



Tonight, it will be our privilege and joy to continue a wonderful practice that has been seen many times over the past 30 plus years of ministry here at the Chapel. But more than that, it is one that has been practiced by the church around the world for over 2,000 years. There is something

special and beautiful in witnessing the baptism of a person as they declare before the church their salvation in Christ. For it is in the act of baptism we are given a simple but clear reminder of Christ's death and resurrection that comes full circle in the death and new life of the one being baptized.

For Christians, baptism is intrinsically tied to the Gospel. It is an essential truth that shapes our practice, because it cannot be separated from the work of Christ on the cross. Baptism uniquely portrays the essence of God's redemptive plan for all His people through a simple act of obedience. Tonight, we are going to take a look at the connection between baptism and Christ's death and resurrection. This connection is key to explaining why we practice baptism in the way we do.

This may be review for most of you. But it is an important part of who we are as a church and I think, as an important part of the mission of the church, it is worth revisiting often. So let's ask the Lord to help us see His glory as we reflect on the practice of baptism as we see it in His word this evening.

The slide has a dark blue background with white text. The title 'The Immediate Context' is at the top, followed by a list of topics marked with a white icon of a scroll. The footer contains three items: 'Baptism's Practice', 'April 8, 2018', and 'Slide 3'.

## The Immediate Context

- After Jesus' genealogy, His birth, and return to Nazareth
- Outline
  - An introduction to John the Baptist (v. 1-6)
  - The nature of John's baptism (v. 7-12)
  - The baptism of Jesus (v. 13-17)
  - Jesus' instructions on baptism (v. 28:19-20)

Baptism's Practice      April 8, 2018      Slide 3

This evening, we are going to start in beginning of Christ's ministry in the book of Matthew. Please turn to Chapter 3. Just to set the context for this passage, let me remind you that Matthew has just given us the details around Jesus' genealogy, an account of His birth, and His return to Nazareth. This account establishes that Jesus' birth is in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah.

After these details there is a large gap in the story of Jesus life, as Matthew jumps directly to the inauguration of Jesus' earthly ministry here in Chapter 3. Matthew begins the account of Jesus ministry by doing two things. First, he introduces us to the forerunner to Jesus and His ministry. John is the foretold voice crying in the wilderness who proclaims the coming of the Messiah. And

second, we see the initiation of Jesus' ministry through baptism in the Jordan river and its divine affirmation through the voice of the Father.

As we look at this passage, I would like you to keep in mind that my focus tonight is on understanding our practice of baptism. So, we will be moving through these verses at a fairly quick pace. But still, I want to break this passage down into an outline that faithfully provides structure to what Matthew has written. The first six verses provide an introduction to John the Baptist. Verses 7 through 12 we see the nature of John's baptism. And in verses 13 through the end of the chapter we have the baptism of Jesus. Finally, we are going to jump to the end of Matthew and look at Jesus' instructions on baptism.

An Introduction to John the Baptist

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baptizo

baptism  
baptizmo

dunk  
dip  
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drown  
sunk

(Matt. 3:1-6)

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First, let's look at Matthew's introduction to John the Baptist. Please turn to Matthew 3 verse 1 and follow along as read.

*"1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight." 4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."*

Matthew introduces us to John the Baptist here in the narrative just prior to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. John is an interesting character. But perhaps there is more to his appearance. For example, his course dress and attire are to be seen as reflecting a humble and minimalist nature. John is not interested the opinions of men. His focus is on preaching a message of repentance. In verse 5, Matthew tells us that his ministry was attracting attention from

Jerusalem and all over Judea. But the key aspect of John's ministry we are to see is not his unconventional clothes or food, but that of baptism. It was such a key element of his ministry that he was known as John the Baptist; or more accurately John the Baptizer.

Now we are all probably familiar with the term baptize. It is a word that literally means to dip, to dunk, or to immerse. It is a word that has an essential association with water. The Greek word for baptize was even used in the stronger sense of being drowned or a ship being sunk. There is no way to escape its clear connotation with being immersed in water. Yet today, depending on the context of our culture or denomination, baptism has now come to have different meanings and practices. But here in this passage and throughout the New Testament, the meaning of the word baptism is tied to a water immersion.

Now something I did not know until recently thanks to Pastor Dale, is that the word baptize we see in our bibles is not translated from a Greek word – it actually is a form of the Greek word. The word "baptize" is actually a transliteration of the Greek word "baptizo". And similarly, the word "baptism" is derived from the word "baptisma". You can see and hear how similar they are. Rather than translate to another word, the word "baptize" was used in a specific way to mean the act of dipping or immersing a person in water.

I will also note that John did not invent the practice of baptism. For example, it was often used by Jewish custom in the conversion of a Gentile to Judaism. The difference for John the Baptist, was that he used baptism as public declaration to indicate one was repenting of their sins. It was a defining characteristic of his ministry and understandably led to his being called John the Baptizer.

In verse 6, we see that many were coming to him so that they could be baptized in the Jordan river. Notice the phrase, "by him" in this verse. This indicates that John personally was performing the baptisms and was not merely an overseer or administrator. It may seem obvious, but we must not miss the importance of the Jordan river here providing the water in which John performed these baptisms.

So how are we to understand John's baptisms? First, the essence of the act here is not one of ceremony but of personal confession and commitment in preparation for the coming Messiah. This is not an act of religious ritual, but a personal act of repentance made before many witnesses. Second, it was a public declaration. It was done before witnesses who gave testimony to the public act of repentance. This is a pattern which the early church adopted and is seen throughout the New Testament.



In the next few verses, Matthew shows us the nature of John's baptism. Let's pick up at verse 7.

*"7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 'I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'"*

There were many people coming out to see John. Some of them were the Jewish religious leaders; the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew's description of them makes it clear that they are not there to support John's ministry. They were more likely there as skeptics and in opposition to John. They were there to see what his baptizing was all about. Matthew describes them in contrast to those being baptized. They were not there to repent or confess sins. Their confidence was based in their lineage from Abraham and following the religious laws. They had no desire nor felt a need to turn from their current ways. Their hearts were filled with religious pride and a sense of privilege.

John speaks boldly of the importance of repentance in noting that trees which do not bear fruit are chopped down and burned. This was strong condemnation for the Jewish leaders. Their faith was dead and barren. Matthew also quotes John in conveying two important aspects to the nature of his baptism. The first of these is water and the second is repentance. We can take from this that the nature of John's baptism was to immerse people in water as a sign of repentance.

John then points to the coming Messiah; a reference clearly to Jesus and the One who is greater. John's baptism is linked to the spiritual reality that Jesus will come and bring about a spiritual baptism of the indwelling Spirit. John's baptism therefore, points us to Gospel realities and the need for repentance to be saved. We may note then, that John was not far from the consistent evangelistic call of the early church to repent and be baptized. Just as John's baptism was an act that personally symbolized the reality of repentance, so today baptism is an act the personally symbolizes the reality of salvation.

The Baptism of Jesus

identification  
authentication

(Matt. 3:13-17)



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In the last few verses, Matthew describes the baptism of Jesus. Follow again as I read beginning at verse 13.

*"13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.""*

Matthew now takes us to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus comes to the Jordan river from Galilee and asks John to baptize Him. After some initial reluctance Jesus persuades him and Jesus is baptized by John. Again, the word used here is of the same Greek word. We should hear this literally as "And when Jesus was dunked under the water". John is carrying out the same form of baptism that was his practice. Not that Jesus needed to repent, but as He notes, was fitting and fulfilled what was right. Jesus begins His ministry by being baptized, and in doing so,

is identifying with all those for whom He came to save. His baptism points us to the Gospel and the redemptive work which He alone could fulfill.

As Jesus comes up out of the Jordan river Matthew describes what must have been an awesome and frightening moment for those gathered there. Imagine the scene. The sky is opened up and descending like a dove, the Spirit of God comes down and rests upon Jesus. Suddenly, a voice thunders out of the heavens and they hear the Father say, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

Note that Holy Triune Godhead comes together in approval and authentication of Jesus' ministry. There is both approval and pleasure in the Son and the redemptive Gospel work Jesus now sets out to do. As Jesus' ministry begins, we are left with a vivid picture of Jesus rising up from the waters of baptism to follow in submission and obedience to do the will of the Father.

Jesus' Instructions on Baptism

mission disciples

(Matt. 28:18-20)

Father water  
life death  
Son new creation Holy Spirit

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Before we conclude this message tonight, there is one more passage I want to bring your attention. We have seen how Jesus' ministry begins, but let's also take a look at how it ends. Turn in your bibles to Mathew 28 verse 18. Follow along as I read God's word.

*"18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.""*

Matthew ends his book with Jesus' last and most important instructions to His disciples. For the purposes of focusing on the practice of baptism I would like to focus on verse 19. It can be no accident that Matthew begins and ends his account Jesus's ministry with both the presence of baptism and the Trinity. Here is an instruction that is given to the disciples that formed the

mission of the Apostles. From the early church to this day, Jesus followers obey this great commission to go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is the same word here as before meaning to dip or dunk in water. Neither Matthew nor Jesus have given any indication that there has been a change in the method of baptizing in water.

From this point forward, the pattern and practice of the church is water baptism of new believers. In Acts 8, Phillip takes the Ethiopian Eunuch down into the water to be baptized after his profession of faith. All of the early church baptisms use the same Greek words meaning to dunk or immerse. Furthermore, there is no evidence or instruction of any other form or practice of baptism in scripture. Other forms of non-immersive baptism take their pattern from outside of scripture. What else could cause the early church to so consistently follow the practice of repentance and baptism other than the example and command of Jesus? For these reasons, at the Chapel we practice baptism trying to faithfully follow this same pattern.

Reflect and Respond

- significance
- importance
- gospel
- community
- identity

DEAD TO SIN - ALIVE TO CHRIST  
**BAPTISM**

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Well for many of you, I know this has been a review; but one which I trust is reassuring and encouraging. Our Lord gave us the ordinance of Baptism to provide a regular and powerful picture of the Gospel. And as we participate in baptism, it is a time for great rejoicing and celebration over the miracle of spiritual life that God has brought about in a new believer. And as we have seen, it is a practice that we follow that has its roots in the bookends of Jesus ministry.

One of the distinctives of the Chapel is our holding to a high view of baptism. That is, we make much of its significance in its example, as a picture of a spiritual reality, and in the pattern of the early church. In that sense we are serious about the significance and importance of baptism. We also believe that it is the only biblical mechanism through which the local church recognizes those who are of the household of faith and adds them to their community. So we take it as nothing less than a solemn and serious responsibility.

It follows then that we take the biblical example and practice of baptism seriously. While baptism is not a means by which a person is saved, the clear teaching of scripture is that baptism is a step of obedience and evidence of that salvation. And the redemptive story that it reflects is of such great value that we are guarded against diminishing it or what it represents. Each baptism of each person is a picture of the Gospel and is evidence of God fulfilling the commissional work of the Church through His people. At its core, it represents our identity with Christ. For through the baptism waters we illustrate that we are buried with Him in His death and so rise with Him to new life. It is this imagery of death and new life that should fill our hearts with joy as we reflect on our own conversions and the goodness of our Lord to save us.

Please bow your head as we close in prayer.

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