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Date: December 16, 2007  
Title: The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ - His Baptism  
Text: Mark 1:1-13 (vv. 9-11)  
Theme: The baptism of Jesus Christ and the action of the Father and Holy Spirit shows Him to be worthy of the ministry entrusted to Him.

Today is the third Sunday of the Advent Season. The church historically celebrated this season as a time of anticipation of His arrival in fulfillment of the promises made in the Old Testament.

The intent of this larger passage (vv.1-13) is to verify the character of Jesus Christ and the efficacious nature of redemptive activity. His forerunner (vv.2-8), His baptism (vv.9-11), and His temptation (vv.12-13) all seek to explain why He is worthy and why the sacrifice He offers is efficacious against sin.

### **The Advent Emphasis:**

<sup>1</sup> "The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; Like the crocus <sup>2</sup> It will blossom profusely And rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, The majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the LORD, The majesty of our God. <sup>3</sup> Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. <sup>4</sup> Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you." <sup>5</sup> **Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. <sup>6</sup> Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.** For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. <sup>7</sup> The scorched land will become a pool And the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, Grass becomes reeds and rushes. <sup>8</sup> A highway will be there, a roadway, And it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, But it will be for him who walks that way, And fools will not wander on it. <sup>9</sup> No lion will be there, Nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, <sup>10</sup> And the ransomed of the LORD will return And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away" (Isa. 35:1-10).

The relationship between each of these initial pieces is intentional. The account moves from John to that of Jesus through the act of baptism.

### **How will they best hear?**

- The world is populated by people who have never "felt" the affirming/approving touch of a parent. Jesus knew what it was to experience His Father's love.
- Baptism is like wearing the jersey of your favorite team or the colors of your favorite school.

**Questions:**

1. Is baptism important?
2. Why would you be baptized?
3. How important is it to work from a position-based acceptance rather than a performance based acceptance?
4. Are the workings of God based on our feelings or on His facts?

**To Know:** To know why Jesus was baptized and why we should be baptized.

**To Choose:** To choose to be baptized by immersion.

**To Feel:** To feel the joy of following Jesus.

“The baptism itself was followed by an audible and visible divine recognition of our Lord as the Messiah, which is said to have occurred immediately . . .” (Joseph Addison Alexander, The Gospel According to Mark, [Baker, 1858], 11).

Whatever the idea is behind His baptism, it deals directly with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus probably began his public ministry around AD 27 when he was approximately 30 years old (Luke 3:23).

I. Its historical context – the washing of the unclean

“The Jew was familiar with ritual washings. Leviticus 11-15 details them. (William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, DSBS, [Westminster John Knox Press, 1975], 13)

When Gentiles converted to Judaism three things happened.

- First, they would have to undergo circumcision.
- Second, they would have to provide sacrifice for atonement.
- Third, they would have to undergo baptism.

Baptism “symbolized their cleansing from all the pollution of his past life.” (William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, DSBS, [Westminster John Knox Press, 1975], 14)

What made John’s baptism so significant is that the Jew was being asked to submit to a baptism that was only required of unclean Gentiles. The baptism of Jesus by John presents a problem to the church. If his baptism is a sign of repentance, then why did Jesus submit to the baptism?

II. Its theological context – a theocratic anointing

All three persons of the Trinity are involved at the baptism of Jesus Christ -- The Father speaks, the Son is baptized, the Holy Spirit descends on the Son.

The baptism of Jesus by John contains four thoughts.

- First, it was the moment of *decision*.

With the coming of John, Jesus knew it was His time.

<sup>4</sup> “But when **the fullness of the time came**, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, <sup>5</sup> so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4, 5).

The time element plays heavily in John’s Gospel. Remember the wedding feast of Cana in John 2:4 when Jesus made the following statement to Mary, “And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.’”

- Second, it was the moment of *identification*.

He identified with those who were seeking God. In this action, He presented Himself as race representative. In this manner He is the second Adam. This action on His part “fulfilled all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15).

- Third, it was the moment of *approval*.

There is no greater statement in all of Scripture than the approval by the Father of the Son. The Father identifies Him as His beloved Son in whom He is pleased. All three gospels note this statement. The grammatical structure is equally telling as to the nature of this event. One grammarian gives us the following statement:

“The verb ‘I am well pleased’ may be taken as a timeless aorist or perhaps as representing the Hebrew stative perfect. The meaning then would be that God is always pleased with the Son.” (Walter W. Wessell, “Mark,” EBC, [Zondervan, 1984], 8:622).

Another concurs, “It is a delight that never had a beginning, and will never have an end.” (Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies, [Eerdmans, 1973], 1:25).

Who He was and what He was about to do received the Father’s full approval. The overarching idea reaches beyond the person and into the work He will accomplish. The Father will accept the sacrifice His Son offers in behalf of sin.

This sense of acceptance and approval is the very essence of our Lord’s redemptive activity in behalf of those who believe. Listen carefully to the following statement:

“The whole Christian gospel could be summed up in this point: that when the living God looks at us, at every . . . believing Christian, **he says to us what he said to Jesus on that day. He sees us, not as we are in ourselves, but as we are in Jesus Christ.** It sometimes seems impossible, especially to people who have never had this kind of support from their earthly parents, but it’s true: **God looks at us, and says, ‘You are my dear, dear child; I’m delighted with you.’** Try reading that sentence slowly, with your

own name at the start and reflect quietly on God saying that to you, both [when you believed] and **every day since.**" (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, [WJK, 2004], 4, 5).

Did you catch what was just said? Just as, so also. Just as the Son finds full acceptance before the Father, so also those who are in His Son. Listen to the following verses. Consider what they are saying. Perhaps you will see that what has been said is true.

<sup>17</sup> "By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; **because as He is, so also are we in this world.** <sup>18</sup> There is **no fear in love**; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love" (1 John 4:17, 18).

"Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, **we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming**" (1 John 2:28).

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

"Therefore we have been **buried with Him** through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

<sup>17</sup> "Therefore if anyone is **in Christ, he is a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. . . <sup>21</sup> He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, **so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him**" (2 Cor. 5:17, 21).

As believers, we are to live by the "just as, so also" principle. There is no greater delight and no greater rest. Right now, in your moment of failure, the Father's acceptance of you is poured out on you. He is pleased with you, not because of your obedience and certainly not because of your rebellion. He is pleased with you because His Son offered a sacrifice of infinite worth to enable Him to impute to you His own righteousness. Listen to the words of Larry Crabb in his book, The Pressure's Off:

"We're as beautiful to the Father as Christ is because we're in Him. The Father sings. And we collapse with gratitude at His feet. Filled with joy. The Son touches us on the shoulder. We stand." (Larry Crabb, The Pressure's Off, [Waterbrook Press, 2002], 107).

Listen to the words of Sarah Young in her book, Dear Jesus, where she writes as if Jesus is speaking to us:

"I want you to rest in the perfection of your salvation. My glorious grace makes you holy and blameless in My sight. So, nothing you do or fail to do could ever separate you from My love." (Sarah Young, Dear Jesus, [Thomas Nelson, 2007], 177).

My fear for all of us is that we will fail to feel the weight of those words and continue to live in bondage to our performance-based thinking as it relates to our standing before

the Father. It has been my ongoing prayer that we will fully come to know and experience the freedom that is in Christ Jesus. I would encourage all of us to meditate on these things. Let them dominate our thinking and control what is said and done. May we find the rest that is already ours.

In John 12:29 and 30, when the Father spoke from heaven, those who heard it said it sounded like thunder.

“Thus the baptism of Christ, besides the other purposes already mentioned, was the occasion of his public recognition and authoritative attestation, as the Son of God and as the true Messiah, before he entered on the actual discharge of his official functions.” (Joseph Addison Alexander, The Gospel According to Mark, [Baker, 1858], 12).

- Fourth, it was the moment of *equipment*.

The Holy Spirit anointed Him for the role of King. Jesus Christ received what is called the “theocratic anointing” that enabled the kings of Judah to reign for God over His people. Jesus came as an heir of David’s throne.

“When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, ‘Jesus, **Son of David**, have mercy on me!’ Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, ‘**Son of David**, have mercy on me!’” (Mark 10:47, 48).

“And Jesus began to say, as He taught in the temple, ‘How is it that the scribes say that **the Christ is the son of David?**’” (Mark 12:35).

“This was the anointing with the Spirit for His three-fold ministry of Prophet, Priest, and King, the dynamic equipment which would enable the Messiah to discharge the duties connected with these offices (Luke 4:16-19). (Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies, [Eerdmans, 1973], 1:23).

John’s gospel notes how John the Baptizer knew ahead of time by the Spirit that such an event was to take place and John was an eyewitness to the event. He saw the Holy Spirit descend and remain on Jesus Christ at His baptism (John 1:32-34).

### III. Its biblical context – from John to Jesus to Paul and beyond

In the baptism of John we do not have the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no “gospel” in John’s baptism. If our Lord baptized people, it would be more in line with John’s baptism than that of Paul’s. The baptism of Paul contains John’s thoughts but goes further than John by noting the imagery of our Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection. This much is seen in Romans 6:1ff. Paul goes on to show how there is only one baptism, which is Holy Spirit baptism. Water baptism is only a picture of Holy Spirit baptism. Thus, Spirit baptism is the substance and water baptism is the shadow.

The question is often asked as to whether or not we need to be baptized. My response is four-fold.

- **First**, the necessity of baptism appears to be down-played by the apostle in 1 Corinthians 1:14-17. However, the primary point here appears to be the emphasis on preaching the word and not water baptism. Paul was correcting a misplaced emphasis on baptism and the downplaying of the word.
- **Second**, water baptism appears as an essential part of the making and maturing of disciples in Matthew 28:18-20. The church in Acts seems to understand the importance of baptism by its continued practice (i.e. Acts 8:36-39).
- **Third**, water baptism should continue to be a public statement of personal conversion. As a community of faith we should strive to make the event as public as possible. "Submission to this rite is the testimony of the person to the fact that he has been saved." (Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest's Word Studies, [Eerdmans, 1973], 1:17).
- **Finally**, water baptism by immersion is an opportunity to preach the gospel to those who witness it.

Thus, for these four reasons I believe all believers should be baptized by immersion

APPLICATION: (What the NEXT STEP? - Let us leave with four practical thoughts)

1. Have you been baptized?
2. What would keep you from baptism?
3. Do you know the joy of God's unconditional love and acceptance of you because of your position in Jesus Christ?
4. What feelings come to mind when you experience God's unconditional love and acceptance of you because of Jesus Christ?