

Mark 1:4-11  
Jesus' Baptism  
Sunday January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017

The deep meaning of this text can be easily missed or easily dismissed if the richness of the symbolism and acts in this scripture are not understood.

Yes, the passage tells of the preaching of John the Baptizer and the baptism of Jesus, but what does that mean and what does it mean to us? And why did Jesus at his insistence undergo a baptism for the forgiveness of sin when he was sinless?

Let's begin by understanding who John the Baptist is, where he was and why. In verse 4 it says, "John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins."

The "Wilderness" or "desert" has always been important to the Hebrew people. It is in the desert that they wandered for 40 years. It is there they paid for their sins.



It is there they became a people, adopted as God's children, and first given the Spirit.

For the Hebrews to go out into "the wilderness" was in itself an act of repentance--"Repentance" being a turning to or returning to God and away from sin.

John was in the desert and through his preaching invited the Jews to turn or return to God. The signs of them doing this were a return to the wilderness and his baptism.

Jews baptized people in John's day, but only converts to Judaism. Jews that were born Jews were not baptized; so it was scandalous for them to show up at the Jordan to be baptized. It was as if they were saying I wasn't a Jew, but now I am.

So **first**, John was in the place of returning to God, or repentance—the wilderness.

**Second**, he was also **preaching a gospel of repentance**.

And **third** he was symbolizing it by **“baptism” a sign of repentance and becoming part of the People of God—the Jews**.

These 3 were powerful signs and symbols calling the people of Jerusalem and Judah to come in mass to the Jordan River to confess their sins, repent and be baptized.

And so the expectation was high that John was the Messiah and the end times were near for one of the signs of the end times was such a baptism and John was held to be the 1<sup>st</sup> prophet sent by God to Israel in 300 years.

And then in verse 6 it describes John's clothing and food: **“John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey.”**

The significance of this was it was the dress and food of a prophet and not just any prophet, but **the prophet Elijah**.



Elijah was the prophet who was prophesied to return immediately preceding the Messiah. So these signs heightened the expectations of a Messiah soon to come if not already there in John the Baptist.

The turning or returning of the nation of Israel to the desert for repentance and baptism, the appearance of a prophet in word, dress and action all pointed to a special time in God's plan. It was **"Kairos" time, the time in which God breaks into our world.**

John, though, immediately wants to squash any thought that he is the Messiah for in verses 7 & 8 **"He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

In Greek the word used here for "stronger" is one that is used only for a spiritual being. John is saying a person more **"spiritually powerful"** than me is coming who will empower you with the Spirit of God.

He was saying your sins will not only get washed away through confession, repentance and baptism; you will receive power to do the will of God through the One who is coming.

Now in verse 9 Jesus of Nazareth is baptized by John. It simply states, **"About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River."** We've heard and read this so many times that we fail to ask why? Why did Jesus at his insistence undergo a baptism for the remission of sin when he was sinless?

Why should the Son of God, the sinless Lamb of God be baptized? Especially when it was held in Jesus' day that whoever baptized you was in a superior religious position to you?

Was John the Baptizer superior to Jesus? Of course, not. In verse 7b John stated he wasn't worthy to do a menial task that even a slave wasn't required to do i.e. untying Jesus' sandal thongs.

No, John wasn't superior and Jesus wasn't confessing any sins and having them washed away in baptism. Something much more

profound was going on like what went on for us when Jesus died on the cross.

In verse 10, as Jesus came up out of the water, Jesus, not the crowd, saw the heavens violently ripped apart and the Spirit came down into Him like a dove.



Jesus baptism showed that God in a dramatic way revealed who Jesus was: The Son of God!

In verse 11 where God says, **“You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.”** The Greek here reveals that what God was saying is that Jesus had always been His Son. This wasn’t the point of a divine adoption, but the revelation of who Jesus Christ was!!!

The voice and baptism were a validation of Jesus’ ministry, a revelation of that ministry to the world. God violently broke through the barrier between heaven and earth to reveal who Christ was and to encourage and bless him before His public ministry began. The heavens opened up! He was declared the Son of God and sinless.

So then, once again, why was Jesus baptized? Well, **in His baptism Jesus took upon himself all the sins of all the people to have them washed away in his blood on the cross.**

Baptism is a death to sin and a resurrection to new life. When we are baptized we are baptized into Jesus’ death and are raised to new life through his resurrection. As Romans 6:3-4 says, **“Don't you know that all who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”**

Therefore, we were buried together with him through baptism into his death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too can walk in newness of life.”

**Jesus was baptized to take away our sin!**

Spiritually, we were in Jesus as he was plunged under the water and died the death for our sin. Spiritually we were in Jesus as he came up from the water as we are raised to new life.

It is fascinating to think that **Jesus’ baptism for Him was a validation and blessing of His ministry and for us a washing away of our sin.**

This is a rich act that we as Christians are called to participate in today that does 3 things for us.

**1<sup>st</sup> It grants us forgiveness through our confession of sin.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> It marks us as a child of God.** Whereas Jesus Christ was always God’s son for us it is our sign of adoption. I sometimes have said it’s when we get our God tattoo.

**3<sup>rd</sup> It is our ordination for service.** In baptism the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given.

Even infants when they are baptized are forgiven and cleansed of any sin



as their parents believe on their behalf until they reach the age of accountability, the age of accountability being about 12. This is the age at which Confirmation occurs for most Orthodox Christians and Bar mitzvah and Bat mitzvah for Jewish children.

It is appropriate that today is the day on which our Confirmation Experience begins with a parent meeting after the service.

In baptism God is telling each of us we are his beloved child. And God gives us gifts of the Spirit to use in the world for his ministry.

**If someone asks if you are a minister of God your reply should be "Yes!" for I have been baptized.**

My basic ordination as a Christian is the baptism I received so long ago as an infant. My ordination as an Elder in the Church is to the specific ministries of Word (preaching and teaching) Sacraments (baptism and Holy Communion) and order (organizing the church).

All of us as baptized Christians are ordained to do God's work. Many of you have already discovered your gifts. You have opened that bag of gifts given to you at your baptism. Others are searching for the gifts God has given you to use in the ministry of the church and mission to the world.

I encourage you to search for and use the "gifts of the Holy Spirit" God has already given you! For remember what John said about Jesus, **"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."** Understand and claim your blessing from God, your calling, your ordination and the gifts that came with your baptism.

Remember that in your baptism God first and foremost blessed you and claimed you as His child. You don't have to do something special and important and great for God to delight in you because as the CEB version puts it today, **"in you God finds happiness."**

God has already delighted in you and you actually make him smile. A sleeping baby can do nothing.



It just lies there breathing in and out and yet when we watch a sleeping baby it brings us great happiness. In the middle of the night, even joy. They make us smile.

It is the same with God. Don't spend time in fear and worry and wonder "Am I good enough, gifted enough, sinless enough to be loved by God and do God's work in the world."

The answer is through your baptism "Yes!" you are good enough, gifted enough and sinless enough. God has claimed you and adopted you as his child. God has gifted you with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

And God has washed away all your sins through Jesus' baptism and his death on the Cross.

God is a proud happy Father: Our Father. In your baptism He has given you a bag full of the gifts of His Spirit.

God says to you today to take your gifts, find happiness in my love, and open that bag of gifts.

Find your gifts and go out and play.

Remember your baptism and be thankful.

In Jesus Name amen!

