

## Jesus' Baptism Matthew 3:11-17

Today is the second Sunday in Advent. During Advent we prepare to celebrate Jesus' coming into the world as a baby. As well, Advent has another sense in which we look forward to His second coming at the end of time. This morning as we continue our Advent series we are looking at the second of four episodes from the life of Jesus between His birth and the inauguration of his public ministry. As Steve mentioned last week, each of these events reveal something significant about Jesus. They teach us on how we should think about him and relate to Him. They teach us what we should expect from Him.

Today, we are looking at the account of Jesus' baptism found in Matthew 3. There are things revealed in this episode that helps us more deeply appreciate why He came to earth. There are things revealed in this episode that can help us worship Him in ways that are appropriate in light of who He is.

And so let's look at this passage. We are going to start in Matthew 3:11 where John the Baptist speaks of the Coming One.

### I. John Speaks of the Coming One (3:11-12)

John says this:

*<sup>11</sup> "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."*

John compares who he is and the nature of his ministry with the One who is coming and that nature of that One's ministry. John says that his ministry was one of calling for repentance. He baptized with water for repentance. Earlier in Matthew 3:1-2 it said that John was

*<sup>1</sup> . . . preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

His was a ministry of preparation, but the ministry of the One who was coming would be a ministry of fulfillment. The One who was coming would baptize *with the Holy Spirit and fire*. The Messiah would usher in the Messianic Age; the age of the Spirit.

John also says of the One who is coming, *He . . . is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals*. John was powerful preacher. He was having a significant impact on Jerusalem and Judea all those who were going out to hear him. And yet he understood that the One who was coming would be greater than he was. He would be the One who would bring eschatological judgment. That's what John speaks of in verse 12.

<sup>12</sup> *“His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*

John uses an image that would have been a familiar sight - a farmer taking a winnowing fork and throwing grain and chaff up into the air on a windy day. The heavier grain would fall to the ground while the chaff was blown to the side. The coming Messiah, John says, will gather in His followers, but for those who reject Him, they will be burned *with unquenchable fire*. This is a reference to judgment at the end times (Is. 34:10; 66:24; Jer. 7:20). This is why John's call for repentance is so important.

And so John proclaims these truths about the One who was coming. He would be greater than John. He would bring a baptism of fulfillment that would usher in the Messianic age, the age of Spirit. He would be One who brings judgment. And as we come to verse 13, this One of whom John speaks shows up on the scene. Jesus comes to John in order that He might do the Father's will.

## **II. Jesus Does the Father's Will (3:13-15)**

<sup>13</sup> *Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?”*

Jesus' purpose is clear. He comes to John for the purpose of being *baptized by him*. But as John considers this he is completely unsure. In fact he tries to prevent it. From his perspective what really needs to happen is that he needs to be baptized by Jesus.

At this point we don't know for sure if John recognized Jesus as the Messiah or not. Some commentators believe that John did know at this point that Jesus was the Messiah and that is why he tries to prevent the baptism. Others believe that John only knew of his cousin's miraculous birth and His great wisdom regarding the Scriptures that He had even as a child (last week's sermon), but that he didn't yet know that Jesus was actually the Messiah. Regardless, his hesitation is rooted in the fact that John sees nothing in Jesus' life of which He needs to repent. And so he seeks to prevent the baptism.

Verse 15:

<sup>15</sup> *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.*

In response to John's hesitation to baptize him, Jesus says, *Permit it at this time*. It's firm a command to John. Jesus understands that now, *at this time* in salvation history, His Father is calling him to take this step to be baptized. He is not coming to be baptized because he is a sinner in need of repentance, but rather He is coming to be baptized because He understands that now is the time that He is to take up his role as the Suffering Servant. In undergoing John's baptism, Jesus will fully identify with His peo-

ple and He will take up this role as the Messiah.

In doing this, Jesus says that it will *fulfill all righteousness*. *Righteousness* can refer to the moral goodness that is demanded by God. But it also can have the sense of doing what God wants – following His will. That is how we should understand this. This action of being baptized by John is not fulfilling some moral requirement, but rather in doing this Jesus is follow God's will. He understands that as God is working out His salvation plan that this is the time for Him to be baptized and receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit, which will initiate his ministry as the Messiah.

It is interesting that Jesus says that *it is fitting for [US]* to do this. He doesn't just say it is fitting for ME to do this. John had a part to play and Jesus had a part to play in doing what was proper according to God's will.

This is just kind of an aside, but I think this is a great way to think about our lives with God. As we seek to do God's will, we are never alone in it. We are never left to our own resources and abilities and wisdom. God never says, "You go do this by yourself." Jesus is always with us. It is a promise that Jesus makes at the end of Matthew when he says that he will be with us even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Too often we can feel like it is up to us, but the Christian life is meant to be one in which we seek to do the Father's will in partnership with Jesus who lives within the believer.

Ultimately, we are told that John *permitted Him* to be baptized. John joined in with Jesus to do the Father's will. And in doing so John's ministry of preparation was brought to fulfillment and Jesus' ministry was initiated.

Jesus does the Father's will. He is baptized. And immediately following his baptism . . .

### **III. Jesus is Anointed and Affirmed (3:16-17)**

We're not really told anything about the baptism other than John permitted it. What is emphasized is what happens afterwards because that is what is important. Verse 16:

*<sup>16</sup> 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, <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."*

After Jesus is baptized we are told that immediately he comes up out of the water and *the heavens were opened*. This is an expression that points to revelation (e.g. Ezek. 1:1; Act. 7:56). In this revelation there was something seen and something heard. What Jesus saw was *the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on him*. He is anointed by the Spirit. Now, we should not think that this is the first time that Jesus had any interaction with the Spirit. He had not lived thirty years independent of the Spirit. The anointing of the Spirit here is a kind of commissioning for His ministry.

What was heard was *a voice out of heaven*. God speaks and He says, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”* God affirms that Jesus is the Son of God. The fact that it is in the third person suggests that in addition to Jesus, John and others may have heard this utterance.

What was seen and what was heard in this revelation is very significant. There are clear connections to passages in the Old Testament Messianic passages. When God declares that the One just baptized is His beloved Son, there is a clear connection to Psalm 2:7, which says:

*<sup>7</sup> “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:  
He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.*

Psalm 2 is all about God’s promise that through the Davidic line, He would establish His universal rule over all the earth. It was a psalm that called God’s people to look to Him in trust that one day He would bring about an era in which their enemies would put down as God’s anointed king reigns (VanGemenen, 64). These words of affirmation that the Father declares over Jesus indicate that Jesus is the one of whom Psalm 2 speaks.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit at His baptism also identifies Jesus as the One of whom Isaiah 42:1 speaks. That passage says:

*<sup>1</sup> “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;  
My chosen one in whom My soul delights.  
I have put My Spirit upon Him;  
He will bring forth justice to the nations.*

Isaiah 42 is found in section of Isaiah that speaks about the Suffering Servant – the One who would come and who would suffer and die on behalf of sinful humans. When the Spirit descends upon Jesus after His baptism it is a fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1. God is identifying Jesus as the promised Servant spoken of by Isaiah.

By being baptized, Jesus is affirming His willingness to take up this ministry as the Suffering Servant. And through the revelation that follows His baptism, God marks this as the formal beginning of Jesus’ public ministry as He anoints Jesus with the Spirit and affirms that He is the Son of God.

This week as I reflected on this passage I was drawn to consider it from John’s vantage point. From John’s vantage point, there are at least a couple of insights that we can make. First, **God’s will is sometimes counterintuitive to us**. Before Jesus comes to John, John describes the Messiah, and rightly so, as One who would be mighty. He would be One who would come and baptize with the Spirit and with fire. His ministry would be with power. He would be involved in the judgment at the end times.

John’s view of the Messiah is one of greatness and power and so when Jesus comes in

a humble way to be baptized by him, this was counterintuitive to John. It didn't make sense to him. From his perspective what made sense was that Jesus should baptize him. But that was not God's will. God's will was that the Messiah's ministry would be initiated by Jesus humbly submitting to John's baptism that he might fully identify with the people He came to save.

God's will is sometimes counterintuitive to us as well isn't it? Let me give you a few examples. We so often want to protect our lives and hold on to it thinking that that is what is going to give us what our hearts long for. But Jesus said:

<sup>35</sup> *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it (Mark 8:35).*

That's counterintuitive. You've got to lose your life to save it? But it's true; we find life when we give up our lives for God's sake and the gospel. That's when we really live. That's when we really find what our heart in the deepest place longs for.

Here's another one. So often we tend to think that the way to a really good life is to promote ourselves and exalt ourselves. We can tend to think that we need to think of ourselves first. But Jesus said:

<sup>11</sup> *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).*

Jesus also said:

<sup>26</sup> *"It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, <sup>27</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave (Matthew 20:26–27).*

Greatness comes through descent into servanthood? Greatness comes from humility? That's counterintuitive. But it's true.

Let me give you one more example. When it comes to enemies, we so often want to get even. We want to find a way to get revenge. And yet Jesus said:

<sup>43</sup> *"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup>"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:43–44).*

Love our enemies? Pray for those who persecute? That's not what common sense tells us. And yet that is God's will. We could go on and on. God's will is sometimes counterintuitive to us, which can make it hard to want to do it sometimes. And so like John, we can seek to prevent that approach. And yet, if we really want to experience a joy-filled life of meaning, purpose and significance, we need to be willing to submit to doing God's will even when it doesn't make sense. It requires an act of faith. So often it

is only after doing God's will that the wisdom of God's way makes sense.

Ultimately, that is what John does. He agrees to do the thing that is counterintuitive to him and through that action he is part of launching the Messiah's life-changing, world-changing ministry. I'm sure it made sense to John after he baptized Jesus.

Here's a second insight. **We should worship Jesus as the Son of Psalm 2 and as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.** This is who Jesus is revealed to be at his baptism.

Again, think about this from John's vantage point. He ends up doing the thing that was counterintuitive to him. He baptizes Jesus. And immediately after this, revelation from God comes. The heavens are opened. The Spirit descends upon Jesus as God anoints Him for His Messianic calling. He is identified as the Suffering Servant of whom Isaiah speaks. John would not have missed this. And God declares that this One who has come in humility to be baptized is His Son. Again, John would not have missed the connection to Psalm 2.

The Scriptures don't actually tell us what John thought about all of this because the focus is on Jesus going into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. But I have no doubt that what was in John's heart was worship for the One who had clearly been revealed as the Son of God and the Suffering Servant. In this episode from the life of Jesus, it is revealed to us as well that Jesus is the Son of God. Worship Him. It is revealed that he is the Suffering Servant of whom Isaiah says, He bore our griefs. Our sorrows He carried. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him. And through His ministry, Isaiah declared that the Servant will justify the many because he bore our iniquities.

As we come to the Lord's Table today, we are reminded of this ministry of the Suffering Servant that Isaiah writes about. Jesus did these things for you. And so today as you take the bread and the juice be reminded of the great sacrifice that Jesus made for you. He took your sins upon himself. Worship Him. You may want to turn to Isaiah 53 and spend some time reflecting on what it says there during this time.