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This study begins a four unit set of Sunday School lessons in the Smyth-Helwys Formations series under the unit title of "Disciples, Servants, and Friends." The studies are taken from the gospels in the New Testament. This first lesson centers on Jesus' baptism, and then explores possible connections to Christian baptism.

Since this narrative in Matthew is a triple tradition -- that is, it is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke -- we will study it from the perspectives of all three gospel writers rather than just from Matthew alone. When the various documents of the New Testament began coming together as authoritative scripture during the centuries after the apostolic age of the first century, a few efforts to weave the story of Jesus into a single story (e.g., the Muratorian Canon) were rejected in favor of keeping a fourfold gospel story with distinct perspectives. The conviction was that Christians could profit more by having these four accounts than by just one account.

## I. **Context**

Both the literary and historical contexts of our passage are important, as is the case always in Bible study. Thus we will take a look at both the internal and external aspects of both.

### a. **Historical**

First is the issue of the compositional history, the **external history**, of the Matthean Gospel. Because we have studied Matthew's gospel previously, I will simply allude to one of those lessons for the details, Matt. 3:1-12. Here is the conclusion reached in that study, which also serves as the viewpoint on that topic for this study:

For me, it's better to speak of the Matthean community, without fully assuming the early church tradition, as the source of this document. This divinely inspired document arose out of a desire to defend the belief in Jesus as the promised Messiah prophesied in the Hebrew Bible. Evidently this need was occasioned by the First Jewish War (appx. 66-70 AD), which resulted in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and a huge fear among Jewish people for the continuing existence of their way of life and religious heritage. The religious community of mostly Jewish believers, possibly in the Roman province of Syria in either Damascus or Antioch -- or both -- came under strong pressure to abandon their Christian faith in favor of the synagogue tradition of Judaism as a way to help preserve that threatened heritage. God inspired this community -- along with individuals within it -- to produce the Gospel of Matthew in order to demonstrate just the opposite. In order to be consistent with what God had begun in the Old Testament faithful Jews should accept Jesus as their Messiah, since Christ represented the culmination of the Old Testament revelation and promises for His covenant people.

Presupposed in this Redactional Critical perspective is also the conviction that the Matthean community had access to Mark's Gospel, as well as a document known simply as Q (=Quelle, the German word for source), in the writing of his story of Jesus. Additionally, some other sources were available and surface as

narratives and sayings which are found only in the first gospel and not in any of the others. How that will impact the study of our passage is summarized by Donald Hagner (*Matthew*, vol 33a of the *Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems):

Matthew appears to be dependent upon Mark for the main content of the passage although he does not at all follow Mark closely. Vv 14–15, on the other hand, are drawn from Matthew's private source (M), unless we are to attribute them to his own historicizing of a theological point (see below). The occurrence of non-Matthean vocabulary in the passage suggests that Matthew here is to some extent dependent upon oral tradition (thus Strecker, *Weg*, 150).

The **internal history** of 3:13-17 centers on the place designations found inside the passage, along with some vague time references. The place designations are Nazareth, Galilee and the Jordan. The Marcan narrative (Mk. 1:9) indicates that Jesus left Nazareth to go to where John was baptizing. This was a small village located in northern Palestine in the Roman province of Galilee.

Nazareth was where Jesus had grown up as a child and young man. D. C. Pellett ("Nazareth," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach) provides helpful background information:

**1. Location and description.** The identification of the site of the ancient village with the modern Nazareth (see above) is generally accepted. Questions have arisen because there is no mention of Nazareth in the OT, the Talmud, the Midrash, or Josephus. This is understandable if it was an insignificant village (cf. John 1:46). Aside from the NT, the earliest evidence for Nazareth is from Julius Africanus (A.D. 170-240), as cited by Eusebius (Hist. I.7.6-12), but there is no suggestion that it had just been founded and was not in existence before the birth of Jesus....

Nazareth lies to the N of the Plain of Esdraelon in a valley or basin open only to the S. The village is on the sides of a hill facing to the E and the SE. It is ca. fifteen miles from the Sea of Galilee and ca. twenty miles from the Mediterranean. The altitude is ca. 1,300 feet above sea level. The altitude and the protected position make for a moderate climate. The climate and the rainfall are favorable to vegetation, but the town has always been handicapped by possessing only one spring which must be supplemented by cisterns.

The ancient village seems to have extended farther up the hill, judging by the few remains to be seen (cf. Luke 4:29). In Jesus' day it was a small village, secluded, and not on any main highway, although it was near Sepphoris, an important city which was just S of the main road from Tiberias to Ptolemais.

Although various traditional holy places are shown



as connected with the gospel accounts, the only one which may be authentic and go back to the time of Jesus is Mary's well. Other shrines are at the Church of the Annunciation, the House of Joseph, the Synagogue Church, the Mensa Christi (Table of Christ), the Church of Gabriel, and the Maronite Church of the Precipice....

**2. In the NT.** Nazareth is first mentioned as the home of Joseph and Mary at the time of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26). From there they set out for Bethlehem, and to it they returned after the birth of Jesus (Matt. 2:23; Luke 2:4). As a boy Jesus continued to live there with his parents (Luke 2:39, 51). He left Nazareth to go to be baptized by John (Mark 1:9). When Philip spoke to Nathanael and referred to Jesus as from Nazareth, Nathanael replied: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:45-46). This implies that the village was insignificant, which is supported by the absence of references to it in ancient non-Christian sources. See § 1 above....

**3. Later history.** Nazareth did not become an important Christian shrine until the reign of Constantine (A.D. 324-37). According to Epiphanius, before Constantine only Jews were permitted to live there (Adv. Haer. XXX. 136). The first mention of a church built there is by Arculf (670). Nazareth suffered much persecution and destruction under the Muslim conquest (ca. 700). It regained its freedom and importance during the Crusades and was made the seat of a bishop (ca. 1108). Although it was captured by Saladin in 1187, it was

retaken by Frederick II in 1229. During the Crusades its churches were rebuilt, but at the end Nazareth was captured and finally destroyed in 1291 by the Mamluke Beybars. Under the Turks it continued to be unimportant, but the modern resurgence of Nazareth as a Christian shrine and city began in 1620 when the Franciscans were granted permission to establish themselves there as the guardians of the holy places. Nazareth was captured by the British in 1918. Modern Nazareth has an estimated population of nearly twenty thousand. It is an important city in its district and is the largest Christian city in Israel.



The second place name is Galilee. This was the fertile Roman province in northern Palestine in which Nazareth was located. K.W. Clark ("Galilee," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach) gives us helpful background insight:

**1. The region.** After the separation of Solomon's kingdom (936 B.C.), the region later to be known as Galilee was the most northerly part of the N kingdom of ISRAEL. In 734 it was absorbed in the Assyrian Empire by TIGLATH-PILESER, and the record in II Kings 15:29 refers to that conquered area of Naphtali as the galil. Through the next six centuries the region passed in turn to Babylonia, Persia, Macedonia, Egypt, and Syria, while constantly experiencing infiltration and migration. The genuine Israelite population in the Persian period was but a minority among the dominant Gentiles, and when Judea issued a summons (attributed to Hezekiah) to gather at Jerusalem for worship in the temple, the response from the galil was meager (II Chr. 30:10-11). As late as Maccabean times the Jewish element was small, and was reduced still further when Simon's expedition to the N resulted in the defeat of the Gentile forces of Galilee and the evacuation of many Jews to Judea, for security (I Macc. 5:21-23). The region was not governed by Jews any time after 734 B.C. until 80 B.C., when Alexander Jannaeus subdued this Gentile region and attempted to Judaize the population.

In 63 B.C. the whole of Palestine came under Roman rule, although a large degree of autonomy was granted the Jewish government, whether established in Jerusalem, Sepphoris, or Tiberias. When the kingdom of Herod the Great was split into three parts in 4 B.C., Sepphoris became the capital of Galilee until replaced by Tiberias ca. A.D. 25. In A.D. 44, Herod Agrippa I, the last Jewish ruler of Palestine, died after a six-year reign over Galilee, and all Palestine was then formed into a province and governed by procurators. The revolts of A.D. 66-73 and 132-35 brought death to thousands of Jews and destruction to the Jewish state, and after the fall of Jerusalem surviving Palestinian Jews converged upon Galilee. The cities of Tiberias and Sepphoris became Jewish, and the

Diaspora came to look upon Galilee as its center. Tiberias became the chief school of Jewish learning in the West, where the Palestinian Talmud and the Tiberian system of vowel pointing were developed. In the meantime, Christianity in the fourth century was established as the dominant religion in the Empire, and in A.D. 451 the Council of Chalcedon set up the Patriarchate of Jerusalem for the governing of the church in Palestine. Galilee was placed in diocese II, under the patriarch Juvenal. In the seventh century Muslim rule over Galilee began, to be broken only by the twelfth-century interlude of the Crusades and the World War of 1918. The modern state of Israel, established in 1948, has included all of Galilee....

**2. Its life.** Life in Galilee was determined chiefly by the Lebanon Mountains, which gathered the beneficent moisture in the form of dew and snow and springs and literally poured it over the land. From as far as Mount Hermon, streams converged in the gorge of the Jordan, to the benefit of crops and cattle and the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee. Terraced farms and orchards dotted even the N mountains, and grain and grass were abundant in the plains. With normal rainfall, crops were especially luxuriant in the valleys and plains of Lower Galilee, most of all in the Plain of Esdraelon. Simple but substantial industries developed, in processing the chief product such as olives and grapes and cattle. Oil, wine, fish, and grain were common exports. Another important source of income was the toll collected on the international trade routes. The taxes of Herodian Galilee supported an extensive building program under Herod the Great and Herod Antipas. Impressive public buildings were erected reflecting Hellenistic culture--such as baths, gymnasiums, theaters, and hippodromes, as well as entire new cities. The data on population are fragmentary and intricate, but a reasonable estimate for the first century would find about 350,000 Galileans, including a large slave element and about 100,000 Jews largely Hellenized. The primary language at this time was the universal Greek Koine, although many Jews spoke Aramaic, some with a local accent (Matt. 26:73). Herodian coins were inscribed solely in Greek....

**3. Jesus of Nazareth.** In the light of history, Galilee's most significant period was the thirty-year span of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and especially the short "active ministry" during which he proclaimed his gospel of salvation. This remarkable event has had far greater effect upon mankind than the concentration of national conflicts in this little "galil of the nations." Almost the entire career of Jesus of Nazareth lay within the borders of this tiny region. It is reported that he traveled once with his disciples to Caesarea Philippi, E of the Jordan and about thirty miles N from his home in Capernaum (Matt. 16:13; Mark 8:27). The same evangelists report another journey of about the same distance to the "border of Tyre" (Mark 7:24, Nestle), or to the "district of Tyre and Sidon" (Matt. 15:21), where he met the Syrophoenician woman whose daughter he cured. Upon occasion, Jesus entered the

Greek territory E of the Jordan (Mark 7:31; 5:1 and parallels), especially the fishing town of Bethsaida (Mark 6:45; 8:22; Luke 9:10). He may have traveled to Jerusalem through the E district of Perea, although such a journey through Samaria is much more certain.

The third place name in our passage is the Jordan River, which ran from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. S. Cohen ("Jordan," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach) gives us the background:

The longest and most important river of Palestine, traversing the entire country from its sources at the N border to its outlet in the Dead Sea. It is remarkable not only because of its unique natural character but also

because of the part that it played in the history of Palestine and the religions that

evolved on its soil....



**2. Geological features.** The valley of the Jordan lies in a deep rift in the earth, the N part of the same line of weakness in the earth's crust that has produced the Wadi el-Arabah, the Red Sea, and the Great African Rift.\* It resulted from the sinking of a stretch from N to S between two parallel faults and apparently occurred, not all at once, but in successive stages. As early as the Eocene period of the Tertiary era this depression was in existence, but it was for a time covered by an inland sea that extended for a short time into the Transjordan region. During the Miocene and Pliocene periods the mountains to the E and the W began to rise, and the rift between sank lower, so that the inland lake began to be confined to the Jordan Valley, while further crosswise faulting produced the four great river valleys of the Transjordan: the Yarmuk, the Jabbok, the Arnon, and the Zered....

**3. Description.** The air-line length from the source of the Jordan to the Dead Sea is ca. eighty miles, but the full length of the river is more than two hundred, on account of the twists and turns of its lower course. Its width below the Sea of Galilee is normally ca. ninety to a hundred feet, its depth from three to ten; in the spring, when it floods, it is naturally wider. No parts of it are navigable, except the lakes; there are numerous fords--at least sixty have been counted--where it can be waded. As there were no bridges in Bible times, the Jordan formed a great military obstacle, and the possession of the fords became an important factor in the warfare of that age....

**5. History...c. In NT times.** The essential story of the gospels begins at the Jordan River. It was there that John the Baptist came out of the wilderness like Elijah to preach the coming of the kingdom of heaven, followed the prescription of Elisha to cure a moral instead of a physical illness, and bade the people to bathe in the Jordan and repent of their sins. It was from John that Jesus, through baptism, received his first mission to go forth to teach and perform miracles (Matt. 3:1; Mark 1:4-9; Luke 3:1; John 1:29-34). The traditional site of the baptism of Jesus is below Jericho; but the gospel accounts are not uniform, and it is very possible that this event took place not far below the Sea of Galilee, close to the home of Jesus, as well as to that of John in Perea, where he was arrested shortly after this event (Luke 3:18-20; cf. Matt. 14:3-12; Mark 6:14-17).

The first part of the ministry of Jesus was in the cities about the Sea of Galilee. The decisive moment of his career took place at Caesarea Philippi, on the site of the ancient Paneion, the most eastern source of the Jordan, where gods had been worshiped for centuries. There he put to his disciples the question: "Who do men say that I am?" and accepted the answer of Peter: "You are the Christ [Messiah]" (Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-20; with a slightly different version in Matt. 16:13-20). One of the mountains nearby was the site of the Transfiguration, which followed this event (Mark 9:2-8). The second part of his ministry followed as he pursued his course down the E side of the Jordan Valley, performing new miracles, and speaking to the multitudes in parables, especially those of the magnificent collection in Luke 12:1-18. He crossed the Jordan for the last time at Jericho, and thence set forth for the final part of his ministry in Jerusalem.

Thus we have some understanding of the movement of Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan River where his baptism took place. How great a distance this was depends entirely upon the location of the baptismal site on the Jordan. The traditional location is near the north end of the Dead Sea and would be the greater distance from Galilee. The distance is not the major point of the narratives, however.

The single time reference is "then" (τότε, Mt. 3:13) which interpretes Mark's (ἐν ἐκείαις ταῖς ἡμέραις, 1:9) "in those days" in terms of "the next thing that happened." Luke's time indicator is even less specific with his "when all the people were baptized" (Luke 3:21; ἐν τῷ βαπτισθῆναι ἅπαντα τὸν λαόν). All three gospel writers simply indicate that during the baptizing ministry of John, Jesus came to him and requested to be baptized. Although the time frame cannot be narrowed down with absolute precision, it seems that this took place in AD 27.

## b. Literary

The literary setting for Mt. 3:13-17 has several important aspects. In a listing of the [pericopes](#) in Matthew's gospel, this one is number 11 out of 179 passages. Clearly this episode comes early in Matthew's story. Additionally, Jesus' baptism and temptation stand as the markers of the [beginning of formal ministry](#) by Jesus in all three gospel writers. John's gospel does not highlight these markers like the Synoptic Gospels do, although John will allude to Jesus' baptism without having described it ([John 1:32-34](#)). For [the synoptic writers](#), Jesus' baptism climaxes their descriptions of John the Baptizer's ministry. Quickly after Jesus' baptism there came his forty days of temptation, in the Synoptic Gospels accounts. Once these two events were completed, Jesus will travel to Galilee to begin his public ministry. Thus his baptism signals a shift from his "growing up years" to his public ministry years. Luke (3:23a) will mark the baptism especially as the start of public ministry when Jesus had reached adulthood in Jewish tradition at 30 years of age: "Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work."

The literary form (**genre**) of 3:13-17 is historical narrative within the framework of ancient concepts of history, which could naturally include supernatu-

ral events as a part of history. Thus the narrative includes human interaction and divine/human interaction. Modern definitions of history would be compelled to eliminate the latter part as not a proper part of an historical account. History, since the beginning of the modern era, has been understood as exclusively human interaction.

But it is the divine/human segment that provides the significant theological perspective in this narrative. The gospel writers worked within ancient definitions of history and with a fundamental theological goal in the telling of their stories about Jesus, as [Luke 1:1-4](#) and [John 20:30-31](#) clearly indicate.

Thus our gleaning the spiritual insights from these verses is the highest priority, while the historical elements are important but not primary.

## II. Message

Donald Hagner (WBC) suggests an accurate internal literary structure for these verses:

The content of the passage readily divides into (1) the arrival of Jesus (v 13), (2) the dialogue with John (vv 14-15), and (3) the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus after his baptism, including the climactic divine attestation (vv 16-17). Thus the events associated with the baptism are the center of attention, rather than the baptism itself.

We will follow this breakdown of the text in our study.

## a. Arrival, v. 13

### Greek NT

<3:13> Τότε παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.

### NASB

13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.

### NRSV

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

### NLT

13 Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John.

### Notes

This introductory sentence sets the scene for Matthew's account and gives us our first introduction to Jesus as a grown man ready to begin his life's mission. He modifies his Marcan source at a couple of points:

### Greek NT Mark

<1:9> Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου.

### NRSV Mark

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.



retaining the reference to Galilee. For Matthew the idea of Jesus moving from home in broad terms was enough, perhaps because in the birth narratives of the first two chapters a lot has already been said about Nazareth. Mark, on the other hand, has omitted all this material and this is the first time that Jesus pops on the scene in his narrative. Interestingly, Luke's use of his Marcan source leaves out the reference to even Galilee (Luke 3:21): "21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened,..."

Secondly, a quick reading of Mark and Luke re-

First, he omits the reference to Nazareth while

veals that the baptism is not the primary point; the appearance of the Heavenly Voice is their point. But Matthew sees the baptism as more important than they do. Thus Matthew turns Mark's "and was baptized" into "to be baptized." This purpose infinitive identifies the purpose of Jesus' coming to see John.

Who was this John? In the preceding narratives ([Mt. 3:1-12](#) / [Mk. 1:1-8](#) / [Lk. 3:1-20](#)) in all three synoptic gospel writers, John emerges as a somewhat mystic figure who lives in the region around the northern part of the Dead Sea and conducts his preaching and baptizing ministry to the Jewish people from there. [John 1:19-42](#) presents a somewhat similar but still very distinct depiction with strong emphasis upon John's understanding of Jesus as God's Son. John dressed differently and ate differently. His preaching was a powerful message on repentance from sin with baptism as a decisive turning point away from sinful living. [Isaiah 40:3](#) is seen by all three synoptic writers as the Old Testament anchor identifying John and his ministry: "A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in

the desert a highway for our God.'" Matthew (3:11-12) follows Mark (1:7-8) with a strong emphasis of Jesus' superiority and one indicator of this is the different "baptisms" of the two: "11 I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." John's baptism focuses upon immersion in water as a signal of true repentance. Jesus' baptism will go beyond to effect a transformation of life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew's mentioning of Jesus' baptism refers to what has come to be called [Christian baptism](#) at one level. But the primary thrust of Jesus' "baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire" is realized on the day of Pentecost as described in [Acts 2](#). With this beginning of Christianity, the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit would be Christ's presence among His people from that point on.

Thus Jesus' arrival at the Jordan sets the scene for Jesus' baptism by John.

## b. Dialogue, vv. 14-15

### Greek NT

<3:14> ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης διεκώλυεν αὐτὸν λέγων, Ἐγὼ χρεῖαν ἔχω ὑπὸ σοῦ βαπτισθῆναι, καὶ σὺ ἔρχῃ πρός με; <3:15> ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν, Ἄφες ἄρτι, οὕτως γὰρ πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην. τότε ἀφίησιν αὐτόν.

### NASB

14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 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.

### NRSV

14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

### NLT

14 But John didn't want to baptize him. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?" 15 But Jesus said, "It must be done, because we must do everything that is right." So then John baptized him.

### Notes:

Only Matthew contains this brief dialogue between John and Jesus. Over the years of interpretative history, the often asked question is Why did John not want to baptize Jesus? Clearly verse 14 makes this point. Donald Hagner (*WBC*) surveys some of that interpretative history:

What causes John's recognition of his need to be baptized by Jesus and his consequent reluctance to baptize Jesus? The text does not tell us what John concluded about Jesus. The implication, however, is that John recognized Jesus as the one whose way he was preparing. That is certainly the conclusion that Matthew's church was meant to draw. Probably we are

to understand some previous contact (Schlatter suggests a conversation prior to the baptism) between John and Jesus, in contrast to the Fourth Gospel (1:29-34), which seems to assert that John did not know the identity of Jesus until the baptism. This in turn would necessitate Jesus' own consciousness of his messianic identity, which (despite objections, e.g., by Klostermann) is a natural assumption if the events immediately following the baptism (i.e., the divine voice, the temptations) were to have meaning for Jesus (see Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*; Schlatter, 86). The suggestion that John's reluctance to baptize Jesus is the result of his intuition of a high degree of righteousness in Jesus, rather than the recognition of

Jesus' messianic identity (so Tasker), has little to commend it. It is unlikely that John allowed for exceptions to his call for preparation. That John did recognize Jesus as the Messiah is evident from his question in 11:3, even if that question stems from disenchantment. The present verse fits perfectly with v 11, which stresses John's comparative unworthiness. How should the one who prepares the way with a baptism of repentance baptize the one for whom preparation is made? Surely the reverse must be true, and John must submit to the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. In these terms, the objection is perfectly understandable. The words are precisely what we would expect John to say (*pace* Schweizer). This passage was hardly constructed as a polemic against the disciples of John who persisted as such during and after the time Matthew wrote (cf. Acts 19:1–7). Its content is of course inconsistent with a continued commitment to John, especially after the crucifixion and resurrection; Matthew does not, however, like the Fourth Gospel, purposely belittle John, but holds him in the highest esteem (see 11:7–15).

The consequence of John baptizing Jesus is clearly to link John with Jesus as the promised forerunner

as indicated earlier in the Isa. 40 quote. Thus John's ministry is preparatory to that of Jesus. Then the followers of John can transition into being followers of Jesus as the fourth gospel will describe (1:35-42) with two of John's disciples (one is named as Andrew).

This helps explain Jesus' reply to John in verse 15, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" ("Ἀφες ἄρτι, οὕτως γὰρ πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην."). Jesus felt his baptism by John was a part of "righteousness." This [concept](#) is a major theme in Matthew's gospel with six of the gospel's nine uses of the word (δικαιοσύνη) in Matthew.. As Gene Boring ("Matthew," *New Interpreter's Bible*, iPreach) states: "Righteousness here means, as often elsewhere, doing the revealed will of God." Thus Jesus understood his baptism by John as a part of the divine plan for his life, and his was determined to obey that. Nothing in verse 15 implies that something was deficient in Jesus' life that would be completed by his baptism. Such a view misses the point of Jesus' reply completely.

### c. Baptism, vv. 16-17

#### Greek NT

<3:16> βαπτισθεῖς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εὐθὺς ἀνέβη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος· καὶ ἰδὼν ἠνεώχθησαν [αὐτῷ] οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδεν [τὸ] πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ καταβαῖνον ὥσει περιστερὰν [καὶ] ἐρχόμενον ἐπ' αὐτόν· <3:17> καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν λέγουσα, Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα.

#### NASB

16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

#### NRSV

16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

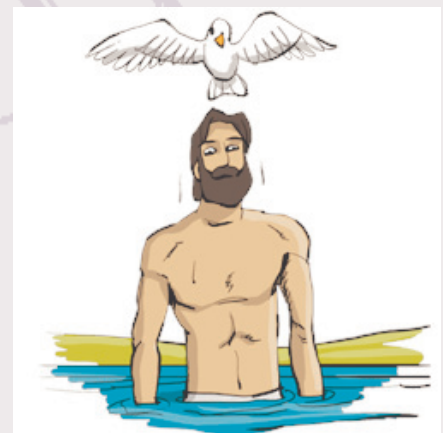
#### NLT

16 After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him."

#### Notes:

This third segment in Matthew reaches the climatic part where God speaks from Heaven and pronounces His blessing upon Jesus and this act of baptism.

Quite interesting is the various ways that artists attempt to depict this moment. Of the three pictures given here, the simplest is the first one to the right, emphasizing the descent of the dove. Here the graphic designer merely wanted to stress the simplest and easiest aspect of the scene to create visually. One can paint a dove above Jesus' head without too much difficulty, since every viewer will be familiar with the





shape of a human and of a dove.

The other two above, however, stress the opening of the heavens and the Heavenly Voice. But notice John's different reactions in the two pictures. In the first one John is looking up, fully participating in what is taking place. In the second one, he is overwhelmed by the brightness of the divine glory, but is not participating fully in the rest of the manifestation.

These pictures highlight the two major aspects of this part of the text: 1) the descent of the Spirit as a dove from the opened heavens, and 2) the Heavenly Voice.

First, notice how the four gospels characterize this part:

#### **Matt. 3:16**

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

#### **Luke 3:21b-22a**

when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.

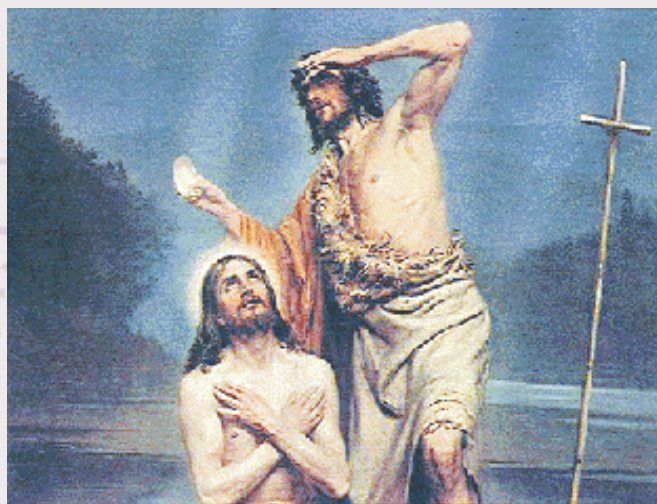
#### **Mark 1:10**

And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

#### **John 1:32-33**

32 And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

Each gospel writer has a distinctive way of describing this moment. Clearly Matthew is closely follow-



ing his Marcan source; compare Matthew and Mark. Matthew revises Mark in typical fashion by taming down Mark's "the heavens torn apart" to "the heavens were opened." He sets the stage for the Heavenly Voice segment by describing the event in the passive voice "the heavens were opened to him" in place of Mark's "he saw the heavens torn apart." Although difficult translate a shift in the prepositional phrase is present. Mark's εἰς αὐτόν (on him) becomes ἐπ' αὐτόν (upon him) in both Matthew and Luke. John's depiction is similar to Matthew and Luke here. Mark's statement emphasizes the extent of the descent slightly more. But it also is typical of Mark's more dramatic language used consistently through his gospel, e.g., here "torn apart" rather than "opened up" in Matthew and Luke. Luke adds "in bodily form" (σωματικῶς) to the descent of the Holy Spirit as a dove to his Marcan source, emphasizing the real nature of this event.

The Spirit's descent signals the formal beginning of Jesus' ministry as the climax of His baptism. The symbolism of the dove probably reaches back to a Jewish scribal tradition in Genesis one where the Spirit's hovering was compared to the nesting of a dove. It is not clear whether only Jesus, or John and Jesus, or these plus the people present witnessed this. The fourth gospel interpretes the scene as John participating in the experience. Thus the first picture above.

The second part is the Heavenly Voice speaking in verse 17. The unique way in which the voice is introduced in Mark 1:11 "a voice came out of Heaven" (φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν) and is essentially followed by Luke 3:22 "there was a voice out of Heaven" (φωνὴν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ γενέσθαι) but modified by Matthew 3:17 "note, there was a voice out of Heaven saying..." (ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν λέγουσα). The point is that since the OT era the idea of God speaking

directly to people demanded a special way to be introduced, since God's voice was different from a human voice. Consequently, God's voice just happens, comes out of nowhere visible. But human voices "speak" from a visible person. Donald Hagner (WBC) underscores further insight:

After the exile, when prophecy was regarded as dead in Israel, the rabbis developed the concept of *bat qôl*, "the daughter [or 'echo'] of the voice," as a way of accounting for continued revelation from God, but thereby designating it as indirect and not of binding authority. Ordinarily, in the NT period a voice from heaven would be regarded as a *bat qôl*. Here, however (contra Hill), Matthew means something that transcends rabbinic allowances and expectations: with the presence of the Messiah, the Spirit of God is again abundantly active, and God speaks from heaven with directness and authority.

What the voice declared is the major point. Again, the synoptic gospel accounts vary slightly, mostly Matthew.

#### Matthew 3:17

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

#### Mark 1:11

And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Both Matthew and Luke follow their Marcan source in the essence of the quote from two Old Testament passages of scripture. But Matthew shifts from the second person singular "you" to the third person singular "this is." The most immediate impact of this is to cast emphasis upon John as fully participating in the revelatory experience as the first picture on the preceding page attempts to portray. Mark and Luke emphasize the focus only on Jesus, as the second picture assumes. Beyond this impact with Matthew's shift of the citation, the effect of this is to include Matthew's readers as more participatory in this event. Gene Boring's suggestion (*NIB*) that this probably signals the crowd's awareness of the words of the Heavenly Voice is possible, but not likely. The fourth gospel's recounting of this by John the Baptizer (1:32-34) clearly interpretes his participation but only at the point of the descent of the Holy Spirit as a dove. In either instance -- whether just to Jesus, or, to John and Jesus -- the effect is the same: confirmation of God's approval of Jesus in direct revelation like had not been seen since the close of the Old Testament era. Thus Jesus was given an authorization to ministry that lifted him above the scribes of his day in interpreting the Hebrew

scriptures against the backdrop of his Messianic mission on earth.

The words of the voice are taken from two OT scripture texts: 1) "you are my Son" [Mark] (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου) from Psalm 2:7; 2) "the beloved one in whom I am well pleased" (ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα) from Isa. 42:1.

Mark and Luke take the first statement directly from the LXX translation of [Ps. 2:7b](#): "The Lord said to me, 'You are my son...'" (Κύριος εἶπεν πρὸς με Υἱός μου εἶ σύ). A major significance of the use of this Psalm is that it was used in the coronation of the king in Israel. Thus when it was uttered to Jesus he was being crowned as the king of Israel, a descendant of David and the realization of the promises made to David to provide one who would deliver Israel from its enemies and restore them to the place enjoyed by David. As Hagner (WBC) declares,

the affirmation of Jesus as God's Son partakes of messianic associations through the use of Ps 2. Jesus, now anointed with the Spirit (cf. Ps 2:2), is through this ceremony of inauguration (cf. the coronation of the king as the background of Ps 2) about to enter into his ministry whereby the nations shall become his heritage (cf. Ps 2:8).

#### Luke 3:22b

And a voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you."

The second reference "the beloved one in whom I am well pleased" (ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα) comes from an allusion to Isaiah 42:1: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, *in whom my soul delights*; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations" (Ἰακωβ ὁ παῖς μου, ἀντιλήμφομαι αὐτοῦ· Ἰσραὴλ ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου, *προσεδέξατο αὐτὸν ἡ ψυχὴ μου*; ἔδωκα τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ' αὐτόν, κρίσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐξοίσει). Isaiah 42 is one of the Suffering Servant texts and clearly is important to Matthew with his lengthy reference to it again in [12:18-21](#).

The impact the Heaven Voice is to proclaim Jesus as the promised Messiah who would stand as David's royal descendant and also as the Suffering Servant deliverer.

Jesus' baptism marks an important turning point in His life. It gave him the authorization to begin ministry. The coming of the Spirit reinforced the divine presence needed for that ministry.

How important is your baptism? It didn't save you, but it should mark an important turning point in your life: a time of turning to God for the beginning of ministry.

## Matthew 3:13-17

### Greek NT

〈3:13〉 Τότε παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. 〈3:14〉 ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης διεκώλυεν αὐτὸν λέγων, Ἐγὼ χρεῖαν ἔχω ὑπὸ σοῦ βαπτισθῆναι, καὶ σὺ ἔρχῃ πρὸς με; 〈3:15〉 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν, Ἐφες ἄρτι, οὕτως γὰρ πρέπειν ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην. τότε ἀφίησιν αὐτόν. 〈3:16〉 βαπτισθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εὐθὺς ἀνέβη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἠνεώχθησαν [αὐτῷ] οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδεν [τὸ] πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ καταβαῖνον ὥσεί περιστερὰν [καὶ] ἐρχόμενον ἐπ' αὐτόν· 〈3:17〉 καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν λέγουσα, Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα.

### NASB

13 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?" 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. 16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

### NRSV

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

### NLT

13 Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. 14 But John didn't want to baptize him. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?" 15 But Jesus said, "It must be done, because we must do everything that is right." So then John baptized him. 16 After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him."

## Mark 1:9-11

### Greek NT

<1:9> Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου. <1:10> καὶ εὐθὺς ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ὡς περιστερὰν καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν· <1:11> καὶ φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα.

### NASB

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; 11 and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

### NRSV

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

### NLT

9 One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. 10 And when Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens split open and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you."

## Luke 3:21-22

### Greek NT

<sup>3:21</sup> Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ βαπτισθῆναι ἅπαντα τὸν λαὸν καὶ Ἰησοῦ βαπτισθέντος καὶ προσευχομένου ἀνεωχθῆναι τὸν οὐρανὸν <sup>3:22</sup> καὶ καταβῆναι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον σωματικῶς εἶδει ὡς περιστερὰν ἐπ' αὐτόν, καὶ φωνὴν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ γενέσθαι, Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα.

### NASB

21 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."

### NRSV

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

### NLT

21 One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying, the heavens opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you."