

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

THE RESCUE *begins*

GOD THE SON

The Son of God is Baptized

In the movies, a cameo role is a brief appearance or voice part of a known person appearing as themselves. Last week, we saw the cameo appearance in the New Testament of the 12 year-old Jesus when He stayed behind in the Jerusalem Temple where His family had gone to celebrate Passover. His speaking role was “*I must be about my Father’s business.*” Following this cameo, the stage is dark for almost 18 years after He left the temple with His parents and submitted to them. Today, the curtain is pulled back after those 18 years of silence and the life-changing ministry of the Son of God begins with His baptism by John the Baptist.

The Old Testament prophet, Isaiah who had foretold the Israelites’ Babylonian captivity also looked centuries beyond their captivity. **Isaiah 40:1, 3 (ESV)** ¹ *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God...* ³ *A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.* That voice heard so long ago as Isaiah looked across the mountain peaks of time belonged to John – the son born in the old age of Zacharias and Elizabeth. Elizabeth was related to Jesus’ mother, Mary. The King James Version calls them cousins – while other translations describe them only as ‘relatives’.

God’s messenger prepares the way for Jesus.

Read Matthew 3:1-6 (ESV) ¹ *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,* ² *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* ³ *For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”* ⁴ *Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.* ⁵ *Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him,* ⁶ *and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*

As the curtain is pulled back on the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, we first see the adult son of Zacharias and Elizabeth, John, proclaiming that he is the one whom the prophet Isaiah foresaw. His appearance had also been predicted in **Malachi 4:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.* Like with Jesus, the Bible is silent regarding John’s youth. His silence is broken by his thundering call to repentance. There was an ancient practice that when a king planned to visit a place, before the king arrived, workmen would prepare the king’s highway. A road was cut through the wilderness, valleys filled up, hills leveled, winding paths straightened. John’s life’s work was to prepare King Jesus’ highway. Israel had waited expectantly for centuries for the coming Messiah, but when He finally came they were not ready to receive Him. Their hearts needed preparation which would come only from honestly facing their sins before God.

John's wearing of a hairy mantle marked him as a prophet. Elijah-like, John was a man of the wilderness, whose way of living added to the force of his words. Some debate whether he actually ate locusts, or if the term refers to the carob-pod of the locust tree. Locusts are the only insect considered kosher by the Jews and are still eaten today; therefore, it seems likely that John did actually eat locusts. The appearance and lifestyle of John the Baptist reminds us that God does not necessarily choose the kind of person "society" would select for His work. God looks into the heart. When you see people, do you look at them with God's eyes?

Near the time of Jesus, Judaism began a heavy emphasis on ritual washings to cleanse from impurity. This goes back to priestly baths prior to offering sacrifices. The Jews baptized Gentile converts when they converted to Judaism but John was baptizing Jews. John's baptism was not what we know today as 'Christian baptism'. John's baptism bound people to repentance but not to faith in Christ. Those who were baptized by John would later be re-baptized after their profession of faith in Christ Jesus. Christian baptism today is a type of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and it also pictures our own death to sin and being raised to walk in new life with Christ. Believers' baptism also identifies us with the family of God. We will see shortly that the baptism of Jesus identified Him with His sinful people – although He was the sinless Son of God.

God's messenger preaches repentance and baptism.

Read Matthew 3:7-12 (ESV) ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. 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 gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

John's baptism was a washing, symbolizing moral regeneration. He criticized the people for presuming to be righteous and secure with God because they were children of Abraham. John laid an ax to the root of this presumption. He warned that the Jews would be purged and rejected unless they demonstrated fruits of repentance.

The Pharisees and Sadducees did not come believing John's message of repentance and faith; otherwise John would have baptized them. The Pharisees evidently came to make a show of piety since large numbers of people were accepting John as a prophet of God. To be baptized by God's prophet would make them appear to be in God's will. The Sadducees came apparently to gain political power. The Sadducees did not believe in a bodily resurrection of the dead. John was a messenger of the coming King. To be baptized

by the king's messenger would put them in good standing with the new king. John refused to baptize them because they sought baptism for wrong motives.

John called them a brood of vipers. Jesus would call them the same thing. A brood was a hatching group of animals birthed together. I have said it often that we do best what we do together. However, we need to be careful that we attune ourselves to God's Spirit and do not hatch an evil spirit together. It is easy to do that together just like the Pharisees and Sadducees did.

John cautioned them not to fool themselves. When asked about their spiritual condition even today, people will answer by speaking of the faith of their mother or often grandmother. Don't try to claim your ancestors' faith. It didn't work for the Jews and it will not work for you or for me. God did not need the Pharisees and Sadducees to fulfill His promise to Abraham as found in **Genesis 15:5 (ESV)** ... *"Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them."* Then he said to him, *"So shall your offspring be."* God raises up seed to Abraham through the blood of Jesus.

The wheat mentioned by John represents the children of God's kingdom and the chaff represents the evil-doers who will be baptized in God's judgment. Like so many other biblical prophecies, we see a two-fold meaning in this one. On the Day of Pentecost, God's children were baptized with the Holy Spirit and, yes, the Spirit cleansed "like as fire." But, in the final judgment the baptism will be with the fire of hell!

Matthew 25:41 (ESV) *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. This is why it is so important to share the good news of Jesus with others before the Great and Terrible Day of the LORD.*

God's Son identifies with His people through baptism.

Read Matthew 3:13-17 (ESV) ¹³ *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, 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 thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.* ¹⁶ *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;* ¹⁷ *and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

The time had come for the long-awaited Messiah to be revealed. He appeared among John the Baptist's crowd and stepped forward to undergo the rite of confessed sinners. He who was born to take the sinner's place came at the opening scene of His public ministry to be baptized by John. But why? To even John it seemed inappropriate that Jesus should submit to a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. John felt his own need rather to be baptized of Jesus. And yet, it was not until AFTER the baptism of Jesus that John received affirmation from the Father regarding the true identity of Jesus. John the Apostle gives the details of how John the Baptist came to that knowledge.

Read John 1:32-34 (ESV) ³² *And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."*

Going back to the question of 'why did Jesus need to be baptized by John?' Jesus Himself explained the reason to John: *it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.* Let's make sure we understand Jesus' reason.

Jesus' baptism was to signify that He identified with sinners. Only His perfect righteousness could fulfill all the requirements of the Law for the sinner's need of a perfect one time sacrifice. **Isaiah 64:6 (ESV)** ⁶ *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.* Jesus gives His righteousness to all who come to Him to exchange our sin for His righteousness. **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)** ²¹ *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Jesus' baptism by John takes on an added dimension when we consider that John was of the priestly tribe of Levi. One of the duties of the priests in the Old Testament was to present the sacrifices before the LORD. After Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist proclaimed of Jesus ... *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* **John 1:29** This Lamb of God would be sacrificed on the cross during Passover three years later.

God reveals Himself to us in three Persons – Father – Son – Holy Spirit. All three Persons were present at the baptism! In verses 16 and 17, we read: *Jesus [the Son] was baptized... and he saw the Spirit of God [meaning the Holy Spirit] descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven [the Father] said, "This is my beloved Son, [Jesus] with whom I am well pleased."* We have direct testimony from heaven of the Father's pleasure with the Son. Rest assured our Father in heaven is well-pleased with us when we put our trust in Jesus and receive His Holy Spirit.

The Father loved us from before the foundation of the world. **Ephesians 1:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.* The Father sent His Son for a specific reason: **Luke 19:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* Jesus said of the Spirit in **John 16:8 (ESV)** ⁸ *And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.* This means the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and draws us to the Father through the Son.

Why should followers of Christ be baptized today? We do it – because baptism is the beginning of our obedience. Jesus' last words included the command to be baptized in **Matthew 28:18-19**. However, baptism is not a requirement for salvation – requiring the physical act of baptism would create a salvation by works and not by faith. What can wash away my sin – nothing by the blood of Jesus!