

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Baptism of Jesus

Luke 3:21-22

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Scripture

We are studying the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke in a sermon series I am calling, "To Seek and To Save the Lost."

The first two chapters of Luke's Gospel deal with the prophecies and births of John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ, and then what happened to Jesus following his birth.

The third chapter of Luke's Gospel focuses on John the Baptist. Luke tells us about the ministry (3:1-6), preaching (3:7-14), testimony (3:15-17), and boldness of John the Baptist (3:18-20).

John had a remarkable ministry. His preaching was not designed to set people at ease. He saw himself as God's messenger who called people to repentance. And although he was viewed as a little odd, it would not be an overstatement to say that he was a huge sensation. Thousands of people came to hear John preach and he baptized large numbers of individuals who responded to his call for repentance (Matthew 3:5).

Many people began wondering whether John might be the Christ (Luke 3:15). However, John knew that he was not the Christ. He was only the messenger who was to go before the Christ to prepare the people for the ministry of the Christ.

Then, one day Jesus came to John to be baptized by him. Today I would like to examine the baptism of Jesus.

Let's read about the baptism of Jesus in Luke 3:21-22:

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."
(Luke 3:21-22)

Introduction

During my third year at the University of Cape Town I believed that God was calling me to vocational ministry. Knowing that I was prone to misreading God's leading in my life, I prayed earnestly about that matter for many months.

Some time later I spoke to my pastor and to my campus pastor about what I thought might be God's call on my life. Both of them affirmed that I should pursue vocational ministry.

For the next four years I completed my University degree and worked in order to save money to come and study in the United States.

Finally, I had enough money saved and I got ready to leave South Africa to go to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School to attend seminary. I sold all my possessions (which were not many) with the exception of my books.

Then one day all was done and I was at the airport saying farewell to friends. One of my close friends wished me well and said to me, "Freddy, go with God. And may Jeremiah 29:11 guide you in the coming years." I thanked him and left.

Not knowing what Jeremiah 29:11 was at the time, I had to look it up in my Bible. Do you know what Jeremiah 29:11 is? Jeremiah 29:11 states, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Over the years that verse has been a great encouragement to me. And even though I am aware that God gave that verse originally to the exiles in Babylon, it is nevertheless a description of how our covenant-making and covenant-keeping God deals with those who belong to him.

Significant statements or ceremonies often mark major transitional points in our lives. For example, graduation is a major transitional point that is marked by a ceremony. Wed-

dings and funerals are marked by ceremonies and statements.

My transition from South Africa to the United States was not marked by a ceremony. Nevertheless, the verse from Jeremiah 29:11 was a significant statement that was a great encouragement to me over the years that followed.

Today's text in Luke's Gospel is major transitional point. Luke has basically finished telling us about the life and ministry of John the Baptist. He is about to transition to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

One reason we know that Luke was transitioning from John to Jesus is because Luke did not mention that John was the one who baptized Jesus, even though the other Gospel writers each record that John was the one who baptized Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; John 1:32-33).

The feature that I want to highlight in today's text is the role of each Person of the Trinity at the baptism of Jesus. Luke recorded a major transitional point in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus was about to begin his public ministry. Luke recorded the baptism of Jesus. But, interestingly, he did not describe the baptism as the other Gospel writers did, but focused on what happened *after* the baptism. Luke wanted his readers to note the action of each Person of the Trinity at the baptism of Jesus.

Today I would like to look at the role of each Person of the Trinity as set forth in Luke 3:21-22.

Lesson

An examination of the role of each Person of the Trinity as set forth in Luke 3:21-22 will show us what each Person of the Trinity does to save sinners.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Setting of Jesus' Baptism (3:21a)
2. The Actions at Jesus' Baptism (3:21b-22)

I. The Setting of Jesus' Baptism (3:21a)

First, let's look at the setting of Jesus' baptism.

Luke told us that John went into the entire region around the Jordan River, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (3:3). And, as I mentioned earlier, thousands of people came to hear John preach and he baptized large numbers of individuals who responded to his call for repentance (Matthew 3:5).

Then Luke said in verse 21a: **"Now when all the people were baptized."** All does not refer to the entire nation of Israel. Nor does it refer to all who heard John preach. In fact, we know that not all who heard John preach responded to his message (7:30). Luke was simply noting that **all** those who responded to John's preaching **were baptized**.

After those who had responded to John's preaching were baptized, Luke said, **"and when Jesus also had been baptized"** (3:21a).

We must not think that Jesus was standing at the back of the line waiting for his turn to be baptized by John. Luke clearly indicated that Jesus' baptism was unique. That is why he separated Jesus' baptism from the baptism of the people.

Nevertheless, this was not a private baptism. There were other people who witnessed the baptism of Jesus by John.

One Bible commentator notes, "There is no indication in Scripture that they had ever met before this incident, which would in fact be their only meeting."¹

Luke told us about the incident at the temple when Jesus a boy of twelve-years old (2:41-51). For the next eighteen years Jesus lived in obscurity in Nazareth in Galilee. He grew in his understanding of who he was and what he had come to do

¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 236.

² John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago:

(2:52). As the years went by he waited for God's timing to begin his public ministry. He knew the prophecy of Malachi 3:1, "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts."

Then Jesus started hearing reports of the ministry of John the Baptist and he knew that the "messenger" had come. So, he knew that the time had come for him to begin his public ministry. Jesus left Galilee and went to the region around the Jordan to find John and to be baptized by him.

The question that naturally arises is this: why did Jesus need to get baptized? You may recall that John's baptism, according to Luke, was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (3:3). John, in fact, had the same question. When Jesus came to him for baptism, John asked him, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (Matthew 3:14).

John knew that Jesus did not need to be baptized for the forgiveness of his own sins, because Jesus had no sins. And yet, Jesus was baptized. Why?

Jesus told John the reason why he needed to be baptized in Matthew 3:15, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then, having heard Jesus' reason for need to be baptized, John consented and baptized Jesus.

According to John 1:33 God commanded John the Baptist to baptize people. God wanted the people to be baptized, and it was necessary therefore for the righteous to be baptized, since God had commanded it through John.

And whatever God required the righteous to do, Jesus did—even things he did not personally need to do. For example, Jesus faithfully participated in the Passover celebration, which pictured God's deliverance of his people from sin. Yet Jesus had no sin from which to be delivered.

Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life. He obeyed every command of God. His obedience to the Law of God was absolutely essential to our salvation. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake he [i.e., the Father] made him [i.e., the Son] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus’ obedience to the Law of God was necessary so that his righteousness might be imputed to us and so that our sins might be imputed to him. As John MacArthur said, “In other words, God treated Jesus as if he had lived believers’ sinful lives and treated them as if they had lived his sinlessly perfect life. Obviously, if he had merely come down from heaven, been crucified, and raised three days later, there would have been no righteous life to impute to believers.”²

So, the reason Jesus was baptized was to “fulfill all righteousness” so that his righteousness might be imputed to us and our sinfulness might be imputed to him.

II. The Actions at Jesus’ Baptism (3:21b-22)

And second, let’s examine the actions at Jesus’ baptism.

Notice what each Person of the Trinity did at Jesus’ baptism.

A. *The Son Prayed (3:21b)*

First, the Son prayed.

Although all three of the Synoptic Gospel writers record Jesus’ baptism and John refers to it, only Luke noted that Jesus **was praying** (3:21b).

Jesus enjoyed unbroken communion with the Father until that awful moment on the cross when he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Never-

² John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1–5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 237.

theless the Gospel writers record numerous instances when Jesus prayed. For example, Jesus prayed at his baptism (Luke 3:21), during his first preaching tour (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16), before choosing the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-13), before feeding the 5,000 (Matthew 14:19), after feeding the 5,000 (Matthew 14:23), before feeding the 4,000 (Matthew 15:36), before Peter's confession of him as the Christ (Luke 9:18), at the transfiguration (Luke 9:28-29), for some children brought to him (Matthew 19:13), after the return of the seventy (Luke 10:21), before giving the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1), before raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41-42), as he faced the reality of the cross (John 12:28), at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-27), for Peter (Luke 22:31-32), in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-44), from the cross (Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:34, 46), with the disciples he encountered on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:30), at the ascension (Luke 24:50-51) and, supremely, in his high priestly prayer in John 17.³

We don't know what Jesus prayed on this occasion that Luke recorded at Jesus' baptism. But we do know that God answered his prayer because Luke said that **the heavens were opened** (3:21b). Whenever that happened in Scripture, either God manifested himself in some way, spoke, or both. In Ezekiel 1:1, "*the heavens were opened* and [Ezekiel] saw visions of God." Stephen "gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55), and cried out, "Behold, I see *the heavens opened* up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (v. 56). In Revelation 19:11, the apostle John "*saw heaven opened*, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and wages war."⁴

³ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 238.

⁴ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 238.

But something happened before the Father spoke.

B. The Spirit Descended (3:22a)

Second, the Spirit descended.

Luke said that **the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form** (3:22a). This does not mean that Jesus did not already have the **Holy Spirit**. Jesus enjoyed unbroken communion with the **Holy Spirit** as well with the Father. The Trinity enjoy eternal communion with each other.

Nevertheless, the descent of the Holy Spirit symbolically represented his empowerment for Jesus' public life and ministry, which was about to begin.

The people who witnessed the baptism of Jesus were aware of the numerous instances in the Old Testament of the Holy Spirit empowering individuals for special service. They had read of the following individuals being empowered for service: Moses (Numbers 11:17), Joshua (Numbers 27:18), the seventy elders of Israel (Numbers 11:25), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Jephthah (Judges 11:29), Samson (Judges 13:25), Saul (1 Samuel 10:1, 6), David (1 Samuel 16:13), Elijah (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16), Azariah (2 Chronicles 15:1), Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20), Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:1-2), and Micah (Micah 3:8).⁵

So, the visible descent of the Holy Spirit was a clear sign that Jesus was being empowered for the task to which he had been sent.

I want you to note that Luke also mentioned that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus **like a dove** (3:22a). We have all seen pictures of **a dove** hovering over Jesus at his baptism. However, all the Gospel writers insist that the Holy Spirit descended **like a dove** on Jesus. One commentator notes, "What was visible was not a dove, but rather what was seen is compared to a

⁵ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 239.

dove. . . . The manner of the Spirit's descent was like the way a dove floats gracefully through the air."⁶

The visible presence of the Holy Spirit indicates his empowerment for the Son's life and ministry.

C. The Father Spoke (3:22b)

And third, the Father spoke.

Luke recorded that **a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"** (3:22b).

This is the climax of the passage. The Father first spoke a word of affection to the Son. He said, **"You are my beloved Son."**

This word of affection is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. Speaking of the coming Christ, God said in Psalm 2:7, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." God also said through the prophet in Isaiah 42:1, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights."

As Jesus was about to begin his public ministry, the Father reaffirmed his love for him. The Father wanted Jesus to know that as he was about to begin his difficult ministry that he loved him with a perfect and eternal love.

The Father also spoke a word of approval to the Son. He said, **"With you I am well pleased."**

Notice the wording: **"With you I am well pleased."** The Father was pleased with the person of Jesus. Jesus was pleasing to the Father simply because he was the Son. And yet the Father was also pleased with the Son's obedience. By submitting to baptism, Jesus was fulfilling the righteousness that God required of sinful humanity. He was agreeing to carry out the great task that the Father had given to him: eventually to suffer and die for sinners. And so the Father was pleased with Jesus.

⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 338.

The Father was well pleased with Jesus all the days of his life. The Father was well pleased with his obedience to his parents, his resistance to temptation, his teaching, his miraculous deeds of mercy, his life of prayer, and most of all with his sacrifice that he paid by dying on the cross to pay the penalty for sinners. We know that God was pleased with Jesus because he raised him from the dead.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the role of each Person of the Trinity as set forth in Luke 3:21-22, we should thank God for our salvation.

All three Persons of the Trinity are actively involved in the salvation of sinners.

Jesus prayed for sinners. We read about that especially in Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17 where he prayed for sinners to come to faith in him. But Jesus went further. His baptism indicates his commitment to fulfilling all righteousness so that his righteousness could be imputed to sinners and so that our sin could be imputed to him.

The Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism. This symbolized the Spirit's empowerment of Jesus for ministry. Today, the Spirit applies the righteousness of Christ to believing sinners so that the Father sees us now clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Furthermore, the Spirit now empowers believers so that we may walk in a manner pleasing to the Father.

And finally, the Father speaks words of affirmation and approval not only to Jesus but to believers as well. For example, Zephaniah 3:17 states, "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

So, let us thank God for our salvation. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father, I thank you for the baptism of Jesus.

At his baptism Luke points out the active role of each Person of the Trinity. The Son prayed, the Spirit descended, and the Father spoke. They were carrying out their plan to reconcile the elect with themselves, with each Person of the Trinity playing a different role. Thank you for the Father who sent the Son to win our salvation. Thank you for the Son who fulfilled all righteousness, even to the point of dying on the cross, in order to win our salvation. And thank you for the Spirit, who applies the righteousness of Jesus to sinners and now empowers us for service.

And for all of this I thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!