

December 7, 2025

AFFIRMATION: MATT 3:13-54:11

Introductory Activity Option 1 (Adapted from ETB LG, 17)

Explain: Sometimes, when we set out to learn a new skill or hobby, someone will act as a coach or teacher. They might teach a newbie how to drive the forklift or work the paper machine. They might teach a young buck how to direct a horse or bring in the cows. They might teach a young athlete how to scale a cliff face or properly secure a pack for a hike. A good teacher will offer words of affirmation like, “You got that one. Good job,” or “Ok, that’s good. You are figuring it out.”

Ask: Why do you think words of affirmation are so important when you embark on a new endeavor? (PSG, p. 10)

Explain: In today’s lesson, we will see the Father and the Spirit affirm the ministry of Jesus. They are showing others that They endorse the work and words of the Teacher. They also demonstrate to the people that Jesus is *more than a teacher*. He is the long-awaited Messiah. We will also see, through Jesus’ interaction with the tempter, an affirmation of His sinlessness and the power of the Word.

Skip to Transition below.

Introductory Activity Option 2

Prior to the lesson, ask a staff person or a person responsible for the baptism ministry of your church to borrow either a baptismal robe or one of the special t-shirts used in baptism.

As the class begins, display either the robe or the t-shirt and ask the group to express their ideas on why a person wears a baptismal robe or this particular t-shirt when they are baptized. What does the robe or shirt (particularly the logo on the shirt) mean?

Explain:

(For those who use robes): Not only does the robe provide a modest covering, but it also provides a picture of the purity (if white) of the person being baptized. The baptism does not make them pure, but as a person made clean by the work of Christ, they picture this through the baptismal robe.

(For those who use a t-shirt with a logo): Explain what the logo means. (You might want to ask a staff member if you need clarification.)

Today, we are going to examine the baptism of Christ in the Jordan River and what it teaches. Like the robe/t-shirt this action by Christ reveals something special and extraordinary. We will also examine the wilderness temptation of Jesus and see that life after baptism is not a cakewalk and requires us to remain connected to the Word of God.

Transition: Today, we begin our study in the book of Matthew. Over the next three months, we will explore the first 13 chapters of the Gospel. In a few weeks, we will look at the birth of Christ, but today we begin at the start of His earthly ministry. This beginning is both glorious and grueling. We will examine Christ’s glorious baptism and His grueling wilderness temptation. As we explore this passage, let us remember that “Jesus came to fulfill the Father’s plan of salvation.” (ETB LG, 15)

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Matthew* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- *Exalting Christ in Matthew* (Exalting)
- *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1-13* (ACCS)

Teachers note: Today’s lesson is divided into four parts instead of the normal three. Therefore, we will have to mind our time and resist going to “deep” into the many possible areas of study.

1. OBEYING GOD (MATT. 3:13-17)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 3:13-17.

Explain: Matthew leaves Jesus as a child in chapter 2 and picks up in chapter 3 with the now adult John, Jesus' cousin, preaching in the wilderness near Jerusalem. In the first 12 verses of chapter 3, he describes John's ministry as a herald of the Messiah and the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3. His ministry included the practice of baptism. He baptized people as a demonstration of their repentance of sin.

"Repentance in Greek traditionally implied a change of mind or attitude, but under Old Testament influence it took on the sense of a change of action as well. This combination means that John was asking his hearers "to change their way of life as a result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness." (NAC, 73) This repentance, followed by baptism, did not "save" the person as we might understand it today. Instead, it shows they understood their personal sinfulness, a desire to turn from sin, and "produce fruit consistent with repentance" (v. 8) John Chrysostom wrote in the fourth century, "John's baptism was looking toward repentance. Its purpose was to bring hearers to the point of experiencing conviction for their offenses." (ACC, 51) This is why John was "shocked" (ETB LG, 18) at Jesus' request for baptism because He had not offenses for which conviction or repentance was necessary. In verse 14, Matthew tells us that John "tried to stop him." "The Greek verb translated tried to stop indicates John made several attempts to deter Jesus from being baptized by John." (ETBC, 13) We can understand John's reluctance if we look at verse 11 and see how John described Jesus. (Read Matthew 3:11. See Notes Box) Jesus, though, says it must be done "to fulfill all righteousness."

Now this might be a confusing statement, but Blomberg writes, "'To fulfill all righteousness' means *to complete everything that forms part of a relationship of obedience to God*. In so doing, Jesus identifies with and endorses John's ministry as divinely ordained and his message as one to be heeded." (NAC, 81) In other words, one important aspect of Jesus' baptism was to affirm all that John had previously said about Him. But there was more to Jesus' baptism than simply an endorsement of John's message. David Platt provides three reasons for Jesus' baptism.

1. Jesus' baptism was "**an identification with sinners.**" (Exalting, 56) John's argument in verse 14 regarding the unnecessary nature of Jesus' baptism does not explicitly state Christ's sinless nature, but it does allude to it. In his argument, "He now acknowledges his own sinfulness in comparison with Jesus and how the tables ought rightfully to be turned." (NAC, 81) Jesus was not a sinner, but in His baptism, He identifies with us. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states, "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus "did not know sin," but in His baptism, He declares that He does know us, and He has come to contend with sin for us.

2. Jesus' baptism was "**an example for the saints.**" (Exalting, 56) First, I think Jesus' baptism was an **explanatory example**. One early Christian preacher imagined the thoughts of those who viewed Jesus' baptism. He writes, "If he whose innocence the Baptist gave witness thought it necessary to have

Matthew 3:11
"I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.¹

himself baptized, how can we who are covered with sin scorn repentance?" (ACC, 50) The very sinlessness of Jesus and His baptism remind us of our sinfulness, the need to repent, and follow through with baptism. Moreover, as Platt explains, it was, what I call, an **endeavoring example**.

Ask: "What is the purpose of baptism in a believer's life?" (PSG, p. 13)

Platt explains that Jesus is giving us a model for what a person does after he repents from sin. He reiterates this in Matthew 28:19. We should endeavor to be baptized and to baptize others after we or they become disciples of Christ. Platt writes, "Baptism is not something that man has made up; it's something that God has commanded, something He has called every follower of Christ to do, and something He has told us to do in all nations." (Exalting, 56) Just as Christ identified with sinners in baptism, the forgiven sinner identifies with Christ in his or her baptism.

3. Jesus's baptism was "a **picture of salvation**." (Exalting, 56) Verse 16 says Jesus was "baptized" (*baptizō*) and "he went up immediately from the water." The Greek word means "to immerse. [And] expresses the action of immersing something or someone into liquid (usually water.)"¹ The Explore the Bible Commentary gives further details on baptism. "The Didache [pron: did-uh-kA] (translated as 'the Teaching' a Christian church manual describing the practices of the early church, written in the late first century or early second century AD) details various rules surrounding baptisms. The preferred mode of baptism was first in living (running) water, second a pool of water, and third in pouring or sprinkling *if enough water was unavailable*. (ETBC, 14, emphasis mine) Matthew does describe the method of Christ's baptism, but his words "went up immediately from the water" indicate that Christ was baptized by immersion. Immersion is important to Platt's point that Jesus' baptism was a picture of salvation. For believers today, baptism is a picture of Christ's act of redemption. When we go under the water, we are declaring our death and burial with Christ. When we come up from the water, we picture our own resurrection from death and entrance into a new life in Christ. "Baptism pictures death and resurrection to new life, such that here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we get a picture of the climax of this ministry." (Exalting, 56)

Summarize Transition: Christ's baptism demonstrates Christ's identification with the people He came to save. It provides an example for those who follow Christ. It also pictures for us the death and resurrection of Christ. But there is more going on in these verses that we, sadly, must touch on briefly. Upon Christ's coming up "immediately from the water," Hillary of Poitiers (c. 315-367) notes "God's son is manifested both by hearing and by sight." (ACC, 53) The arrival of the Spirit and the words of the Father both affirm Jesus as the Son of God and the Suffering Servant (Messiah). Just as Christ affirmed the ministry of John, the triune God affirms

Matthew 28:19
Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

TEACHERS NOTE: I am not going to get into a boxing match with someone over the proper mode of baptism. However, as the ETBC states, "Baptists have always viewed baptism by immersion as the only proper mode of baptism, rejecting sprinkling and pouring as valid modes of baptism." (ETBC, 14) Baptism by immersion is required for membership in most Southern Baptist Churches.

¹ Benjamin J. Snyder, "[Baptism](#)," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

the ministry of Jesus. We could take time to discuss the doctrine of the trinity and how it is affirmed here, but as Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) wrote in a sermon on this text, "Here then we have the Trinity present in a clear way...This only needs to be barely mentioned, for it is so obvious for anyone to see." (ACC, 54)

For us today, we must ask ourselves if we have been baptized on the "right side" of our salvation. God commands that born-again believers be baptized as a demonstration of our commitment to the Lord Jesus. In our church, baptism can take place on any Sunday and only requires a conversation with the pastor to ensure the person being baptized is a follower of Jesus and understands the meaning of baptism.

2. HEARING GOD (MATT. 4:1-4)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 4:1-4.

Explain: We can read these three temptations of Christ in two ways. First, what is the temptation offered to Jesus? Second, how can we apply these passages to our lives?

The Temptation of Christ: The first thing we should note is the setting of the temptation. Matthew tells us that the Holy Spirit led Jesus "into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." O'Donnell asserts that "Jesus' temptation was God-ordained but not God-inflicted." (Preaching, 83) James 1:13 tells us that God tempts no man. However, sometimes God allows temptations to come into our lives as a means of refining us. O'Donnell goes on to say, "This is not because God doesn't like us or love us. Rather, it is because he does. Gold is refined through fire, not by being thrown into a pile of marshmallows." (Preaching, 84) The temptation of Christ was connected to the situation He was facing. While in the wilderness, He fasted for nearly six weeks. It was at Jesus' hungriest and weakest point that the tempter showed up. "Often, we experience spiritual challenges when we are physically weak." (ETB LG, 20) When the devil speaks, he affirms Christ's divinity (the Greek grammar in "If you are..." confirms this). So, he says to the Son of God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, "Why are you, of all people, hungry? Why don't you just turn these rocks into bread?" You see, the temptation was one of "**Self-Gratification**" to use His supernatural power to provide for His desires (Exalting, 69).

Application for Christians: Christ's power was not meant to be used for His own gratification. Moreover, the situation was not right. Christ was in the wilderness fasting so that He could commune with the Lord. Creating bread from stones was not God's will. It was not God's will for Him to use His power this way, and it was not God's will for Him to be full of bread at this moment. "We [too] are tempted to fulfill our wants apart from God's will." (Exalting, 69) Instead, we should **Have Faith that God will Provide in the Midst of His Plan.**

Discuss: What are some ways that we might use our power or ability to gratify ourselves outside of God's will?

Explain: We all have desires and needs. Basically, needs and desires are not bad. Platt writes, "We have desires that are good and God-given, desires for food, water, sleep, sex, relationships, companionship, etc. This is the place where Satan works." (Exalting, 69) It isn't the need that's the problem. It's the way we are

Notes:

"The heavenly voice cites excerpts of Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1." (NAC, 82)

"It is no coincidence that Jesus' temptation immediately follows his baptism. Many of God's people have had similar experiences. Right after conversion or some other significant spiritual event, precisely when a certain level of victory or maturity seems to have been attained, temptations resume more strongly than ever (cf. Elijah in 1 Kgs 19:1-18 and Paul in Rom 7:14-25). (NAC, 83)

Chrysostom: "Now we should not be troubled if, after our baptism, we too endure great temptation." (ACC, 56)

tempted to fill the need. We sin when our need for food becomes gluttony, when our need for sex and relationships leads to intimate relationships outside of our marriage, or when our need for sleep becomes apathy. We can also use our power to break the law or harm others to fill our needs. We don't have to be supernatural or divine to face the temptation to "turn stone into bread." We all face the temptation to satisfy our needs outside of God's will. We like Christ should remember that "Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Where did Christ learn that? It is the Word of God that teaches this truth, and it is the Word of God that we use to repel Satan and remind ourselves of God's good and perfect will.

Summarize and Transition: Jesus' first temptation was self-gratification outside of God's will. Let's look at the next temptation.

3. TRUSTING GOD (MATT. 4:5-7)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 4:5-7.

The Temptation of Christ: In this passage, the situation has changed. The devil transports Christ (either physically or in a vision) to the highest point on the Temple. The exact location on the temple does not matter. What matters is that it is very high, and if Jesus fell, many people would see it. The temptation here is to test the Lord and see if He will keep His "promises." The problem is that the "promise" cited by the devil is not given in context. Since Jesus quoted the Bible in the first temptation, the devil quotes it here, but he takes Psalm 91 out of context. The Psalm refers to a godly man under attack from the world. That man is protected by the Lord, not the man who brazenly tests the Lord by throwing himself/Himself off a building. Moreover, this temptation, like all three, is more about the cross than anything else. If Jesus were to throw Himself off the temple and the angels swooped in to rescue Him, it would be a great show for the temple goers. Who wouldn't follow a man who could pull off such a stunt? So, in reality, this temptation is one of "**Self-Protection**" (Exalting, 70). He could protect Himself from the agony of the cross if He simply put on a show for the people.

Application for Christians: There are at least two applications for believers. First, the most expedient means is not always the best means. Sometimes suffering is necessary for us to grow in the Lord. This does not mean we should seek out suffering. But it does mean that sometimes suffering will come. When the Lord instructs us to give away money or move to a difficult ministry assignment, we will suffer, but He will use it to grow us. By the way, moving to a difficult ministry assignment is not just for pastors and preachers.

Discuss: What are some difficult ministry assignments that God might put before a Christian?

Explain: God calls people from the pew or the chair into ministry. Sometimes that ministry is in their local church. Sometimes that ministry assignment is at another church in the area. God might call you to leave your good, comfortable church to go to one that needs your skills and abilities. Or, He might call you to help plant another campus of your church. He might even call a middle-aged or retired couple to attend seminary or move to the mission field. These will be forms of suffering, but that suffering will grow us in the Lord.

The second application relates to building God's Kingdom. On an individual level, this connects to the way we share the gospel. We should not goad people or manipulate people into accepting Christ as their Lord. We simply share the gospel and let the Spirit work. On the corporate level of the local church, this relates to how we expand God's Kingdom in the community. Like sharing the gospel as an individual, we should not manipulate others. It also means that sometimes the local body must suffer to build God's Kingdom. It means holding your "best" people with a loose hand. We should be ready to release church members to take on ministry assignments elsewhere. It also means holding your money with a loose hand. The local body and the

members of that body should be ready to release funds to financially support missions and ministries outside the four walls of the local church.

Summarize and Transition: Jesus' second temptation was self-protection. He responded to the devil that one does "not test the Lord your God." (Deut. 6:16) Just like the Israelites in the wilderness, He was being tempted to doubt the Lord's faithfulness. Would God protect Him if He followed God's plan? Yes He would. Where did Jesus learn this? It is the Word of God that teaches this truth, and it is the Word of God that we use to repel Satan and remind ourselves of God's good and perfect will. Like Jesus, **We Should Trust God's Faithfulness to His Plan.** Let's look at the last temptation.

4. WORSHIP GOD (MATT. 4:8-11)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 4:8-11.

The Temptation of Christ: The situation again changes. This time, the devil transports Jesus to a mountain and shows Him the kingdoms of the world. Clearly, no actual mountain can offer such a vantage point. So, this must be a vision or a "mountain" in the spiritual realm. Nevertheless, the tempter shows Jesus all the Kingdoms, and he finally comes to the real point of this exercise. If Jesus just worships him, he will give Jesus the world. Here we see the temptation of "**Self-Exaltation.**" (Exalting, 72) Again, this is a means of avoiding the cross, at least in the devil's mind. The end result of Christ's death on the cross is His end-times rule of creation. But there are two problems with the devil's temptation. First, while the NT does teach us that Satan is the prince of this world, he is only the prince for a limited time. The world is not his to give. All of creation belongs to the Lord already. Satan has no authority to give what is not his. Second, worshiping the devil as a means of accomplishing the mission is not God's plan for Jesus. Christ was to be the humble, Suffering Servant who dies for mankind. Only the blood of the holy God-man spilt at the cross could accomplish the mission of redeeming mankind and thereby making a way for mankind to follow and worship the true King. Jesus, as should be expected, refutes the devil's offer and tells him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." (see Deut. 6:13) Unlike the Israelites who were tempted to forget that God is their redeemer and He alone should be worship Jesus holds firm to this truth. Where did He learn this? It is the Word of God that teaches this truth, and it is the Word of God that we use to repel Satan and remind ourselves of God's good and perfect will.

Application for Christians: We are often tempted to exalt ourselves. We might not be tempted with overt worship of Satan, but when we exalt ourselves in spite of God's plan or in an attempt to subvert God's plan, we are facing a similar temptation as Christ. Like Him, we are to be humble servants of the Lord, the church, our families, and our community. Through humble service in accordance with God's plan, we will accomplish God's will. We should be reminded to **Faithfully Worship God, Who has a Plan.**

CONCLUDE

Jesus started His day on the banks of the Jordan River. After His baptism, the triune God showed up to affirm his ministry. Six weeks later, hungry, tired, and weakened, He found Himself in the wilderness. Then the devil showed up in an attempt to subvert God's plan by derailing Christ's ministry. Jesus rebuked him using the most powerful tool available to all God's followers: the Word of God.

Our lesson reminds us of who Christ is and what He came to do. It also reminds us to be on guard against the temptations of self-gratification, self-protection, and self-exaltation. All of these can derail our lives and our ministry. Let us be faithful to the Faithful One as we seek to fulfill His plan to reach the lost and dying around us.

Pray and ask the Lord to help group members resist temptation this week.