

Luke 3:21-22 7-8-18  
**Attending God's Baptism**

We have spent the previous three Sundays looking at John the Baptizer – the man, the message, the mission. We come this morning to the most interesting moment in the life of John when he introduced the Lord Jesus to his public ministry and baptized him. **21-23** *Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."* **23** *When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli.*

If you hang out with us Christians for very long you will become familiar with what might be called *Trinity* talk. We speak of God as Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. We baptize with that formula. We sing hymns about Father, Spirit, Son, God in three persons, and the blessed Trinity. We have Trinity churches and Trinity colleges. We believe that the one true God subsists in three distinct but unified persons. The Father, usually referred to in Scriptures simply as *God*. The Son, who is Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit. Now what this has to do with our verses this morning is this – in the baptism of Jesus we find present and operative all three persons of the Trinity. The Son was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended and the Father spoke. Let's ponder first what Jesus the Son did in our story.

We are told simply that He was baptized along with many others by John. Anything surprising there? I mean – how many of you have been baptized? Not so unusual to be baptized, but John was preaching that baptism was about the forgiveness of sins. Baptism represents moral cleansing and here is Jesus, whom we regard as divine, whom we regard as sinless, receiving an ordinance designed for sinners. Confusing. You ask, *Why did Jesus get baptized?* And you are not the first to ask that. Who was the first to ask that question? It was John the Baptist. Matthew 3:**13-14** *Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"* John saw an incongruity in what Christ was doing. It didn't seem right. Baptism was for sinners. Jesus was pure. Jesus responds in **15** *But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."* Then he permitted Him. Now, I don't get all that this may mean. But there is here a clear indication that Christ's baptism was unique. Some

have suggested that just as He died in the place of sinners he was also ceremonially cleansed in the place of sinners. I don't know. But the context of the event certainly indicates that, at his baptism, Jesus publicly assumed His role as Messiah. This was His coming out – sort of His ordination and the baptism represented God's anointing Him with power for the mission which lay before Him. In the Old Testament, the priests were baptized as part of their ordination into the priesthood. Jesus was beginning to function as prophet and priest, so to fulfill "all righteousness" it would be appropriate for him to be baptized as one engaging in the ultimate priestly function of offering Himself as a sacrifice. But, whatever the purpose, by submitting to the baptism Christ was humbling himself. He thus identifies Himself with the people. He submitted to this common religious act of humans and sinners. John saw it for what it was – amazing condescension. Jesus humbled Himself and it is here at His baptism that He is also empowered. God exalts the humble and with the humble is power.

Look at what happens 21 *Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying.* Matthew and Mark both indicate that Jesus had walked out from the water and begun to pray. And what happened when He prayed? 21d *Heaven was opened.* The power of a praying Savior. When Jesus prays heaven is opened. The New Testament tells us that Jesus now is still praying – praying for us! In the heavenlies! That is great news. I married my wife, in part, because I wanted to make sure she would pray for me. Beth is a great one to have praying for you. I really believe that. But Jesus is even greater and thank God that He now is praying for us. Hebrews says that He always lives to make intercession for us. What a gift!

Three times in the life of Jesus there was heard a voice from heaven. Three times. And the one thing that links the three is that each time it happened while Jesus was praying. In John 12:28 Jesus prays, 12:28 *Father, glorify Your name. Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."* Luke 9:28-29 *He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.* We call this *the Transfiguration*. It took place during prayer and God here again spoke audibly 35 *Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!"* What I am saying brethren is this: if we want to see an outpouring of the Spirit, then pray. You've likely heard II Chronicles 7:14, that call to humbles ourselves and pray. That is what Jesus did. He humbled himself, submitting to baptism and he prayed. That is the price of revival and that is the power of ardent prayer. By prayer we link

ourselves with the Power on High and you never know what fantastic things will be done through your prayers. Our verse says, *While he was praying, heaven was opened.*

So, the Son of God's role in this baptism event – he submitted to baptism by John and he prayed. Now we look at what the Holy Spirit did. **21d-22a** *While He was praying, heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove.* What a great event in redemptive history! Jesus and John saw this – that, we know. It is uncertain whether or not others saw this take place. But this is where you get the dove symbol for the Holy Spirit. Next to the cross, the dove is the most widely-used Christian symbol. It represents the Holy Spirit who here took a dove-like form, not becoming a dove, but looking like one, and descended on Jesus. When the Holy Spirit comes on a man it is always a descent. He comes from heaven. Now, today the most popular mode of water baptism among Bible-loving people is immersion. But immersion as a mode is not consistent with what baptism represents. Water baptism is a sacrament, a visible, outward symbol of an invisible, inward event. Water baptism symbolizes Spirit baptism and if you are consistent with Scripture how are you going to administer the water? Is anyone in Scripture dunked into the Holy Spirit? What is the biblical language? The Spirit is always *poured* out on men. He *descends* and if we are to faithfully represent that we must do so by pouring or sprinkling the water onto the individual. We baptize by pouring or sprinkling because it is Scriptural so to do. After Jesus is baptized with water He is baptized with the Spirit who descends upon Him as a dove.

Now, the great significance of this event is that here Jesus the Messiah, the Anointed One is being anointed by God with power. Remember that Jesus is around thirty years old when this takes place. His baptism by the Holy Spirit marks and makes the difference between Jesus the righteous carpenter and Jesus the healer-preacher. What has Jesus done for thirty years? Any miracles? Any sermons on the mount? No. He was not equipped for those things until this time and this event when the Holy Spirit falls. The Spirit does not come upon Jesus to make him righteous. He is already that. The Spirit comes to give Him power to heal and to cast out demons and to preach the word. The baptism of the Holy Spirit on a life is just for that purpose – to equip and enable someone for ministry. Speaking to his disciples after the resurrection Jesus say Acts 1:**8** *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses.* They had been told to wait before they went out preaching the gospel until the Spirit came at Pentecost, when He was poured out upon His church and gave the apostles the ability to do what Christ called them to do. Just as the apostles waited until Pentecost to begin their ministry, Jesus waited until His baptism. Now, endued with power by God's Spirit the mild-mannered carpenter from Nazareth

becomes the Healer, the Prophet; the Messiah. It fulfills the promise of Isaiah 42:1 *Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him.*

In the record of his life, Jesus demonstrates unlimited power. From where did this come? Was Jesus powerful because He was God incarnate or because He was empowered by the Spirit? I would say the latter. It means that when Jesus took on humanity he took on its weaknesses. Humans can't raise the dead, right? But Elijah did it. Paul did it. *But that was God doing it through them.* Same with Jesus. When Jesus performs miracles, He does them just as did Peter and Paul, through or by the power of God's Spirit and He also says that what He seems to do God is doing through Him. Jesus says this in Matthew 12:28 *If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* Jesus implies that His work is by God's Spirit working through Him. Peter says this in his first sermon. Acts 2:22 (NIV) *Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him.* Who did the miracles? God. Jesus healed by the Spirit who enabled. The miracles of Jesus did not prove directly that he was God. Paul's miracles did not prove he was God. The miracles of Moses did not prove he was God. What they prove is that Jesus is of God, from God, endorsed by God. We know He is God because He told us so.

Now, the power granted to Jesus on earth was indeed greater than that ever granted to a man. John 3:34 *He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.* That referring to Jesus – the Spirit given without measure, without limit. Elsewhere, when men are given the Holy Spirit's gifts it is *with measure*, it is limited. Ephesians 4:7 *To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.* But no so with Jesus. Although He was dependent on the Spirit's power, he had full access to that power.

So, the Spirit equipped Jesus for His ministry and you know what? The Spirit of God also equips you for your ministry. Scripture tells us that every believer is to be a minister and every believer has gifts for the special ministry to which he or she has been called, whether that is a ministry of evangelism or helping or hospitality or encouragement or wisdom or teaching. The Holy Spirit is yours if you are in Christ. You have His power in measure, but you have His power in truth. Walk and serve in the confidence as a steward of the Lord's gift

Alright, now we have seen from Luke 3 what the Son did and what the Spirit did – now consider what God the Father did. Verse 22 says *A voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."* I wonder what language the voice was in. I wonder if it was a deep, resonant voice as we imagine it. Who knows? What really counts is what God said about Jesus.

What the Father does here is bear verbal witness to His Son. When I was a young athlete my father used to express his pride at my successes by loudly saying, “*That’s my boy!*” And in a far greater way our God does this for His Son. Jesus would later say, John 5:**37a** *The Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me.* And again John 8:**18b** *The Father who sent Me testifies about Me.* I believe, in part, he was referring to this event. There were three times when God said, *This is My Son.* The first is here at His baptism. The second time is at the transfiguration Luke 9:**35** *Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!”* There is one other occasion when God said this. In the most booming voice of all, God said it at the resurrection when He broke the chains of death and shouted for all the world to hear, *This is my Son. Listen to Him. He is Lord.* In Romans 1 Paul writes of the gospel **3-4** *Concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared.* Declared how? With an audible voice? No **4** *Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.* And the book of Acts records how the apostles went about preaching how God has born witness that Jesus is Lord by raising Him from the dead. Our God has already, you see, given his view on who Jesus is. The world has yet to learn about God’s view of Joel Osteen or Donald Trump or Dan Hendley, but God has spoken out on who Jesus is. Now, the Muslims and Jews say he is just a prophet. The Jehovah Witnesses say he is the highest creation. Christian Science says he was just a man. Religious liberals take Jesus to be a wonderful guy and a good moral teacher. Atheists think him a fraud. God says, *He is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.* Whom do you believe?

Now – we know God’s view on Jesus. What is His view on you? Is He pleased with you? Wouldn’t you love to hear the Father’s voice affirm His pleasure in you? Our comfort now is that I am, you are, Brother, Sister, one in Christ, united with Him so that in Him we are also well-pleasing. We are! The righteousness of Christ is accredited to us and Christ lived the perfect life. He made this incredible claim John 8:**29c** (NIV) *I always do what pleases him.* Wow! And Praise His holy name! The righteousness of Jesus is ours and so the Father can rejoice over us, the Father can pronounce us well-pleasing in His sight. God even says this in Zephaniah 3:**17** (ESV) *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.*

We take deep comfort in those gospel truths while we also make it our goal, our ambition to always please the Father as Jesus did. Paul said in Ephesians 5 that God’s child tries to learn and do what is pleasing to the Lord. Do you want that? More than wealth or fame or health or peace?

Pleasing the Lord doesn't generally mean becoming a pastor or missionary or something like that. When God said he was pleased with Jesus he was not talking about His miracles or His preaching or His sacrificial death, it was His obedience at whatever God had given Him to do in those first thirty, quiet years. For thirty years, Jesus waited. He worked as a carpenter. He provided for His family. We don't know what else. We just know He was doing what His father wanted. He wasn't making headlines. He was simply faithful, simply obedient.

So, so – if God has called you to be a mom – be a faithful mom and don't envy the missionary. If God has called you to be an engineer, do a good job, live a holy life. Please God, that is what counts and you can do that as a baker, barber, butcher, or beautician. Our Lord, by His life sanctified what we call “secular” labor. Think of it. In the first quarter century AD the godliest man in the world was a carpenter. For all we know that may still be the case in our day. What mattered in Christ's life was that He did as the Father wanted, as a son, as a carpenter, as a teacher, as a healer and as a sacrifice for sin. What matters in your life is that you do the same, pleasing God in whatever He called you to do and to be, even as you remember that our acceptance with the Father is always in and through Christ Himself.

Wonderfully, God said of Jesus *You are my beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased*. I close with this application and these words from Luke 9:35 – *Listen to Him*. Since God has borne witness to Christ, hear Him. We all have a philosophy, a view of the world and life. Where do you get yours? Your parents? Some college professor? The cast of *Friends*? Stephen Colbert? The voices spouting forth their views are numerous. How do you decide what is right? In all of history, only one man has risen from the grave by His own power. Only one man has walked on water and only one man has ever had God say of Him, *This is my Son, with whom I am well-pleased, Listen to Him*. I think I will. His word has a distinctive and unique authority. Will you listen to him? Learn from Him? Trust in Him? If so, I challenge you to make a commitment to read through the gospel of Luke this month. Just that. In my Bible it is only fifty-four pages, but it is a way to learn of Jesus – who He is and what He says. Pray about that would you?