

Bi132 The Gospels

Lesson Bi132-9 Baptism of Jesus

Sometimes when people begin building a home, an office, or a school building, they hold a special gathering. They call this celebration a ‘groundbreaking’ or the ‘laying of the cornerstone.’ They might invite the architect who drew the plans for the project. Also present at the celebration may be the actual builder and his men, the town officials who are giving their approval, and perhaps the person who is providing funds for the project. God’s plan for Jesus’ ministry was to begin with his baptism by John. But the Jewish leaders, who would prove hostile to Jesus, almost prevented John’s baptizing people before Jesus even got there.

The Jews of Jerusalem sent a delegation of priests and Levites to look into the activities of this unauthorized teacher. They wanted to find out who John was. When they asked him, John answered plainly, “I am not the Christ.”

So the religious leaders questioned him further, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” They knew that Elijah had not died, and they believed he may have come back to announce the end time.

John said, “I am not.”

“So are you the Prophet?” they asked. They were referring to the prophet whose coming Moses had spoken of at the time he gave Israel the Law. They expected him to be associated with Messiah’s coming.

He emphatically answered, “No!” But they pressed him further to give them an answer about who he was. They had to take a report back to the ones who had sent them. This time John quoted the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

Some of the Pharisees who had been sent asked, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

“I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” (John 1:19-27). So the delegation left John and returned to Jerusalem.

Sometime later, Jesus came from Galilee to Bethany on the other side of the Jordan where John was baptizing, to be baptized by John. But John tried to refuse him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matt 3:13-17).

The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (John 1:29-34).

Consider these questions: Why did Jesus submit to baptism? What did his words to John mean, when he said it was ‘to fulfill all righteousness’?

John thought Jesus needed to baptize him, not the other way around. By being baptized, Jesus confirmed that John was truly God’s prophet. At the same time, Jesus completely identified himself with man’s sin and failure. Though he himself needed no repentance or cleansing from sin, he became our substitute and modeled the behavior he desires in his followers. This event gave God the opportunity to confirm Jesus as the Messiah. By speaking from heaven, God addressed not only Jesus and John, but the rest of the spirit world, unseen by human beings. The baptism indicated that Jesus was consecrated to God and officially approved by him. All God’s righteous requirements for the Messiah were fully met in Jesus.

In this unique event, all three persons of the trinity were clearly seen: The Father spoke from heaven, the Son was baptized and commissioned for his ministry, and the Spirit descended on the Son to empower him for ministry. Here all three are present as distinct beings, yet acting together to accomplish God’s great plan. God is pleased with the Son because he will fulfill the plan of redemption and deliverance for all people, as promised throughout the Old Testament.

This story is **important** because it reveals to us that Jesus was obedient to the Father by coming to be baptized. He was sent from heaven to fulfill God’s plan of redemption.

The **main truth** of this story is that at the baptism of Jesus all three persons of the Godhead were present, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. What person did God use to baptize Jesus in water?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said "John the Baptist," you are correct.
2. What part did each member of the trinity have in this story of Jesus’ baptism?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said "The Father spoke from heaven, the Son was baptized, and the Spirit descended on Jesus," you are correct.

3. When God spoke these words, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased,” who was he speaking to?
 - A. [Pause for 5 seconds] If you said, "God addressed not only Jesus and John, but the rest of the spirit world, unseen by human beings," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to this story several times, until you can tell the details in your own words to another person. After you share the story of Jesus’ baptism, ask the person, “Who needs to be baptized in water here in our community?” Discuss further the importance of water baptism and the method of baptism for the followers of Christ today. How much water is needed? Ask the person if they have followed Jesus’ example by being baptized in water. Encourage them to do so, if they have repented of their sin and accepted Christ as their Savior.