

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 354, 01-12-2020 † Sunday after Epiphany

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

MATTHEW 3

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John at the Jordan. ¹⁴But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?”

¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John let him. ¹⁶After Jesus was baptized, he immediately went up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens were opened for him! He saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and landing on him, ¹⁷and a voice out of the heavens said, “This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him.”



Jesus was to be known as the “Christ.” This is not the last name of Jesus.

To redeem us sinners, Jesus of Nazareth, our Substitute, had to enter on the public scene in His official ministry. He had to be the “Anointed One,” a.k.a. Messiah or Christ. We sang in the psalm (45:7), “*You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has **anointed** you with the oil of joy ...*” So Jesus first went beyond Jordan to be baptized by John. Before beginning to preach publicly He went to John at the Jordan. There He’d receive the public testimony that He was sent from the Father and anointed with the Holy Spirit.

How Was Jesus Baptized & What Was Poured Out?

Luke 3:23 tells us Jesus was about 30 when he began his ministry. Matthew had already recorded in 3:5 that Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to John, to be baptized and confess their sins. So this great event took place in the presence of great multitude. As soon as Jesus was baptized, John would begin to bear witness of him saying that Jesus was the greater one to come after him.

Ever since the days of the Reformation, baptism has been a subject of controversy among Protestants. This controversy concerns partly the doctrine and partly the way to baptize. The controversy on the doctrine arose when the Swiss reformers began to deny that baptism is a means of grace and to represent it as nothing more than only a sign, or ceremony of reception into the community of the church. Meanwhile the Saxon reformers continued to teach that baptism is a means of grace, a medium and instrument through which God confers his grace and other gifts; He works regeneration; He makes those receiving baptism his children; and He pours out the Holy Spirit. Now baptism is indeed a sign of reception into the community of the church, but not merely an empty ceremony.

The argument most commonly brought against this doctrine of baptism is the question, "How can you believe that a handful of water will wash away sins?" If we did believe this it would be foolishness. For water, more or less, can only wash the body and not the soul. (The ax is in itself a lifeless piece of steel, but in the hands of the lumberjack it becomes a mighty tool, laying low the giants of the forest.) It is the words of institution and promise of Jesus, and not the water, to which we must look.

God is a sovereign Lord who could appoint whatever means he pleases to confer on men the Holy Spirit, and by which to transplant men into His kingdom.

- He chose baptism for such a medium, for to Nicodemus the Lord said, *"Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"* (John 3:6).
- Doubtless referring to these words of the Lord, St. Paul writes, *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior"* (Titus 3:5-6).

It is easy to see that this is describing baptism as an instrument through which the Holy Spirit works regeneration and renewal.

It makes no material difference whether a large or small amount of water is used; whether the water is applied by pouring, sprinkling or washing; or whether the person is applied to the water by immersion. If only the words of institution are preserved and water is used; then Father, Son, and Spirit are there, and it is a valid baptism. Many claim that it has to be immersion or it would be no baptism,

and one of the Scriptures used in support of that thought is our text. Was Jesus baptized by immersion?

First we need to look at the conversation before the baptism. It was almost like a coin toss before the kick-off. Who is baptizing whom today? Wasn't Jesus here to wash the sins of John? John forbade Jesus, saying, "*I need to be baptized by you.*" Jesus conceded that, as far as being a sinner, He did not need baptism. But Jesus argued it must nevertheless be so, because to baptize Him would "*fulfill all righteousness.*"

This is far more important than the "how," or the mode of baptism, to St. Matthew. We aren't given instructional value from the *way* John applied to the water. We aren't told that they went out into the middle of the river, or at least where a man could be lowered and submerged completely. We are only told that Jesus was baptized and "*He immediately went up out of the water.*" Wouldn't this be a pointless sentence if "to baptize" meant "to immerse"? It doesn't say that Jesus went completely under, just that "*He immediately went up out of the water.*" And further, the Greek word "to go up out of" here means "away from," as in, to go "away from" the water, "to go on land." It's the same word used for disembarking or landing when a boat reaches the shore.

So the language does not at all determine whether John and Jesus went into the water or stood at the brink of the water. Much less does the text say whether John baptized Jesus by sprinkling, or by pouring water on Him, or by immersing Jesus in the water. In very old pictures John and Jesus are represented as standing in the water, John with a vessel pouring water over the head of Jesus. It would not have to be this way, but this text determines nothing as to the form or manner in which Jesus was baptized. Similarly no other passage of Scripture which speaks of baptism specifies any particular mode.

Even though it doesn't matter, one suggestion that we do get about a 'pouring' is that the Bible continuously calls Jesus' baptism an "anointing":

- Isaiah 61:1, "*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has **anointed** me to preach good news to the afflicted.*"
- Acts 10:38, "*God **anointed** Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, because God was with him.*"

- And Isaiah 42:1 says to us, "*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I am placing my Spirit on Him.*"

In fact, the word "Christ" means "anointed one." "Messiah" is the same in Hebrew. Here is a wonderful thing; Jesus came to be baptized and anointed with the Holy Spirit because He was serious about fulfilling "all righteousness." He was ready to begin His office of ministry to battle sin, death, and the devil. Remember, Jesus was made true man. As true man, Jesus had set aside His divine glory and power. He would need spiritual strength to "fulfill all righteousness" for us. Therefore, at His baptism the Spirit descended on Him, like a dove. The Holy Spirit not only descended and alighted on Him, but was poured out on Him and remained on Him to give Him benefits along the way.

What benefits would the Spirit give? For that we look again to Isaiah 11:2, "*The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him: the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.*" Wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the Lord—the Holy Spirit was with Him in full measure. The Holy Spirit was with Him to remain on Him and give these benefits to Him.

He who came to Jordan was not a sinner, but he came bearing sins which He had made His own, and He sought in baptism the spiritual strength to bear them.

Therefore we also read that Jesus, "as soon as" He was baptized, "immediately" went up out of the water. As for others John baptized, he doubtless first instructed and exhorted to bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance; but Jesus he neither instructed nor exhorted, because the Holy Spirit was on Jesus to remain on Jesus. Jesus Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit to begin His office as the Christ. He would now do battle for the remission of OUR sins.

Isn't the Father's pleasure of Jesus evidence enough that Jesus Christ did obtain the forgiveness of your sins? And certainly Jesus did not obtain it for himself, but as your Substitute He obtained it for you. Hold fast to Him, for all you who believe and have been baptized have both the Spirit's gifts and the good pleasure of the Father. Nothing in heaven or on earth can condemn you. Not even the gates of hell can prevail against your salvation. For the Lord promised and said, "*The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life*" (John 6:63). Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.