

# Why Was Jesus Baptized?

Matthew 3:11–17

## Introduction

The mother of Jesus (Mary) and the mother of John (Elizabeth) were cousins. So that would make John and Jesus second cousins. You may remember that Mary went to stay with Elizabeth while Elizabeth was three months expecting and Mary had just found out she was expecting. This stay lasted six months—right up until the time that John the Baptist was born. It is very likely that, as children, Jesus and John played together.

Mary and Elizabeth were close. Of all the family members that Mary could have stayed with, she chose Elizabeth. For six months, they each carried babies in their womb while living under the same roof. That will make you close.

Between the end of Matthew 2 and the beginning of Matthew 3, at least thirty years have passed. In chapter 2, Jesus was only 1 or 2 years old, and in chapter He is 30 years old. We know very little about what took place in the life of Jesus over these 30 years. We have only a few verses in the Bible that speak to any event during this period and they are found in Luke 2:42–49 when Jesus was lost in Jerusalem at age 12. When they finally found Him, He said, “Did you not know that I would be about my Father’s business?” Of course, He was not talking about His step-father Joseph. He was speaking about His Heavenly Father God.

Eventually, Jesus and John lost contact with one another. We are not sure about what age, but Jesus would grow up in obscurity in Nazareth, and John would go live off the grid in a desert.

John the Baptist was like the original Duck Dynasty Patriarch. He had a long beard, he ate off the land, he stirred up controversies, and he pointed people to Jesus. John lived in a nearly uninhabitable region that spanned the entire length of the Dead Sea. When we arrive at this text, both men are coming out of 30 years of seclusion.

We are going to dive into the text in a minute, but first I want us to see a unique word that God chose to use for baptism. The Greek word is *baptizo*. It means “to dip, immerse, or plunge.” It is the only word every used for any baptism in the Bible (not just the baptism of Jesus).

A biblical baptism is a *baptizo*. This word never refers to sprinkling or pouring. There are Greek words that refer to those, but this is not it. Two examples will prove this. When Philip

baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, both went down into the water (Acts 8:38). Also, John chose to baptize at Aenon because there was plenty of water there (John 3:23).

John was so well known for baptizing people that he is actually called John the Baptist (verse 1). If we stick with the meaning of the word, we could come up with other names for John. This morning I told you about John the Paver, right? He paved the road for Jesus to come. We could also call him John the Immerser, John the Dipper, or John the Plunger (not Plumber), because the word *baptizo* means to dip, to plunge, or to immerse.

Baptism is heavily debated today. Some Presbyterians, Catholics, and Methodists prefer sprinkling or pouring instead of immersion. If we are sticking with the Bible, we cannot deny that the word always speaks of someone going into water and coming out of water. You cannot go into a pour or sprinkle and you cannot come out of a pour or sprinkle.<sup>1</sup>

Baptism by immersion was not heavily debated until the Middle Ages. Even the Roman Catholic Church did immersion before the Middle Ages. Only during the Middle Ages did it become finally permissible to sprinkle.

**Transition:** Notice in verse 13 – Jesus came with a crowd of other people who were coming to be baptized from Galilee. It would have taken months for people to travel these great distances. So let’s answer this question tonight, “Why Was Jesus Baptized?” I want to give you three reasons.

### **1. Jesus was baptized to identify with you.**

Jesus deliberately identified Himself with Adam’s sinful race. He ate with them. He spent time with them. He wore flesh with them. As a child, He wore diapers with them. He learned to speak, He went to Jewish school, He worked a carpentry job, He lived life with people. 2 Corinthians 5:21 shows the length He was willing to go to identify with us: “For He made Him who knew no sin [to be] sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

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<sup>1</sup> The Southern Baptist understanding of baptism stands in conflict with the official doctrine of traditional Roman Catholicism and even some Protestant groups who teach that in the act of baptism there is the impartation of grace without preexisting faith. This belief that grace is imparted to the subject of baptism is why it is called a sacrament. Baptism dramatically pictures our entering into covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The Lord’s Supper portrays our continuing in this relationship. See Daniel Akin, “Part I: Baptism,” accessed September 12, 2015, <http://www.danielakin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/11-baptism-manuscript-mg.pdf>.

Jesus never sinned, but at the cross He became sin for us. The wrath of God that should have been poured out on you was poured out on Jesus.

Isaiah 53:12 shares the same truth:

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,  
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,  
Because He poured out His soul unto death,  
And He was numbered with the transgressors,  
And He bore the sin of many,  
And made intercession for the transgressors.

You see, Jesus lived a life we could not live, died a death we could never die, and rose victorious like we could never rise. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.” Jesus was dipped into the water to identify with a fallen race that needed redemption. Our baptism is a one-time public identification with Him, and His baptism was a one-time public identification with us.

When Jesus came to John, John did not want to baptize Jesus (verses 13–15). John was saying, “This is a baptism for sinners. You are not a sinner. I am a sinner. I need to be baptized by You. I am in the same class of those who are being baptized, Jesus, but You are not. You are different. You are sinless. It has been a long time since I saw you last, but I know this: You lived a life I could not live.”

Jesus informed John that it was okay to baptize Him. This was in the plan of God. “I have not sinned—true; but I am doing this to identify with those who have sinned.” These are the first recorded words of Jesus since He was 12 when He said, “I am about my Father’s business.” He is still about His Father’s business, and He says here, “Baptism is My Father’s business.”

Before we move on to the next reason, let’s take a look at the Trinity in this portion of Scripture. This text shows all three persons of the Godhead coming together at the same time in one place.

- We see God the Father giving His approval of the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. He said, “I am well pleased.” God is only pleased with perfection.
- We see God the Son, Jesus Christ, being baptized for the purpose of identification.
- We see God the Holy Spirit like a dove, or in the form of a dove, resting (coming) upon Jesus. This was the beginning of Jesus public ministry. In about 3.5 years he would face the cross.

- He did not receive the Holy Spirit at this time. He is God. He is equal with the Spirit. He has always had the Spirit because He is one with the Spirit.
- We have here the public commissioning of the public ministry of Jesus.

Have you ever wondered why at Jesus' baptism we find a dove descending upon Jesus? Why a dove? He is often pictured in Scripture as a lion and a lamb. Why not one of those? This was not a vision. This was a real event. And in a very real way God was making a statement about the people that Jesus would identify with. There were a few animals that people would sacrifice for an offering in the Old Testament. One of those was a bullock. The wealthy could afford to bring the bullock as a sacrifice. Another animal was the lamb. The lamb would be an animal that the middle class could afford. The final animal would be a dove. What would a Jew see when they saw a dove? What would they think about? They would think about the offering for the poor man. The man who did not have much to offer. They would think of an offering that would be acceptable for all people.

**Transition:** Jesus was baptized to identify with us, and, secondly, he was baptized as an example for us.

## **2. Jesus was baptized as an example for you.**

This baptism marks the phasing out of John the Baptist's ministry and beginning of Jesus' ministry.

Let's look at a biblical theology of Baptism.

- In the Old Testament, only people who were Gentiles were baptized. The Jews did not have this requirement. By coming for baptism, a Gentile was saying, "I am an outsider who wants to follow the Jewish God—Yahweh." They would be walking away from other religions and embracing the God of Israel.
- John's Baptism was unique. It was a baptism of repentance. This meant that those coming to be baptized were admitting that they were sinners, and they were repenting of that sin.
  - So people coming from Jerusalem and Judea being baptized was astounding because they were admitting that their Jewishness was not enough.
  - That is why some were furious with John. By telling them they needed to be baptized, he was "degrading" them to the status of a Gentile.
  - John said, "The kingdom of heaven is coming and you are not ready." BUT I am of Abraham. John says you are not ready.

- You need the same baptism as a Gentile proselyte.

Everyone who came to baptism came under John's rule. John says, "If you come to my baptism you come by my terms."

Gentiles were baptized in the Old Testament to proselytize themselves into Judaism. They could not become Jews, but they could follow this rite.

Jesus is modeling something that later He will command all believers to partake of. Jesus is being an example here. He will later require it in the Great Commission of every believer.

**Transition:** Jesus was baptized to identify with you, to be an example for you, and finally . . .

### 3. Jesus was baptized as a picture for you.

Baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was baptized to identify with us, and now we are baptized to identify with him.



Our baptism pictures a violent death. We can no longer depend on our heritage, our good works, our success, or our morality. We are dying to man's ways of saving himself. We are dying with Christ.

The burial is symbolic of a river of death—a river of burial. Let's think about the landscape where John was baptizing in the Jordan River: "From its source high in the mountains of Lebanon, the Jordan flows southward through the torturous valley until it buries itself in the arid waters of the Dead Sea (about 1400 ft. below sea level), from which it has no outlet except evaporation."<sup>2</sup>

When we come out of the water we are picturing the resurrection of Christ and our future resurrection.

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<sup>2</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 58.

## Conclusion

I am shocked about how many Christians have never been baptized. If that is you, then quickly get baptized because you are living in disobedience. “Though other kinds of professions of public professions of faith have become common—raising hands, walking aisles, taking stands—baptism is the biblical, visible, public picture of saving identification with Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 58.

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