

Sermon: Jesus' Baptism

Text: Luke 3:21-38

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Introduction: We do not hear a great deal from the Gospel records of Jesus' early life. His first thirty years are virtually undocumented. In fact, Mark has no narrative of Jesus' birth, no record of any childhood appearances in the temple, nothing at all until we hear that Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River by John ([Mark 1:9](#)). In what they call the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) there are a scant ten verses about Jesus' baptism, and John only alludes to it in the opening chapter of his gospel. Luke uses two verses to tell us of Jesus' baptism.

For Luke, John, the Baptist fades away into the background. John, by his preaching, showed the way to righteousness; but later, the way to a right relationship with God would be provided through Jesus' death on the cross.

[Isaiah 53:11 \(NIV\)](#) ¹¹ After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Jesus' baptism is his first public appearance as a now 30-year-old adult that we have recorded in the Bible.

[Luke 3:21-22 \(NIV\)](#) ²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

We must ask: what is Luke's purpose in recording Jesus' baptism and sharing his genealogy? Luke tells us of the involvement of God, the Father; Jesus, the Son; and the Holy Spirit in this event.

First of all it is clear that Jesus is endorsing John's ministry, however, more importantly in this account, Luke is trying:

I. To Reveal Jesus Was the Messiah

A. The heavens were opened.

The heavens being opened is a clear sign of God wanting to communicate with his people. He is wanting to reveal his plan of salvation in the person of his Son.

Isaiah 64:1-4 (NIV) ¹Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! ²As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! ³For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. ⁴Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

This is a new beginning with God and his people. Access to God is being reestablished. God is speaking again to his people.

In this second-part of God's revelation:

B. The Holy Spirit marks Jesus' ministry.

The Holy Spirit would not only be a sign of Jesus' ministry, but later it would be his going-away gift to the Church and all who would believe in Him.

It is clear from the text that the Holy Spirit descended in a way that was physically visible. Luke says it was dove-like, not actually a bird. It reminds us of the Spirit superintending over the creation. Its gentleness provides a contrast to judgment.

It must be said clearly at this point that this is not some new revelation to Jesus. He is both God and man (divine and human like us). He has had a clear association with the Holy Spirit. Jesus' conception is through the Holy Spirit (**Matthew 1:20**).

Here, the Holy Spirit's descent is to show the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry and confirms it is from God. Jesus is, indeed, the long-awaited Messiah!

In this third-part of God's revelation:

C. A voice from heaven approves of Jesus.

The voice is not for Jesus' benefit. Jesus is fully aware of his earthly mission. It is for John's and possibly the crowd's enlightenment. Jesus knows what lies ahead. The design for Jesus' messiahship involves a paradox where a King is also a Servant.

The background for this heavenly speech comes directly from a coronation psalm. **Psalms 2:6-7 (NIV)** ⁶"I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." ⁷I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

Matthew recognizes that Jesus is the Son who is God with us: Emmanuel (**1:23**), the Son prophesied by Hosea who was brought out of Egypt (**2:15**).

So that no one is confused, Jesus does not just now become the Son. It is at this time, however, he is revealed as such.

The function of a king even in the Old Testament was to serve God and the people. That is why we hear the prophet Isaiah in the background of this passage in Luke.

Isaiah 42:1 (NIV) ¹“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Jesus with his disciples will hear this confirming voice again later on the Mount of transfiguration as the Master begins his journey toward Jerusalem and his eventual death (**Luke 9:35**).

In this account Luke is trying:

II. To Reveal the Character of the Messiah

A. Jesus is willing to humble himself.

Jesus is a part of the crowd coming for baptism. He has no delusions about his place of importance. He is only doing what God wants him to do. Baptism is always intended to be an act of humility submitting to God’s will. “As Jesus goes into the waters of baptism, he identifies with his people in their need; that is, he identifies with the sinful humanity he has come to save.” - Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary, Matthew*, p. 140

Jesus, instead of being upfront - preaching for repentance, he was in the audience - not as a fellow sinner in need of repentance, but as a man who also needed to follow God’s leading.

B. Jesus was a man of prayer.

It seems to me that since the Son of God was so involved in prayer both before and after his baptism, how much more should we be a people of prayer!

Throughout the church’s history when God’s people pray, the Holy Spirit gets involved with His people. Jesus’ messiahship is announced by the Holy Spirit. Jesus will soon be led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. And later the Holy Spirit will lead Jesus in power into Galilee to do ministry.

“Just as Jesus was praying when the Holy Spirit came upon him, so the church was in prayer awaiting the promised coming of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 1:8, 14**), and, after the manner of Jesus, they continued in prayer (**Acts 2:42; 3:1; 4:31; 6:4; 12:12; 13:3**).” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 52

Most of *us* could have a better prayer life. Maybe if we prayed more, God would speak to us more through his Word and his people.

C. Jesus was a different kind of Messiah.

The people of Jesus time were expecting a different kind of Messiah. They thought the Messiah would appear first in Jerusalem not in the desert. The Jews believed the Messiah would reclaim the Davidic throne, yet Jesus went out of his way to avoid politics. Instead of the temple of Solomon, the Christ would talk of his body as the temple. Later Paul would develop this principle to let us know that followers of Jesus are temples that house the Holy Spirit. Some were even looking for an Elijah-like prophet. That is why they thought John the Baptist might be the Coming One.

Jesus' strength and power came from love rather than political power, care rather than coercion, and humbleness rather than regal ostentation.

Michael Wilkins (Matthew, pp. 145-146) says that “expectations *were* so entrenched that they had difficulty actually accepting God’s work among them ... our familiarity with the truth numbs us to the reality. As Malcolm Muggeridge says, ‘The coming of Jesus into the world is the most stupendous event in human history.’”

God became a man - one of us! Amazing!

In this account Luke is trying:

III. To Reveal Jesus' Genealogy

This genealogy by Luke is different than what we find in Matthew’s gospel. Luke takes it all the way back to Adam where Matthew’s only goes back to Abraham.

Luke 3:23-38 (NIV) ²³ Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, ²⁴the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, ²⁵the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, ²⁶the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, ²⁷the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, ²⁸the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, ²⁹the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, ³⁰the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, ³¹the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David,

³²the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, ³³the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, ³⁴the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, ³⁵the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, ³⁶the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, ³⁷the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Kenan, ³⁸the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

It is a little humorous to me that John the Baptist had just warned his listeners not to depend solely on their connection to Abraham, and here Luke is using a genealogy to establish Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

If you think about it, these early chapters in Luke are stories about *arrivals*. We read about the births of John and Jesus. They both *burst* on the scene. It is the arrival of the Kingdom, the Messiah, and with him - the promise of redemption.

One might also notice that Luke has inserted Jesus' genealogy between his call and ministry. This is also the way it is done in the book of Exodus (6:14-25). The account of Moses' call and formal ministry is also interrupted by his genealogy.

Part of Luke's purpose about Jesus here is:

A. To disclose his age

“A person's age frequently was given in multiples of five. Luke's chronology is only very general.” - Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, p. 147

If Jesus begins his ministry too early, he will not be believed because of his age and perceived lack of experience.

Luke may be thinking about the age when King David took his throne and began to reign (II Sam. 5:4). Even more than that, thirty years old is the age when a priest can begin to serve God (Num. 4:3). Jesus is King of kings. He will be the last High Priest. Jesus will not only serve as priest, but also as a sacrifice.

Another part of Luke's purpose about Jesus here is:

B. To disclose his humanity

There are certainly three very important men to which Jesus is related.

1. David

The Messiah was to be from the line of David, so Luke includes the monarch's name to produce evidence for Jesus' claim of messiahship. This establishes Jesus' rights and in reality declares him to be king of Israel. He is truly the *Son of David!*

2. Abraham

The connection with Abraham puts him in the company of one of the greatest O.T. patriarchs. It ties Jesus to the national promise and covenant with the people of Israel and beyond that - all nations. God was going to fulfill his promise to Abraham that had been reaffirmed with Moses and the twelve tribes. He would do that through Jesus, the Messiah.

The Apostle Paul tells us: **Galatians 3:26-29 (NIV)** ²⁶You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

3. Adam

The reason Adam is mentioned is to show the Messiah's connection with all humanity. It takes us back to creation and God's original purposes to be in a close relationship with man. Jesus is even called the "last Adam" who is a life-giving Spirit (**I Corinthians 15:45**).

There has always been a delicate balance between Jesus' humanity and divinity. He becomes ineffective if you remove either from his nature, but here we are assured that Jesus is like us.

The Hebrew writer tells us: **Hebrews 4:15 (NIV)** ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

Adam brought death through sin. Jesus brings life through his death. Adam was selfish and shortsighted. Jesus was selfless and had eternity in mind.

"In a sense the only genealogy that counts for us is the one that connects us to Jesus." - Bock, *Luke*, p. 125

The last part of Luke's purpose about Jesus here is:

C. To disclose the beginning of Jesus' formal ministry.

The genealogy is in place to provide Jesus' human credentials. His baptism and the Holy Spirit are to announce the beginning of his earthly ministry, and Luke invites us to look at what will follow. God will make us an offer no one should refuse.

Conclusion: “Jesus is the one in whom the hopes of Israel coalesce, but God’s promises must be appropriated by personal discipleship.” - Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 82

“To know God one must know the appointed one. In short, to be a part of the kingdom, one must know the King.” - Bock, *Luke*, p. 121

Next week we will see Jesus being led out into the wilderness to be tempted. The Devil resists the will of God for His creation.

“It probably was no surprise to Jesus, nor should it be to us: good news always has its enemies. Love generously and hatred will put on boots and helmet; speak truthfully and falsehood begins to charm its auditors; live simply and extravagance sets up a carnival across the street; serve faithfully and self-interest renews its seduction of human pride.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 54

There was great difficulty in the first century in recognizing who Jesus was and the purpose of his ministry among his people. It seems to me that we also may need to reshape and rethink what it means to be a part of the kingdom of God. Today there is still a resistance to the plan of God, but people do so at their own peril.

Jesus is still the only way to the Father. His plan of salvation is the only valid offer. Jesus is not one among many sons of God; He is the unique Son of God who will save us if only we will put our trust in Him.