

Called to Ministry Class 6

The Baptism of Jesus

The Baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:21, 22) serves as His call to ministry. This event serves as the basis for Jesus' ongoing controversy with the Jewish religious leaders about authority. They ask Him repeatedly by what authority He does what He does or says what he says. It is this event that Jesus has in mind as the source of His authority.

Before this time Jesus appears as a disciple in the ministry of John the Baptist, in the wilderness; but afterward he moves to Galilee and begins his public ministry of preaching, teaching, exorcism, and healing. Luke structures this narrative around three impersonal infinitives following the main verb 'It happened' or 'now when'. After Jesus is baptized, but while he is praying, three events occur

Heaven is opened

The Holy Spirit descends

A voice from Heaven confirms Jesus' identity and explains his mission

Where Mark uses a simple structure of three sentences in Mk 1:9-11, relating what Jesus did, what Jesus saw, and what Jesus heard; Luke constructs this triplicate using infinitive verbs to unveil these three elements crucial to his call. God is initiating the new Age of the Kingdom; the heavens are opened. Second, God is pouring out his divine power; the Holy Spirit descends. Third, a particular person is endowed with a special identity or self-consciousness. In this case, a voice speaks from heaven confirming Jesus' identity as God's beloved Son.

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A call narrative always alters someone's identity. This divine gift of self-consciousness includes an explanation of mission that frequently becomes a fourth element in a call, so that a person is called to do or be something in particular. The voice from heaven combines Ps 2:7 a messianic psalm sung at the coronations of Israel's kings and Is 42:1 the first of four Suffering Servant Songs. As a result, Jesus' mission involves the calling to be a Suffering Servant Messiah. The messianic task will not primarily involve political rule or economic provision or miraculous works as the devil will quickly tempt Jesus to perform Lk 4:1ff, but instead suffering and death.

The call of Jesus is pivotal in his self understanding and laser focus on the Cross, his endurance of opposition, his patience with his disciples, and his anger at the leaders and the misery their stubborn resistance is and will cause God's people.

The call of Jesus is pivotal in his understanding and teaching about the nature of the Kingdom and the shared calling of his people. The Cross is not simply his peculiar call...it is essential to the calling of every Christian believer...as we will see.

In our culture of success, Jesus does not look like the picture of a successful ministry. His moment of greatest triumph looks like his moment of greatest humiliation and defeat. His calling to 'endure the Cross despising the shame' hardly looks like the offering of a life anyone else would want...but it is precisely the calling that is upon the church of the Crucified One. In His calling at his baptism, God displays the road before Him...the Cross was not an afterthought but was the original plan from before the Creation of the World (1 Peter 1:19,20). Similarly our own crosses are a part of the unfolding story of our lives and ministries. In fact, just as in Jesus' life it is often in the darkest places that we see light, often in the darkest places that our light shines.

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Simeon told Mary that this child would cause the falling and rising of many...Jesus was seen as a figure who would divide people...and He is to this day.

The Baptism of Jesus marked His inauguration to office, of Messiah/King...His ordination as a rabbi...that is as the authoritative interpreter of God's Word, the bible, and His public unveiling of the beginning of the Kingdom or Reign of God and His anointing to the offices of Prophet (Covenant Prosecutor)and Priest (Intercessor and Mediator of Atonement and Forgiveness).

At Jesus' Baptism God spoke...and quoted two passages from the OT.

Ps 2:7 a psalm sung at the coronations of Israel's kings...calling them Son of God. And Is 42:1 in which God calls the Suffering Servant or Prophet of God as His Beloved in whom He is well pleased. In this statement by God the Father, God links two things most in Israel kept separate...things frankly which we too tend to keep separate...that of the certainty of the victory of God through the ministry and reign of the Messiah and that that victory would come through suffering and apparent defeat. God declares at Jesus' Baptism that He would rule and triumph but that He would do it ultimately through the Cross and not the overthrow of Caesar and Herod through military victory.

That Baptism replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of entrance into the New Covenant community is a matter of great importance. Martin Luther said, that in spite of the dangers and threats, joys and sorrows his life experienced he was always grateful that he was a Baptized Christian. Why? If baptism was something practiced prior to the inauguration of the Christian Church why did it become the emblem of our participation in the Covenant Community of God's people throughout the ages?

Baptism or Mikveh was used for a multitude of reasons.

Purification from uncleanness

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Repentance from sin

Submission to a rabbi's ministry

Inauguration or consecration to religious or political office

Acceptance of a particular Doctrine

Baptism tells us who we are and whose we are...it reminds us that we have been created and redeemed for a purpose...and that purpose is the Glory of God. Jesus has come into the world to save sinners...and to make of those sinners ministers, teachers of His Word, purveyors of His interpretation of the covenant. As a church we exist to display the glory of God in our worship, in our preaching of the Word, in our participation in the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, in singing of hymns of praise, in our prayers and in our common life together.

We exist as individuals to display the glory of God through our obedience...which is nothing but living by faith in God's promises...we keep God's commands because they show God is able to meet our needs.

We display God's glory through growing in our knowledge of God and his word. As we become more competent in our handling of God's word we become increasingly able to help others by sharing our story of God's faithfulness, by sharing God's great and precious promises in some helpful way, and by upholding one another in prayer that God's mighty power might sustain each of us to the end of our earthly journey.

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Baptism was a sign of judgment and it was intended to serve as a warning as well as an encouragement. It served as a warning because it was intended and understood as a sign of death...and death at the hand of God himself. Baptism is a sobering picture of the future that everyone of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of our life upon the earth. It is a vivid picture that the wages of sin is death. It is also a picture of our salvation that our judgment has been borne by another who died in our place and calls us from now on to live not for ourselves but for Him who loved us and gave himself for us.

Further, our Baptism reminds us that our lives, like Jesus' life, are lives of opportunity for ministry in the time between the first coming of Christ and the Second coming of Christ. During this period God extends mercy and forgiveness of sins to as many as call upon his name.

In our Baptisms we have been separated from the world and separated to God. We are a Community of Disciples, ministers in training, who accept our Rabbi's authority over us and submit to His interpretation of the Bible, and are committed to carrying forth His mission of making disciples of others.