



# THE COMPASS

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## RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:  
*Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace* God's Word  
on  
Your Discipleship Path

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Sermon Series: "Matthew's Messiah." The Gospel of Matthew.

(Epiphany, 2026)

"Leading the Way." (The Baptism of Jesus)

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**Day #1—Monday, January 12<sup>th</sup>. Read: Matthew 3:1-6. —Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?**

The phrase "In those days" in *n.1*, refers to Jesus' public life. Jesus likely began His ministry at age 30. Consequently, there is roughly a thirty-year gap between Matthew chapter 2 and chapter 3. Here, Matthew introduces John the Baptizer. In addition to baptizing, Matthew describes John as a preacher who is fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy as the forerunner of the Messiah. As Craig Blomberg describes:

John proclaimed God's message as a prophetic spokesman in the desert of Judea, the wilderness area to the south of Jerusalem. Reminiscent perhaps of Israel's wandering in the wilderness prior to their entry into the promised land, John too prepared the way for One who would reconstitute God's people. Jesus himself would also have his time in the wilderness shortly (4:1–11). John's message called for repentance from sin. He thus anticipated the Messiah's mission as described in 1:21.<sup>1</sup>

John's message was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3 with reflections of Malachi 3:1. All four Gospels relate John the Baptist to Isaiah's words (Mark 1:2–3; Luke 3:4–6; John 1:23). Isaiah 40:3, however, refers to "highway construction workers" who were called on to clear the way in the desert for the return of the Lord as His people, the exiles, returned to Judah from the Babylonian Captivity in 537 B.C. In similar fashion, John the Baptist was in the desert preparing the way for the Lord and His kingdom by calling on people to return to Him.<sup>2</sup>

John's clothing was reminiscent of the Prophet Elijah (*2 Kings 1:8; Zechariah 13:4*). John's food was the food usually eaten by the poor (*Leviticus 11:21*). Here we are given a picture of a prophet, like Elijah, who was a "rough outdoorsman with a forthright message."<sup>3</sup> Many people came to hear John, likely longing for and hoping that maybe he was the long awaited Messiah who will restore the people of Israel.

**Consider/Reflect:** "Matthew skips over Jesus' childhood and picks up the story with John the Baptist. This prophet is sent to prepare the people for the imminent appearance of Christ. John's message is one of repentance, recommitment, and warning. God is about to act, and His people must be ready to respond (3:1–10). John called those who responded to his message to demonstrate their repentance by submitting to water baptism (vv. 11–12)."<sup>4</sup>

**Day #2—Tuesday, January 13<sup>th</sup>. Read: Matthew 3:7-10. —Examine: The Text and its Context.**

Matthew introduces two groups that will loom large in the ministry of Jesus: The Pharisees and Sadducees. While a lengthy quote, Craig Blomberg describes these groups well:

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1 C. Blomberg. *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1992).

2 J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985).

3 Ibid.

4 L.O. Richards. *The Bible Reader's Companion* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994).

The Pharisees and Sadducees represent two of the three main religious sects (along with the Essenes) described in some detail by Josephus (*J.W.* 2.8.2–14). Today we probably would consider them a cross between political parties and religious factions. Of the Sadducees... Their name derives perhaps from David's priest Zadok. They were political liberals and religious conservatives, a small aristocratic and priestly sect that had made its peace with the Roman government. They believed only in the written Scriptures as divinely inspired and would believe no doctrine that could not be derived from the five books of Moses. Hence, they rejected angels and the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees (the name perhaps coming from Heb. *Purushim*, meaning *separatists*) were a larger more popular group of teachers of the law. They tended toward political conservatism and religious liberalism. They had developed the oral law as a “fence around the Torah,” which included detailed interpretations, applications, and amplifications of the written Scriptures to enable people to obey them properly. They continued to view Rome as illegitimate in preventing Israel from enjoying its divinely ordained blessings of freedom and peace in the land... The Pharisees and Sadducees apparently began to organize themselves at approximately the same time in the second century B.C. Together they probably comprised no more than 5 percent of the populace. Here they are linked as representatives of the official leadership of Judaism. Most of the Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin, belonged to one of these two groups.<sup>5</sup>

What these two groups had in common, as far as John the Baptist is concerned, is that their religious “professions” do not exempt them from divine judgment, and he uses some provocative language to make his point! John literally refers to these religious leaders as, “snakes from snakes.” John accused them of hypocrisy (something Jesus will do as well) and not exhibiting true, godly living (bearing “fruit.”). These accusations would have likely incensed the Pharisees and Sadducees because...

...these religious leaders believed that as children of Abraham, i.e. Jews, they were automatically “in,” qualified for the Messianic kingdom. John’s response is that “God could take outsiders, Gentiles, if necessary, to find individuals to follow Him. Judaism was in danger of being removed. Unless there was productive fruit in keeping with repentance (v. 8), God would remove the tree.”<sup>6</sup>

**Consider/Reflect:** “The Pharisees and Sadducees wanted John to baptize them without having repented and confessed their sins. Their works should give evidence of sincere repentance (cf Lk 3:10–14)...[Luther]... ‘Confession, too, cannot be false, uncertain, or fragmentary. A person who confesses that everything in him is nothing but sin includes all sins, excludes none, forgets none. Neither can the satisfaction be uncertain, because it is not our uncertain, sinful work. Rather, it is the suffering and blood of the innocent Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’”<sup>7</sup>

#### Day #3—Wednesday, January 14<sup>th</sup>. Read: Matthew 3:11-12. —Explore: The background to this text(s).

John continues his sermon by pointing out that he is only the *forerunner* of Messiah. Again using vivid language, John believed he was not worthy to either carry (or untie) the sandals of Jesus, a job that was reserved for the lowest of slaves in the Ancient Near East. John the Baptist was making it clear that he...:

...was simply an introducer who was preparing a remnant for the Messiah, and who was baptizing in water those who responded. The Coming One would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Those hearing John’s words would have been reminded of two Old Testament prophecies: Joel 2:28–29 and Malachi 3:2–5... The baptism “with fire” referred to the judging and cleansing of those who would enter the kingdom, as prophesied in Malachi 3. This symbolism was carried through by John who spoke of the separation that occurs when a winnowing fork tosses up grain, wheat is then gathered into the barn, and chaff is burned up. John was saying that the Messiah, when He came, would prepare a remnant (wheat) for the kingdom by empowering and cleansing the people. Those who reject Him (chaff) would be judged and cast into eternal unquenchable fire (cf. Mal. 4:1).<sup>8</sup>

Christ will baptize (immerse) believers with the Holy Spirit and unbelievers with fire. Those who respond are to be immersed in the Spirit and empowered to live a godly life. Fire in both Testaments is associated with judgment when the unsaved are in view (cf. Isa. 9:19; Jer. 4:4; Amos 1:4, 7) and with purification when believers are in view (Isa. 6:6–7; 1 Peter 1:7).<sup>9</sup>

5 Blomberg, *Matthew*.

6 Walvoord, et al, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

7 Martin Luther: *Smalcald Articles*: III 37–38, quoted in *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

8 Walvoord, et al, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

9 Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*.

**Consider/Reflect:** “John was a preacher of repentance, as was Martin Luther, who often emphasized that we believers must not only sincerely confess our sins but also be certain of forgiveness. Thank God for such preachers. [Pray]: Almighty God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Burn my chaff, but quench my sinful passions in the daily washing of Holy Baptism. Amen.”<sup>10</sup>

**Day #4--Thursday, January 15<sup>h</sup>. Read: Matthew 3.13-14.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus now comes to John to be baptized. This moment in Jesus’ mission was not an accidental encounter, a “surprise” as Jesus walked along the road. As the *Lutheran Study Bible* notes, “Jesus traveled at least 15 miles, perhaps much farther, to receive John’s Baptism. The two were cousins (Lk 1:36–45) and likely knew each other.”<sup>11</sup>

As John himself taught, baptism implied repentance from sin. Consequently, since Jesus committed no sin, John questions baptizing Jesus. Why then does Jesus come and allow John to baptize Him?

[W]hen Jesus undergoes the rite, it becomes a matter of great significance both for him and for the Church. It serves as the occasion of the formal beginning of his ministry, wherein he receives the anointing of the Spirit together with the divine attestation of his unique Sonship (the early Church would not have missed the Trinitarian associations). All of this is in keeping with the will of God, who will now bring salvation to the world...In this identification with his people, Jesus shows himself to be one with them in all that they experience. It is as representative of Israel that he gives his life *for* Israel and so completes the task of the Servant.<sup>12</sup>

We do not know from Scripture how much John and Jesus knew each other growing up or how much knowledge John had specifically about Jesus’ mission. However, clearly John the Baptizer seemed to understand that Jesus was unique. As D.A. Carson notes, “Earlier John had difficulty baptizing the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were not worthy of his baptism. Now he has trouble baptizing Jesus because his baptism is not worthy of Jesus.”<sup>13</sup>

Because baptism implies that a person has repented, John balks at baptizing Jesus. Matthew does not explicitly enunciate the doctrine of Christ’s sinlessness, but he seems to hint at it. In v. 11 John has already disclosed his “inferiority complex” in the presence of the Messiah. He now acknowledges his own sinfulness in comparison with Jesus and how the tables ought rightfully to be turned. Jesus should be baptizing John.<sup>14</sup>

**Consider/Reflect:** Jesus goes ahead of us in all things—even in our baptism! Wherever Jesus has been, when we go through the same experiences, we will ultimately be OK. Do you have any fears of the future? Consider this point and trust that Jesus will get you through whatever you are afraid of—He’s already been there and knows what to do!

**Day #5— Friday, January 16<sup>th</sup>. Read: Matthew 3.15-17.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

With the first recorded words of Jesus in Matthew, Jesus convinces John that His baptism is appropriate and necessary. Jesus has come to save sinners and reconcile them to God and one another. The mission and ministry of the church are to make disciples who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live faithful lives. Ultimately, the sacrament of baptism will be a means of grace for the forgiveness of sins and initiate people into the Church! It will be a baptism in the name of the Triune God. Jesus assures John that His baptism is....:

...fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus submitted to John’s Baptism, the same that sinners were undergoing, in order to affirm His identity with sinners and to provide them with perfect righteousness (2 Co 5:21)...Jesus’ Baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry and anticipated His death on the cross (cf Mk 10:38; Rm 6:3). The fact that all four Gospels report the Baptism of Jesus points to its importance. Luther captured the primary meaning for His Baptism: “[Christ] accepted it from John for the reason that he was entering into our stead, indeed, our person, that is, becoming a sinner for us, taking upon himself the sins which he had not committed, and wiping them out and drowning them in his holy baptism” (AE 51:315).<sup>15</sup>

10 *Lutheran Study Bible*.

11 *Ibid.*

12 D.A. Hagner. *Matthew* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998).

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*

15 Martin Luther. *Luther’s Works: American Edition* (AE 51:315), quoted in, *Lutheran Study Bible*.

As Jesus comes up out of the water and the heavens open, we witness an action of the Holy Trinity; the **Father's** voice, Jesus standing in the river Jordan, and the **Holy Spirit** descending in the form of a dove. Warren Wiersbe notes that:

The coming of the Holy Spirit like a dove identified Jesus to John (John 1:31–34), and also assured Jesus as He began His ministry that the Spirit's ministry would always be His (John 3:34). The dove is a beautiful symbol of the Spirit of God in its purity and in its ministry of peace. The first time we see a dove in Scripture is in Genesis 8:6–11. Noah sent out two birds, a raven and a dove; but only the dove came back...The second time the dove was released, it returned with an olive leaf, a symbol of peace...There may be another picture here. The name Jonah means "dove," and he too experienced a baptism! Jesus used Jonah as a type of Himself in death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 12:38–40). Jonah was sent to the Gentiles, and Jesus would minister to the Gentiles.<sup>16</sup>

God's voice from heaven authenticated Jesus' earthly mission. The Spirit "resting" upon Jesus would also reflect Isaiah's prophecy that the Spirit of God would rest on the Messiah (*Isaiah 11:2*). Jesus' identity as God's beloved Son would soon be tested by the devil in the wilderness.

**Consider/Reflect:** When were you baptized? If you have any pictures or videos, look at them today/this week. On that day you were "sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever!" (Baptismal liturgy) You were brought into God's family (the Church) and had the same words said over you by God as Jesus did: "You are my beloved son/daughter; with you I am well pleased!" (If you have not yet been baptized—call Pastor Seth today! ☺)

**Day #6-Saturday, January 17<sup>th</sup>. Read: Again: Matthew 3.13-17.—Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**

The baptism of Jesus stands as the inauguration of Jesus' ministry. Jesus' baptism by John would both connect these two individuals as had been earlier prophesied, as well as be an embodiment of the coming kingdom John announced.

Baptism symbolized the turning from the old to the new. Jesus' baptism was His own symbolic act of identification with the new, of participation in the kingdom of God. Jesus' use of the word "righteousness" is significant, for righteousness is the word which denotes right relationship. Jesus' act of being baptized was a witness to the rightness of His relationship in the kingdom and to His right relationship with God, the sovereign of this kingdom.<sup>17</sup>

God's words about Jesus at His baptism are also Old Testament Scriptures; again, revealing both the fulfillment of divine prophecy of the coming Messiah, as well as Jesus' continuity with Judaism. Referring to God's voice as the "third certification" of Jesus and His mission, Augsburger and Ogilvie point out that:

The voice said, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" The statement has two phrases, each a quotation from the Old Testament. In Psalm 2:7, a psalm which described the Messiah as the coming King, we read, "You are my Son." In Isaiah 42:1, the description of the suffering servant, we read, "in whom I delight." At Jesus' baptism He is given this divine confirmation from the Father, a word of His being and His behavior, of His acceptance and His approval. The person of the King is now introduced as the Son of God!<sup>18</sup>

**Consider/Reflect:** "Because Jesus is our substitute, we need not fear God's wrath and punishment for our sins. We are washed clean by the blood of the Lamb (Rv 7:14), who prepared the waters of Baptism for us. [Pray]: Lord Jesus, You stood next to sinners in the waters of the Jordan. Stand with me now, and wash away my sins. Amen."<sup>19</sup>

16 W.W. Wiersbe. *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1996).

17 M.S. Augsburger and L.J. Ogilvie. *Matthew* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982).

18 Ibid.

19 *Lutheran Study Bible*.