

Understanding Baptism Part 2: September 23, 2020

Resources on Baptism

1. *Down in the River to Pray* by John Mark Hicks and Greg Taylor
2. *Baptism: What the Bible Teaches* (free eBook on renew.org)
3. A Student's Guide to Baptism (free study guide on TeachOneReachOne.org).
4. Free Bible Study put together by Bryan

Recap:

Old Testament Stories: The waters of Creation, the Flood, the Red Sea, the Jordan River.

Spiritual Anchors: Big ideas, passages, or assumptions that serve as a non-negotiable starting point for understanding our faith.

Tonight's Class

1. Jesus' baptism and what it means (**Matthew 3**)
2. Jesus' teaching on baptism in the Gospels (**Matthew 28, Mark 16, John 3**)

The Big Question: Why Was Jesus Baptized?

"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan..."
Mark 1:9 NIV

The Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17, NIV)

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. 16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Four Major Themes on the Baptism of Jesus:

1. **Trinity**—The revelation of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.
2. **Sacrament**—The blessing of the waters by Jesus institutes the sacrament of baptism.
3. **Story**—Jesus' baptism is a major turning point in the grand narrative of God's redemptive work.
4. **Example**—Jesus sets us an example to follow by doing what he commands us to do.

These Views are Not Always Mutually Exclusive.

"If Jesus Christ is perfect God and perfect man, why was He baptized? In order to reveal truth, to show the way, and sanctify the waters and through the waters the whole of creation."

-Saint George Greek Orthodox Church (Metropolis of Chicago)

Every Christian, every church is like a **"Spiritual DJ"**, mixing the themes in the way they feel is best.

1. The Trinity

Holiday of Epiphany / Theophany celebrates the appearance of Christ. These terms can refer to any of the following:

1. An appearance of a divine being
2. A sudden realization about the true meaning of nature of a person or situation.
3. A Christian holiday celebrating the manifestation of Jesus to the Wise Men (Western) or the manifestation of the Trinity at Jesus' Baptism (Eastern)

Seeing the Trinity as a major theme in the baptism of Jesus is popular among all three branches of Christianity: Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic.

1. Orthodox: *“Christ’s baptism in the Jordan was “theophany,” a manifestation of God to the world, because it was the beginning of our Lord’s public ministry. It was also a “theophany” in that the world was granted a revelation of the Holy Trinity. All three Persons were made manifest together: the Father testified from on high to the divine Sonship of Jesus; the Son received His Father’s testimony; and the Spirit was seen in the form of a dove, descending from the Father and resting upon the Son.” -Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*

2. Protestant: *“Isn’t this a great revelation? That is why we call this festival Epiphany, because God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has revealed himself with all his angels.” -Martin Luther, **The Epiphany of Our Lord (Jan 6, 1534... The Day of Epiphany)***

3. Catholic: *“The mystery of the Trinity is shown forth in Christ's baptism. Our Lord Himself is baptized in His human nature; the Holy Ghost descended in the shape of a dove: the Father's voice is heard bearing witness to the Son.” -St. Jerome, 4th/5th c., quoted by Catholic Scholar Thomas Aquinas, 13th c. in **Summa Theologiae**.*

2. The Sacrament

For churches that view baptism as a **sacrament**—a divine ceremony during which God imparts grace—it needs to be explained how ordinary water could become the means of divine grace. Otherwise, the water is just a bath. These churches view the baptism of Jesus as the moment when Jesus cleansed the water and blessed the waters of baptism for all future Christians.

There are examples of theologians from all branches of Christianity that have taken this view:

- **Church Fathers** (East/West): Ambrose (4th c.) Chrysostom (4th c)
- **Catholic:** Aquinas (13th c.), Catholic.com
- **Protestant:** Luther (16th c.)
- **Modern Orthodox Church:** St. George’s

Churches that view baptism as an ordinance (a command, but not a means of divine grace) do not take this view because they see the waters of baptism as symbolic (meaning there’s no need to explain why water would have divine qualities if it’s only a symbol anyway).

3. The Story

Most Christian churches understand that the baptism of Jesus connects with the stories in the Old Testament that feature the saving and restoring power of water.

Catholic Church: “All the Old Covenant prefigurations find their fulfillment in Christ Jesus...” (CCC 1223). They specifically mention the creation story, the flood, the Red Sea, and the Jordan River.

Thomas Aquinas on the symbolism of Jesus’ baptism: *“The crossing of the Red Sea foreshadowed baptism in this—that baptism washes away sin: whereas the crossing of the Jordan foreshadows it in this—that it opens the gate to the heavenly kingdom: and this is the principal effect of baptism, and accomplished through Christ alone. And therefore it was fitting that Christ should be baptized in the Jordan rather than in the sea... As of yore the waters of the Jordan were held back, so now, when Christ was baptized, the torrent of sin was held back.”*

Many have noted that the baptism of Jesus was a turning point in his own life, when he began his public ministry. Like many others in the Bible, Jesus began his work in God’s Kingdom at the age of 30:

- **Joseph** was given command (Gen. 41:46).
- **Priests** entered service (Num. 4:3).
- **Saul** became King (1 Sam. 13:1).
- **David** became King (2 Sam. 5:4).
- **Ezekiel** was called as a prophet (Eze. 1:1).

4. The Example

Many churches/theologians understand that Jesus is setting us an example to follow.

Evangelical Tradition: *“Jesus was baptized as a sign of his dedication (wholehearted obedience), and so too we follow his example.”* -**Jonathan Pennington**, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary / GospelCoalition.org

Augustine: *“...because He wished to do what He had commanded all to do.”*

Ambrose: *“This is justice, to do first thyself that which thou wishest another to do, and so encourage others by thy example.”*

Moral Law vs. Positive Law

Restoration Heritage Churches (like the Churches of Christ) developed a theology of Biblical law that saw a difference between **moral law and positive law**.

Moral Law—Laws that are rooted in the goodness and morality of God. *Do not murder.*

Positive Law—Commands that have no basis in the goodness of God, but serve solely as a test of our individual faith. *Abraham sacrificing Isaac, marching around the city of Jericho.*

Under this understanding of law, Jesus had no moral reason to require baptism, but he did it as an example of positive law: God requires baptism, so Jesus submits to it as a sign of his obedience. James Harding (i.e. Harding University) made this argument.

What Does Jesus Teach About Baptism?

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." **Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)**

"15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Mark 16:15-16 (NIV) (**might not be in original manuscripts**)

"Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again... Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." **John 3:3, 5-8 (NIV)**

What Does Born of Water and Spirit Mean in John 3?

- Natural Birth?
- Cleansed by the Word? (**see Ephesians 5:26**)
- Cleansed by God's Spirit? (**see Ezekiel 36:25-27**)
- John's Baptism? (**Matthew 3:6**)
- Christian baptism? (**Matthew 28:18-20**)

While there isn't an unequivocal answer, **Romans 6:1-4** and **Acts 2:38** point us to Christian baptism in its description of death, burial, and rebirth (i.e. being born again).