipped to fulfill His role to baptize with the Holy Spirit. Having all three Persons of the Godhead present underscores the significance of this commissioning event.*

The parallel gospel accounts for this passage are Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34.

Mark matter-of-factly reports: *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* Unlike those who had come from Jerusalem, Judea, and the district around *the Jordan* to be baptized by John, Jesus came down from the city of Nazareth in a region around the Sea of Galilee about a hundred miles to the north (roughly a five-day journey).

*Jesus's baptism at the Jordan* alludes to two 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 to Moses's successor, Joshua. Joshua led the children of Israel across *the Jordan* and into the Promised Land. What strengthens this allusion is the fact that the names *Jesus* and Joshua are the same in both Hebrew and Greek.

The Greek name Ἰησοῦς (G2424, pronounced "ee-ay-sooce") 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 יהושע, (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).

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).

*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.

A common question that arises in the mind of Gospel readers is, why did *Jesus* need to be baptized?

In Matthew's Gospel, *John* too seems to be asking something similar: "But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" (Matthew 3:14). *John's* baptism was "of repentance for forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). But *Jesus* was without sin (1 John 3:5).

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*" (Matthew 3:15).

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.

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, δικαιοσύνη (G1343—pronounced: "di-kai-oh-see-ni"). It can also be translated "justice." The idea is that everything is working as it is supposed to be. The Apostle Paul likened "*dikaioúnē*" 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 "*dikaioúnē*" as all persons in a city-state doing what they do best for the benefit of the whole.

To learn more about righteousness and *dikaioúnē* see [The Bible Says article, "What is Righteousness?"](#)

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."

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's* 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)

It is also 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 (John 1:33). That did not occur until *immediately* after *Jesus* came up out of the water after 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?” (Matthew 3:14) was based on his personal knowledge of *Jesus*’s righteous walk. *John* knew that *Jesus* did not need to repent of anything—but he did not yet know *He* was the Messiah until he *baptized Him*.

But, as *John* was baptizing *Jesus*, something miraculous occurs.

*Immediately*, as *Jesus* was coming up out of the water...the heavens opened.

Mark draws special attention to this fact with the word: *Immediately*, to emphasize the rapidity of the heavenly response. This word is one of Mark’s signatures. It is a translation of the Greek term εὐθύς (G2117 – pronounced “yoo-thoos”). This word appears over forty times in Mark to express the suddenness or immediacy of an action. Typical of Mark’s story-telling style, “*ethus*” keeps the action of his narrative moving quickly.

*Immediately*, (i.e. at the same time) as *Jesus* was coming out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

*The heavens* opening 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.

The Holy Spirit arrives, *like a dove, descending upon Jesus*. This is the second reference to the third member of the Holy Trinity in this chapter. Mark tells us that *John* saw *the Spirit* 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 the 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 Baptizer 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. Even before either *John* or *Jesus* were born, *John* knew there was something special about *Jesus*. After all, *John* leapt in-utero in proximity to the in-utero *Jesus* (Luke 1:41). But he did not know his cousin was the Messiah. We have no indication that *John* even suspected *Jesus* was the promised Messiah. Now the veil begins to lift, and *Jesus*'s identity begins to be revealed. The prophet *John* the Baptizer is witness to *Jesus*'s office as the kingly Messiah, the promised one of Israel.

Previously, *John* the Baptizer declared: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8). The descent of *the Spirit* when *Jesus* was *baptized* is visible evidence that *Jesus* is fully equipped to fulfill His declared role of baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

Mark reports that the final sign of *Jesus*'s baptism was *a voice* which *came out of the heavens*.

This is what the *voice* said, "*You are My beloved Son, in You 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*" (Luke 3:22b). Matthew and John indicate that at least *John* the Baptizer heard it as well, but Matthew's account 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, affirming 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" that we are told about before now. *Jesus* has been a son to Mary and Joseph, a craftsman—the Greek word used is "τέκτων" (G5045 – pronounced: "ték-ton")—likely working with his adoptive father, and a member of the community. After Luke describes how *Jesus* amazed the scribes as a boy (traditionally estimated to be 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" (1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 6:7; Colossians 3:23-24).

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

- Genesis 1 mentions God the Father, the Spirit, and the spoken Word.
- On the night He was betrayed, *Jesus* tells the disciples about the Helper—the Holy Spirit whom The Father will send (John 14:26).
- In Matthew 12:28, *Jesus* is speaking and refers to the other two Persons of the Godhead, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

- 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).
- In Acts 2:33, the author tells us, “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.”
- And in Galatians 4:6, the Apostle Paul refers to all three Persons of the Godhead, “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”
- Another is Ephesians 1:17 where, again, the Apostle Paul invokes all three in a blessing saying, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”

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*. Mark uses this moment to place a divine seal upon *Jesus* and underscore his Gospel’s central theme: “*Jesus* is the Divine Savior of the world.”

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; <sup>11</sup> and a voice came out of the heavens: “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”**