

## WHAT ABOUT JESUS' BAPTISM?

Some truly amazing things happened at the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist, as recorded in the Bible. Each of the four Gospels records different aspects of this auspicious occasion. Any honorary event you can think of, inauguration, coronation, etc, pales in comparison to the baptism of Christ. This is chronicled in Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 1:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, John 1:29-34, and Acts 10:36-38.

**1- The baptism of Jesus** reveals the divinity of Christ. Both verbal and visible manifestations of God by God accompanied the baptism of Jesus by John. Luke 1:21 records *"now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove, and a voice came from heaven, You are My beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* These brief words describe the incredible scene of ordination at the inauguration of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. These are remarkable evidences that He is the Son of God come in the flesh as the promised Deliverer.

**2- The heavens were opened.** RK Hughes observes, "there had never been anything like this in Biblical history, ever!" Three remarkable phenomena occur in one scene: The heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended, and the voice of God proclaimed. Mark and Matthew also note the presence of many people, as *"immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him."* Hughes notes, "the skies above the Jordan were supernaturally sundered in a dramatic revelational motif." Such a scene was known only to a select few of God's servants, including the patriarch Jacob in Genesis 28:12 and John 1:51), the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1 and 2, the martyr Stephen in Acts 7:56, the apostle Peter in Acts 10:11, and the apostle John in Revelation 19:11 and John 1:29-34.

**3- The Holy Spirit descended.** Luke presents the view of the people, which Matthew, Mark and John record from John's perspective: *"I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him."* This was the anointing of the Holy Spirit, to identify Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and abiding on Him to indicate that He would not depart from Him. JI Packer notes, "this was not that Jesus was being filled with the Spirit for the first time, but that He was being marked as the bearer of the Spirit, who would baptize with the Spirit and so bring in the age of the Spirit that would fulfill Israel's hopes."

**4- The Holy Spirit remained.** RC Sproul relates, "can we in all honesty think that One who was virgin-born and who amazed the teachers in the temple, was bereft of the Holy Spirit from infancy through adolescence up until age 30? Of course not. Obviously the Holy Spirit was indwelling Christ in power from His very conception. But what happens here is marking the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, the ordination of Messiah to His mission, the outpouring of the Spirit to empower Him for His messianic task."

**5- Why 'like a dove'?** This phrase doesn't mean the Spirit was a dove, but had the appearance or likeness of a dove, in the description given by the eyewitnesses recorded by all four gospel writers. The imagery of a dove has several aspects. Doves were part of the sacrificial offerings, as in Luke 1:24. Psalm 91:4 says *"God will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you will find refuge."* In Genesis 1:2 at creation, *"the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."* In Luke 3:22 the Holy Spirit hovers over the Lord Jesus Christ as He anoints Him for His gentle ministry of reconciliation.

**6- The ministry of Jesus** is beautifully described in Luke 4:18, *"the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captive, and the year of the Lord's favor."* RK Hughes observes how the gentleness of a dove, which has no talons and expresses only love to its mate, suits the temper of Jesus' actual ministry of reconciliation. Matthew 5:5 says *blessed are the gentle.* Matthew 10:16 says believers are to *be gentle as doves.* In Matthew 11:29 Jesus says *learn from Me for I am gentle.* Galatians 5:23 says *the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness.* All examples of what Hughes says is Jesus doing His "tender work" in those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

**7- The voice of God proclaimed** *"You are My beloved Son; with You, I am well pleased."* The visible manifestations of God's presence with Jesus are now joined by an astounding verbal affirmation, in a voice that rumbled like thunder. There can be no mistake: Jesus Christ is God's Son, the Messiah. So declared the glorious heavenly voice which sounded like thunder (echoing Psalm 18:13, Isaiah 30:30-31).

These visible and verbal manifestations, says RC Sproul, "confirm the consecration of God's Son to His task as Messiah." God speaks audibly in the New Testament three times outside the book of Revelation: here at the ordination of Christ, then at His transfiguration in Luke 9:28-36 where God says *"this is My Son, My chosen one, listen to Him."* In John 12:27-30, just before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed *"Father glorify Your name"* and a voice came from heaven saying *"I have glorified it and I will glorify it again."*

**8- An application to you:** Luke 4 describes Jesus as *"full of the Holy Spirit"* as He fulfills God's will. He is the keeper of God's promises. His baptism, involving water and the Spirit, ordains Jesus as Christ to give you new spiritual life. Your water baptism identifies you as His follower, baptized by the Holy Spirit who regenerates you, and empowers you to share the good news about God's salvation. In the same way that you receive salvation, you live it out. Trust and obey Christ, in the Spirit's power. Do it! ☐