

# The Baptism of Jesus

Luke 3:1-22, esp. 21-22

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# Introduction

This class on the baptism of Jesus focuses on the meaning of the Biblical text and its application to our lives today. In order to do so, I include explanations of the original Greek of the New Testament (NT), Hebrew of the Old Testament (OT), visual aids, and opportunities for individual reflection and group discussion.

I include the Hebrew and Greek primarily for several groups, including but not limited to: those who are interested in the very significant understanding of God's Word, which the original languages provide that the English cannot; pastors, theologians, seminary professors, and other scholars; those who want to see documentation of what I say; and those who don't want to read and study the documentation but find joy just in knowing it exists and where to look for it and refer others to it if needed.

# Introduction

Nevertheless, don't avoid reading and using this program because of the references to the original Hebrew and Greek. If you're not interested in studying and reflecting on the meaning of the specific original Hebrew or Greek words included, or if you cannot do so presently, feel free to just skip or skim over these references at least for now. But do daily read and meditate on God's Word, including this passage.

This is a very important subject. The whole Bible is about Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, and God's plan of restoring his creation through him. The OT points to Christ Jesus, and the NT explains him, how his redemption is applied to us, and how he accomplishes God's plan to redeem his creation. This Bible passage explains an essential part of his plan in and through Christ Jesus and how it affects us.

# Introduction

To more fully understand the Biblical accounts of the baptism of Jesus, in this lesson Luke's account, we need to look at the context. Thus, we'll begin with the preceding verses pertaining to John the Baptist, often referred to as the last of the Old Testament prophets, also as the first great prophet of the New Testament, and the forerunner of the Messiah, the Lord and Savior Christ Jesus.

In this presentation, I have drawn on the work of many outstanding Bible scholars. In particular, I want to acknowledge the majority of my quotes herein, as well as other significant insights I've included for your benefit as well as mine, are from the work of the outstanding late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran pastor and New Testament Greek scholar, R. C. H. Lenski. The English translation is the NIV, unless otherwise noted.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:1-2a (NIV)

**3** In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar [ca. 25-26]—when Pontius Pilate was governor of **Judea**, Herod [Antipas] tetrarch of **Galilee**, his brother Philip tetrarch of **Iturea and Traconitis**, and Lysanias tetrarch of **Abilene**—<sup>2</sup>during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,

It will help to locate these places on the map with a brief explanation.

# Near East at the Time of Jesus: Divisions of Herod's Kingdom

A tetrarchy is a government of a territory that is jointly ruled by four persons. When King Herod the Great died, his kingdom was subdivided. Four sons of Herod ruled his kingdom. The map to the right designates three of the tetrarchies. The fourth was the area of Judea and Samaria, sometimes just called Judea, which was ruled by Herod's son, Archelaus, but he ruled with exceptional cruelty and tyranny, which brought his reign to an end after only 10 years (4 B. C. – 6 A. D.), when he was deposed. His tetrarchate then became a Roman province and was ruled by a governor appointed by the Roman emperor, at the time of Luke's writing, the governor was Pontius Pilate. (3:1)



<https://bible-history.com/new-testament/divisions-herods-kingdom>

# Near East at the Time of Jesus: Divisions of Herod's Kingdom



NIV Study Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), p. 1574

# Near East at the Time of Jesus (Including Current Names)



*Deluxe Then and Now Bible Maps: "The Holy Land: Then (New Testament Times AD 1—70) and Now (Modern Times)" (Rose Publishing, WORDsearch/ Logos, 2008)*



# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:2-6 (NIV)

**3** <sup>2</sup>during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah **in the desert**. <sup>3</sup>He went into all **the country around the Jordan**, **preaching** a baptism of **repentance** for the **forgiveness of sins**. <sup>4</sup>As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the desert,  
**‘Prepare the way for the Lord,**  
make straight paths for him.

<sup>5</sup>Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.

The **crooked** roads shall become **straight**,  
the **rough** ways smooth.

<sup>6</sup>And **all mankind will see God’s salvation.’ ” [Isaiah 40:3-5]**

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:2-3

## Key Words and Terms

**3:2 in the desert** in (3:3) **all the country around the Jordan** (the word of God came to John son of Zechariah).

- a. Luke doesn't specify where in the desert John was doing this heralding and baptizing, but the apostle John in John 1:28 (NASB), writes that "These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing."
- b. The "Bethany beyond the Jordan"—in the area also referred to as the Transjordan (e.g., Joshua 1:14)—is not the Bethany about two miles east of Jerusalem and west of the Jordan River (where Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and Simon the Leper lived) but a small town, which cannot now be located, that is east of the Jordan.
- c. Matthew 3:6 cites that the baptisms were done in the Jordan River. The Bible doesn't indicate the specific location, but it is considered most likely that the location was the northern ford near Succoth (see the next map) in the tribal territory of Gad, where Jacob crossed over from Mahanaim when he returned to Canaan. (Genesis 32; 33:17)

# The Promised Land in the Time of the Judges



*Deluxe Then and Now Bible Maps: "The Conquest of the Promised Land to the United Kingdom Old Testament—Judges and Prophets of Israel" (Rose Publishing, WORDsearch/Logos, 2008)*

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:2-3

## Key Words and Terms

3:3 **preaching** < κηρύσσω (*kērussō*), herald, proclaim aloud, publicly preach, announce)

Lenski, introduces John the Baptist and his ministry well. “While baptizing was distinctive of John and thus gave him the added name, his work in general was that of a prophet, more specifically of a herald, sent by God to the nation. That is why Matthew [and Luke] at once adds κηρύσσω [*kērussō*], “acting as a κῆρυξ (*kēryx*) or a herald,” as one who with a loud voice announces what his superior has ordered him to announce. When we translate this Greek word “preaching,” the original meaning of the verb must be retained. Preaching, in the Biblical sense, is merely to announce clearly and distinctly exactly what God orders us to announce in his Word. We dare not change that message by alteration, by omission, or by addition.”\*

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\*R. C. H. Lenski, [The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 91.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:3

## Key Words and Terms

- 3:3 **repentance** (μετάνοια [*metanoia*] = not only feeling sorry for sins, but true repentance consisting of a 180° change of mind, heart, and behavior that is lasting and unending)
- 3:3 **forgiveness of sins** (ἄφεσις [*aphesis*], which Lenski calls “one of the most blessed words in the Bible”) < ἀφίημι [*aphiēmi*], which means “sending away”). The text thus refers to the forgiveness that sends our sins so far away that they are not remembered and thus don’t exist in God’s mind.
- Psalm 103:12. “...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
  - The Hebrew concept of memory means that something exists as long as it is remembered. Cf., Jeremiah 31:31-34 “<sup>31</sup>The time is coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah....<sup>33</sup>I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts....<sup>34</sup>I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’” God is saying that in the new covenant in Christ Jesus, when our sins are forgiven, they will cease to exist.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:3

## Key Words and Terms

3:3 **sins** (ἁμαρτιῶν [*hamartiōn*] < ἁμαρτία [*harmartia*] = missing the mark) Again, Lenski explains well when he says missing the mark is “namely the mark set by the divine law, a mark which God must hold us to meet fully and perfectly. Sin thus entails guilt, and whereas we may speak of the two separately, they are actually never separated. The instant we sin we have guilt, and guilt cannot exist where sin is absent. Sin and guilt entail punishment, and this follows the guilt as surely as the guilt follows the sin. When the sins are thus sent away, all their guilt and punishment leave likewise.”\*

➤ **REFLECT AND DISCUSS:** With mental illnesses, including guilt and its associated issues, skyrocketing in our society, what will you say (or write in a letter to the editor) when you hear someone say, “We don’t need religion; we just need better mental health facilities.”?

In John 1:29, we read that when Jesus came to be baptized, the Baptist introduced Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

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\* R. C. H. Lenski, [The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 179.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:4

## Key Words and Terms

3:4 **‘Prepare the way for the Lord**, refers to the Lord’s coming to us. The Bible’s anthropology, that humans are essentially sinful—including not being oriented to God who is holy, holy, holy—reveals that a relationship with him necessitates his taking the initiative, his coming to us, which we see on every page of Scripture. And we need his grace to help us make the preparations.

To receive the Lord, preparation must (the verb, “prepare,” is imperative) be made. Especially for those who are unregenerate (those not regenerated, not born again), his arriving must be proclaimed. The primary reference in this text pertaining to preparing the way, is to the prophecy concerning John’s proclamation about Jesus’ coming, yet it also pertains to all God’s people in our witness for Christ Jesus and in our own personal preparation to receive him. Isaiah, as well as the Baptist and Luke by quoting him, use the desert, primarily literally for John and figuratively for us, indicating the obstacles in life that deter, divert, and distance people from the Lord.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:4

## Key Words and Terms

3:4 **‘Prepare the way for the Lord**, also means that the herald, literally John and figuratively every believer, must “make straight paths for him [the Lord].” That is, remove the obstacles in our lives that interfere with our relationship with him, e.g., by **repentance** (v.3). Again, the original Greek verb tenses illuminate the meaning the English misses. John is quoting, mostly but not precisely word-for-word, from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint, abbreviated LXX).

“Prepare” (Ἐτοιμάσατε [*Hetoimasate*]) is an imperative, and its tense indicates prepare completely. Isaiah here (40:3-5) uses the Hebrew device of synonymous parallelism in poetry, where the second line restates in other words, and further clarifies and elucidates, the first. Also, in “**make straight paths for him,**” the present tense of the Greek ποιείτε (*poieite*, make straight) is durative, meaning continuous throughout our lives in the sanctification process—always ongoing since sin constantly reappears—never “one and done.” Eliminate the sidetracks that delay, distract, and discourage us from meeting and walking with the Lord.



# John the Baptist Prepares the Way

Luke 3:5

## Key Words and Terms

3:5 **The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.** As we observed earlier, the imperative command, “Prepare,” for walking with the Lord requires our reliance on his grace. As we look at the following details included in the preparation, we see more clearly in this verse why we need the Lord’s help in order to be prepared to walk with him in his great holiness; to make the needed changes exceeds our natural ability.

As Lenski points out, it is important to notice that Isaiah is not primarily talking about geography. He uses three Hebrew words that designate moral conditions as well as geographical places.

- The Hebrew term translated **crooked** is עֲקוּבִים (*‘āqōv*), and it means not only rugged but also deceitful. Pertaining to landscape, the term refers to a lot of unevenness that provides places for people to hide. And hiding in moral matters typically means deception, which is why the Holy Spirit led the LXX translators (2 Timothy 3:16-17) to chose σκολιὰ (*skolia*), which in addition to crooked also means full of obstacles, devious, corrupt, evil, unjust, which must be made right in order to receive and walk with the Lord.

# John the Baptist Prepares the Way

Luke 3:5

## Key Words and Terms

3:5 The **crooked** roads shall become **straight**, the **rough** ways smooth.

- Thus, this preparation for the Lord means turning the crooked **straight**. Isaiah used the Hebrew word, מִישׁוֹר (*mîshôr*), which geographically means plain but morally means uprightness. Therefore, the LXX translates *mîshôr* with the Greek, εὐθείας (*eutheias* < εὐθύς [*euthus*]), which means straight, level (e.g., on an “even playing field”), right, upright. The implications for our moral and spiritual maturity are obvious, but we each need to ask ourselves, what does that mean for my life and the changes I need to make?
- The crooked roads, which also contain **rough** ways, need to be made smooth. The Holy Spirit led Isaiah to use the Hebrew word, וְהָרַכְסִים (*wěhorěkāsîm* < רָכַס [*rekhes*]), meaning “rugged places, rugged country,” to communicate this concept. The LXX, quoted by John, translates *rekhes* as τραχεῖαι (*tracheiai* < τραχύς [*trachus*]), which means rough, jagged. Again, the moral implications are evident; think about our terminology, e.g., “He has a lot of growing up [including morally and spiritually] to do; he’s certainly rough around the edges.”

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:5

## Key Words and Terms

**3:5 The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.**

Lenski summarizes the matter well:

Since three of the terms apply to moral states, we feel that the entire description has a moral and a spiritual import: the hearts of Israel are to be changed....It is, of course, not necessary to change every figurative term used into some spiritual counterpart, which would lead to fanciful combinations. Impenitence, whatever its form, is the real hindrance to the Lord's coming into men's hearts; it is like ravines, mountains, etc., and therefore the Baptist's great call was: "Repent!" The future tenses used in this verse are best explained as imperative, the future in commands..., although they may also be prophetic. The feminine εὐθείας [*eutheias*, straight] refers to ὁδοῦς [*hodous*, ways]..., and εἰς [*eis*, into] is predicative,...

\* Lenski, [The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 184.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:6

## Key Words and Terms

3:6 **all mankind will see God's salvation.**” The future tense is clearly a prophetic statement.

This statement indicates that the preceding will indeed be fulfilled. Very significantly, this passage is not only fulfilled by John's heralding the coming of the Messiah, Christ Jesus, but the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption of his creation will be for all people, **all mankind**, not just the Jews who believe in and follow the Christ. God's plan was first announced immediately after Adam and Eve fell and were disciplined (Genesis 3:15). His plan is reiterated throughout the Bible (e.g., Genesis 12:3; 17:4-7; Galatians 3:26-29; Luke 24:44-47; Revelation 7:9-10) and clearly indicates that his will for his kingdom is that it includes a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language. (Revelation 7:9) That is, representatives of every segment of all mankind will be in God's kingdom. The broader context, including the rest of the NT and the OT, indicates that many people (e.g., Matthew 7:13-14) will not be saved. Therefore, this text does not teach universalism. Since God does not contradict himself, he will not say in one place that many will not be saved and in another that everyone will be saved.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:7-14 (NIV)

<sup>7</sup>John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup>Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup>The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

<sup>10</sup>“What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

<sup>11</sup>John answered, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.”

<sup>12</sup>Tax collectors also came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

<sup>13</sup>“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

<sup>14</sup>Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”

He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:7-14

## Key Words and Terms

**3:7 the coming wrath** Most people, especially in this current age, if they think of God at all, they only want to think of him as being all love. It is true that God is love (1 John 4:8), but God has other attributes as well, one of which is that he is holy, holy, holy (Isaiah 6:3, Revelation 4:8), the Hebrew way of saying most holy. Since he is most holy, he will allow no sin in his presence, and he will judge it, for it harms—and ultimately destroys—people he loves and further corrupts his creation. This reality angers God, and his righteous wrath against sin and evil will be resolved at the final judgment, when Jesus returns.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:7-14

## Key Words and Terms

**3:7 the coming wrath** The mighty act of love that Jesus did in his suffering in our place, thus making atonement, or more accurately translated propitiation, for our sins (e.g., Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17), powerfully demonstrates that God brings good out of evil, and at great cost to himself in the most wonderful demonstration of love ever! “Propitiation” comes from the Greek verb, ἱλάσκομαι (*hilaskomai*), which means propitiate. What does propitiate mean? Propitiating God occurs when we accept his grace in Jesus Christ, whereby he reconciles us to himself, thus enabling us to avoid his wrath, and reestablish the communion with God which was destroyed because of Adam and Eve’s sin.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:7-14

## Key Words and Terms

**3:8 produce good fruit** by obeying God's laws (now in Christ the moral laws, no longer also the ceremonial and civil laws). Jesus fulfilled all the law, but we are still to obey the moral law and all that Christ has commanded, to do good works that demonstrate the genuineness of our faith in and love of Jesus Christ, indeed of the whole triune God, that glorify God, and that show we are Jesus' disciples. (John 14:15,21; 15:8; cf. Matthew 7:15-23)

➤ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. <sup>9</sup>"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command." (John 15:8-14)



# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:15-20 (NIV)

<sup>15</sup>The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. <sup>16</sup>John answered them all, “I baptize you with water [Matthew adds: for repentance”]. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” <sup>18</sup>And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

<sup>19</sup>But when John rebuked [present tense participle indicating repeatedly] Herod [Antipas] the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother’s wife [their adultery and other sins], and all the other evil things he had done, <sup>20</sup>Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:15-20 (NIV)

- 3:16 I baptize you with water** [Matthew adds: for repentance”].
- a. While John’s and Jesus’ baptisms are very significantly distinct, they are not contradictory but complementary.
  - b. John’s message focused on repentance and forgiveness of sins, and for those who did repent—again meaning not only a sincere sorrow for sin but a commitment and concomitant behavioral turn around, no longer continuing to do the sins—and therefore were forgiven, they did receive the water baptism that indicated and affirmed cleansing from their sins.
  - c. John’s baptism, as John himself, was also a forerunner of the soon coming Messiah, the Christ, and the sacrament that would be a sign and seal of membership in the promised new covenant that Jesus came to establish.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:15-20 (NIV)

- 3:16 **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.** Lenski offers this insightful distinction between John's and Jesus' ministries:
- a. "With this difference [John's humble diminishing of himself and magnifying the infinitely greater Jesus, the Son of God] between the persons there corresponds the difference in their work. John makes this plain by use of another comparison. Since he is appointed to baptize he places beside his baptizing that act of the stronger One which may also be called a baptizing. John baptizes with the ordinary sacrament by employing water (ὕδατι [*hudati*], with water], dative of means); God's Son will crown his great redemptive work by baptizing "in connection with the Holy Spirit and fire" (no dative but an ἐν [with] phrase). A divinely appointed man may use water in the sacrament; only the Son of God can pour out the Holy Spirit, and even he only after completing his redemptive work and then ascending to heaven."\*

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\*Lenski, [\*The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel\*](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 198.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:15-20 (NIV)

## **3:16 He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**

Pertaining to the difference between John's and Jesus' baptisms, Lenski adds, "The true distinction is: before the actually completed work of redemption the limited preparatory work of the Spirit [much evidence of the Holy Spirit's involvement throughout the Bible exists, beginning with Genesis 1:2]; after Pentecost the superabounding fullness of the Spirit everywhere."\* See also Titus 3:4-8.

Matthew Henry in his classic commentary makes the important distinction this way: "John can do no more than *baptize with water*, in token of this, that they ought to purify and cleanse themselves; but Christ can, and will, *baptize with the Holy Ghost*; he can give the Spirit to cleanse and purify the heart, not only as *water* washes off the *dirt* on the outside, but as *fire* purges out the *dross* that is within, and *melts down* the metal, that it may be cast into a *new mould*."\*\*

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\* Lenski, [\*The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel\*](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 199.

\*\* Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 1834.

## Titus 3:4-8

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup>This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

Luke 3:15-20 (NIV)

**3:16 He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**

b. The meaning of Christ's baptism with fire is debated. Fire refers sometimes to cleansing and sometimes to judgment. However, baptism always means cleansing, and it is never associated with destruction. Also, fire frequently refers to cleansing, e.g., Malachi 3:2,3; Zechariah 13:9; Isaiah 4:4; 6:6,7; 1 Peter 1:7. Further, at Pentecost, we read that when the Holy Spirit became manifest, his manifestation was with "tongues of fire." (Acts 2:3)

True. Yet, the context also includes references to God's wrath against sin and evil and the coming judgment, e.g., 3:7,9,16-17. Thus, fire here in this context can mean both: cleansing for those who truly repent and believe and who are baptized. **And** it also means **judgment for those who will not repent and believe** and who are not baptized, e.g., Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matthew 3:7; 16:12; 23)

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

- The question often arises, “Why was Jesus baptized?” Since they are writing to different populations, Luke and Matthew emphasize different aspects of the message. Luke, writing to Gentiles, just gives a brief indication, and Matthew, writing to those with a Jewish background, adds more with a quote that Jewish people need to know and would understand. We’ll look at both.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

## **3:21 Jesus was baptized too.**

- a. Jesus' baptism definitely designates his humanity, a vital necessity for him to take our place in fulfilling the Law, which no other human being has been able, or ever will be able, to fulfill. Though the adverb, "too" ("also" in some English translations), is not in the original Greek text, it is important. "Too" is added in the English to convey the meaning of the Greek participle, "Jesus 'having been baptized,'" which occurs right next to the statement about the people being baptized. Jesus' baptism, at the same time the people were being baptized, is a clear indication of his humanity. Since he is 100% human, as well as being 100% divine, and since only he is sinless, he alone is therefore able to take our sins upon himself. The Holy Spirit coming to him is another indication of his humanity, as will be considered below.



# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

## **3:21 Jesus was baptized too.**

Yet this question arises. “Since John’s baptism was ‘a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ (3:3); since one of the main meanings of baptism is cleansing from sins; and since Jesus was without sin (e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5), being perfect, why was Jesus baptized?” Luke doesn’t include this matter, but Matthew does record John’s query and Jesus’ initial answer, the fuller answer to be given by the Holy Spirit through Jesus’ apostles after his suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, seated at the right hand of God’s throne. (Hebrews 12:2)

Before examining what Jesus said in Matthew’s account of the Gospel, and its extensive meaning, we should first briefly consider the following explanation of pastor and Biblical scholar, Donald G. Miller, regarding the timing of Jesus’ baptism with that of the people in the light of Jesus’ sinlessness. Then, we must consider what Luke says about the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in bodily form like a dove.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

## **3:21 Jesus was baptized too.**

Donald Miller, also observes the timing of Jesus' baptism with that of the people, and in the light of Jesus' sinlessness, he emphasizes that in his baptism, Jesus was functioning in and fulfilling his role as the Suffering Servant, a major motif (theme) in the Bible. He writes, Jesus "was baptized for the sins of others. Isaiah 53 makes this clear...Luke couples Jesus' baptism with that of the people—'when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized' (3:21). In his first public act, the Servant identified himself with the sins of his people, and was baptized for their sake, not his own. He took upon himself all the sins which all the people brought to the Jordan. It is plain, therefore, that right from the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, he was headed for the Cross...The Suffering Servant is the key which unlocks the meaning of...the whole Bible (see Luke 24:25-27,44-47; Acts 2:22-33; 3:13,18,26; 4:27,30; 8:32-35; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 5:7-9; 1 Peter 1:11; 4:1; 5:1; Revelation 5:6,9-12).\*

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\* Donald G., Miller, *The Layman's Bible Commentary (Volume 18): The Gospel According to Luke* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 47-48.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

## **3:21 Jesus was baptized too.**

“With this unique empowering [of his human nature], Jesus goes forth to the ministry of the Suffering Servant in obedience to his Father’s will. What Israel failed to do—to be God’s obedient servant—Jesus will now do for them, and for all men [mankind]. Here is both the New Israel and the New Adam. He must bear the sins of the many, in order that he may ‘make many to be accounted righteous’ (Isaiah 53:11; see also Romans 5:19). This is the meaning of his baptism.”\*

Calvin adds that “The general reason why Christ received baptism was, that he might render full obedience to the Father; and the special reason was, that he might consecrate baptism in his own body, that we might have it in common with him.”\*\*

Matthew Henry links Jesus’ baptism with his humility in taking on our sinful flesh in accord with the apostle Paul’s explanation in Philippians 2:4-11, esp. vss. 6-8. “Christ is *now* in a state of humiliation: he has emptied himself, and *made himself of no reputation*. He is not only *found in fashion as a man*, but is *made in the likeness of sinful flesh*, and therefore now let him be *baptized of John*; as if he needed to be washed, though perfectly pure; and thus he *was made sin for us*, though he *knew no sin*.”\*\*\*

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\* Donald G., Miller, *The Layman’s Bible Commentary (Volume 18): The Gospel According to Luke*, p. 49.

\*\* John Calvin and William Pringle, [Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), p. 202.

\*\*\* Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#), p. 1621.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

**3:22 the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.**

And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

b. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon him as a dove. Neither in this passage nor in any other are we told what the form was: “like a dove” is a simile, not a literal description. The meaning, not that detail, is what is important. As a figure of speech, there is a correspondence, but not an identification, between the sign and the reality to which it points; thus, the Holy Spirit was not in the dove (God would not be in an animal), just as he was not in what “appeared...tongues as of fire,” (KJV) the fire at Pentecost. (Acts 2:3) One reason for the omission of an explanation as to what that form was, is to help us keep our focus on the significance and meaning of the Holy Spirit coming on Jesus. Again Lenski’s explanation is superb and succinct.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

## **3:22 Jesus...the Holy Spirit came upon him as a dove. (3:22)**

“The form was visible because, like the open heaven and like the voice, human senses were to perceive what was happening. He who was conceived ‘of the Spirit’ now receives that Spirit as a permanent gift for the Messianic work he is now assuming. As his conception pertained to his human nature alone, so also does this bestowal of the Spirit. In his deity the Son was of the identical essence with both the Father and the Spirit, and thus no one person could be bestowed upon another. But in his human nature, which the Son had assumed in order by it to work out our redemption, he could receive the Spirit and did so when that work was now to begin. So great a task was this that all three persons [of the triune God] are concerned in it, and the Spirit aids the human nature of Jesus in a special way.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

## **3:22 Jesus...the Holy Spirit came upon him as a dove. (3:22)**

“The coming down of the Spirit upon Jesus is the anointing that had been prophesied in Ps. 45:7: ‘God, thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.’ Isa. 61:1: ‘The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach,’ etc. (Luke 4:18). See also Acts 10:38: ‘God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power.’ The prophets received some of the gifts of the Spirit; Jesus, who is lifted far above them, received the Spirit as such. We see what power thus filled him when he was now led up of the Spirit to be tempted (4:1), and when in the power of the Spirit he came into Galilee to teach there in his wonderful way and to work miracles (4:14). Luther writes: ‘Here he begins rightly to be Christ,’ namely the anointed One, ‘and was thus inaugurated into his entire Messianic office as our Prophet, High Priest, and King.’”\*

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\* Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), pp. 211–212. Cf. R. V. G. Tasker (*op cit.*), *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 50.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

## **3:22 Jesus...the Holy Spirit came upon him as a dove. (3:22)**

Further understanding of Jesus' baptism as revealed in the message of the voice from heaven, when the Holy Spirit came upon him as a dove, occurs when we recall Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.

- Psalm 2:7 “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son; Today I have begotten you.’” (NASB) Here, God is using this term, “Today I have begotten you,” figuratively referring to his placing Christ Jesus, the everlasting king, on his throne; it is not speaking of the eternal trinitarian relationship of the Father and the Son. For more on this subject, see Lenski's interpretation of Acts 13:33.
- Isaiah 42:1 ““Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.”

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

## **3:22 Jesus...the Holy Spirit came upon him as a dove. (3:22)**

Another leading Bible scholar, R. V. G. Tasker, London University Professor of New Testament Exegesis, offers further explanation of the significance of the dove and the Father's proclamation in the light of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.

Tasker writes, "it was then that He was appointed to a work which He alone could perform, because of His unique relationship with His Father.\* This is brought out in the heavenly message heard as He came up from the water. The message takes the form of a composite quotation from Psalm ii. 7 [2:7] and Isaiah xlii. 1 [42:1], upon both of which passages Jesus must often have meditated. In the verse from the psalm the Lord of Israel is pictured as crowning a son of David as Messiah...

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\* and, I would add, as part of the Second Person of the Trinity, the triune God.



# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

## **3:22 Jesus...the Holy Spirit came upon him as a dove. (3:22)**

“...[in] the last half of the verse [42:1, are] words from the passage in Isaiah, where the prophet speaks of an ideal servant of God who perfectly does His will as he treads the pathway of obedience and service. Jesus is thus designated God’s beloved Son, chosen to be the One in whom this prophecy is to be fulfilled. He is the unique Son of God endowed with supernatural power, but it is His vocation to be a Servant well-pleasing to God, especially when called upon to suffer vicariously for His people.

“It is a great [apparent] paradox that upon the Messiah, who was to baptize *with fire*,\* the Spirit should have descended at His baptism *like a dove*, a symbol of gentleness and meekness. In Jesus we are in fact confronted with both ‘the goodness and severity of God’ (Romans xi. 22 [11:22]); and this double truth runs right through the New Testament....”\*\* A dove is also a symbol of innocence, purity (Matthew 10:16), and perfection (Song of Songs 6:9); the dove was offered in sacrifice (Leviticus 1:14); a fitting description required of the lamb without blemish (Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 9:3; 23:12; 1 Peter 1:19) in order to redeem mankind.

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\* “Fire” here is a metaphor. See the above explanations.

\*\* R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 50.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22 (NIV)

## **3:22 Jesus...the Holy Spirit came upon him as a dove. (3:22)**

Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown remind us of one other reason “the Holy Spirit came upon him [Jesus] as a dove.” That is for John’s sake: “the fourth Gospel gives us one more piece of information here, on the authority of one who saw and testified of it: ‘John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him.’ And lest we should think that this was an accidental thing, he adds that this last particular was expressly given him as part of the sign by which he was to recognize and identify Him as the Son of God: ‘And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God’ (Jn 1:32–34). And when with this we compare the predicted descent of the Spirit upon Messiah (Is 11:2), ‘And *the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,*’ we cannot doubt that it was this permanent and perfect resting of the Holy Ghost upon the Son of God—now and henceforward in His *official* capacity—that was here visibly manifested.”\*

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\* Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, [Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible](#), vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), p. 12.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Matthew 3:13-17 (NASB)

<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan *coming* to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup>But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?”

<sup>15</sup>But Jesus answering said to him, “Permit *it* at this time; for **in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.**” Then he permitted Him.

<sup>16</sup>After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from\* the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him, <sup>17</sup>and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

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\*The Greek preposition is ἀπό (*apo*), which in this grammatical construction (with a genitive noun) means “from” or “away from.” While *apo* in other contexts can mean “out of,” it is here accurately translated “from.” In this verse, an additional reason to rightly handle God’s Word and accurately translate *apo* as “from” (in contrast to, e.g., the NIV, “out of”) is to avoid unintentionally misleading readers to engage in eisegesis, i.e., reading into the text that the mode of Jesus’ baptism was by immersion, which is not specified in this passage.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

- c. What else, then, does Matthew add to the meaning of why Jesus was baptized by John? Matthew records Jesus' initial answer to this, John's and also our, question: “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (3:15) What did Jesus mean?
- 1) Recall the context. As always, the context is not only the immediate verses just before and just after the passage being examined but the larger context of the passage which provides the necessary perspective for understanding it: that chapter, the whole book, and the whole Bible.
    - a) In the preceding verses, John has been preaching about the need for repentance; forgiveness of sins; producing good fruit.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? Matthew records Jesus' answer to this, John's and our, question. **"[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."** (3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1) Recall the context.

a) In the preceding verses, John has been preaching about the need for repentance; forgiveness of sins; producing good fruit.

1- Bearing good fruit is doing good works to demonstrate the genuineness of saving faith, including reaching out to the whole world; and avoiding the wrath (3:7) to come in the final judgment.

2- Jesus had no need to repent; he always was sinless. His whole life was and forever will be good, indeed perfect. And he will be the judge when he returns. (Romans 2:16; 2 Timothy 4:1)

3- So, he did not have a personal need for baptism. But why then did he say that "it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness"?

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? Matthew records Jesus' answer to this, John's and our, question. **"[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."** (3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1) Recall the context.

b) The large context is one of what Biblical scholars call a major motif (theme or doctrine) that runs throughout the whole Bible. This particular major motif, the covenant, is a key to making sense of the main message of God's Word. To establish the relationship with his people in accord with his will for us he made a covenant with our leaders. In the covenant he stipulated the obedience he expected in order for us to be and remain righteous in his sight, and then he explained the consequences of obedience (blessings) and of disobedience (curses) that would follow.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n **this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.**” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1) Recall the context.

b) The covenant God established with the leader of his people, through whom all believers would be included, developed into two forms, one before the fall and one after the fall.

1- The pre-fall covenant is called the covenant of works. That specific wording, covenant of works, does not occur in the Bible, but its Biblical basis does, e.g., “Like Adam, they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to me there.” (Hosea 6:7)

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to **fulfill all righteousness.**” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1) Recall the context.

b) The covenant God established with the leader of his people, through whom all believers would be included, developed into two forms, one before the fall and one after the fall.

1- The pre-fall covenant is called the covenant of works.

a- To honor humans’ bearing God’s image—in particular a limited but genuine freedom of choice—God gave Adam only one law to obey: to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of course, Adam and Eve disobeyed, and they as well as all humans after them experienced death (and much other disharmony) as God told them would occur if they disobeyed.



# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n **this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.**” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1) Recall the context.

b) The covenant God established with the leader of his people, through whom all believers would be included, developed into two forms, one before the fall and one after the fall.

1- The pre-fall covenant is called the covenant of works.

b- Due to God’s great love for the humans he created, who alone bear his image, he immediately announced his plan of redemption for his creation. (Genesis 3:15)

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to **fulfill all righteousness.**” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1) Recall the context.

b) The covenant God established developed into two forms, one before the fall and one after the fall.

2- The post-fall covenant is called the covenant of grace, also sometimes called the covenant of redemption. Grace is the unmerited favor of God for all humans who will accept his offer of redemption obediently. This Biblical reality distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. All others teach various requirements humans have to do in order to earn their salvation.

a- God’s covenant of grace was established with Abraham.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

- c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to **fulfill all righteousness.**” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?
- 1) Recall the context.
    - b) The covenant God established developed into two forms, one before the fall and one after the fall.
      - 2- The post-fall covenant is called the covenant of grace.
        - b- In God’s plan of redemption in his covenant of grace, he offers salvation and countless other blessings to all who will believe in and obey him. God based his covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17) in a format familiar to his people in the Middle East, the Suzerain-vassal treaty. It consisted of three main sections, which are observed in the outline of the book of Deuteronomy.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

- c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?
- 1) Recall the context.
    - b) The covenant God established took two forms: one before the fall, and one after the fall.
      - 2- The post-fall covenant is called the covenant of grace.
        - b- God’s plan of redemption in his covenant of grace consisted of three main sections, which are observed in the outline of the book of Deuteronomy.
          - 1] An historical prologue (Cf., Deuteronomy 1:3-4:43)
          - 2] Stipulations (Cf., Deuteronomy 4:44-26:19) This section consists of the laws God requires for righteousness in his sight. Thus, Jesus fulfilled what we could not do. As R. Alan Cole says, Jesus fulfilled “every ordinance of God for His people.”\*
          - 3] Ratification: blessings that will follow obeying the covenant stipulations and curses that will occur for failing to keep the covenant. (Cf., Deuteronomy 27-30)

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\* R. Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 58.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1)b)2-b-

2] Stipulations (Cf., Deuteronomy 4:44-26:19) This section consists of the laws God requires for righteousness in his sight. Thus, in obedience to the Father, Jesus fulfilled for us what we could not do, due to our sinfulness, thereby enabling us to be credited with Jesus’ righteousness by our faith. (Romans 4:24) Thus, he also modeled the humility and obedience we need to do in gratitude to our triune God for our salvation that he provided for us at such great cost to himself in the most wonderful demonstration of love ever!

a] Neither of the covenants were democratic documents. God, more precisely the LORD, made the covenants with Adam and Abraham.

b] Notice who makes the stipulation(s) in the covenant of works: the LORD (Genesis 2:16-17); in the covenant of grace: the LORD (Genesis 17:1ff.); and in the new covenant: the LORD (Jeremiah 31:31; Luke 22:20).

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1)b)2-b-

2] Stipulations (Cf., Deuteronomy 4:44-26:19)

This section consists of the laws God requires for righteousness in his sight. Thus, Jesus fulfilled for us what we could not do, due to our sinfulness.

b] Notice who makes the stipulation(s) in the covenant of works: the LORD (Genesis 2:16-17); in the covenant of grace: the LORD (Genesis 17:1ff.); and in the new covenant of grace: the LORD (Jeremiah 31:31; Luke 22:20). The LORD created all that is; he owns it; (Genesis 1:1-3; John 1:1-5,32-34) he alone is righteous; thus, he has the right to define what is righteous and acceptable to him. (Colossians 1:9-28) Jesus has fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 5:17)

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1)b)2-b-

2] Stipulations (Cf., Deuteronomy 4:44-26:19)

c] Now notice who Jesus reveals the further identity of the LORD to be: himself, Christ Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity (e.g., John 8:58; Deuteronomy 6:4. See the next slide.). The LORD, the triune God, set the standard, the criterion, for righteousness acceptable to him. The standard was reachable by Adam and Eve before they sinned, but not afterward. Yet, due to the LORD’s great love for us, who bear his image, he desires to save all who will believe in and obey him. (Romans 4:18-25; John 14:21; Matthew 7:19-23; James 2:17; 1 John 3:18) So Jesus the Christ willingly and out of great love for us, did what we could not do; he vicariously obeyed all the Law and took upon himself the punishment due to us for our sins, so we who believe can be credited with his righteousness. (Romans 4:24)

# Original Hebrew of Deuteronomy 6:4 (Cf. Mark 12:29)

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

<i>'eḥād</i>	<i>yehwāh</i>	<i>'ēlōhênû</i>	<i>yehwāh</i>	<i>yisrā'ēl</i>	<i>šəma</i> ´
one	Yahweh	our God	Yahweh	Israel	hear
	(LORD)		(LORD)		

יְהוָה (*yehwāh*), Yahweh, the LORD < אֶהְיֶה (*'ehyeh*), I AM < הָיָה (*hāyāh*), to be

- “God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ” (Exodus 3:14)
- “‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’” (John 8:58) The Jews to whom he was speaking, clearly understood that Jesus was identifying himself with God; that is why they picked up stones to kill him. (8:59)



# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1) Recall the context.

b) The covenant God established developed into two forms, one before the fall and one after the fall.

2- The post-fall covenant is called the covenant of grace.

b- God’s plan of redemption is in his covenant of grace with Abraham which has been ratified throughout the Old Testament, e.g., with Moses and David, and which God said will be an everlasting covenant. (Genesis 17:7) Jesus came to fulfill and renew the covenant, thus also fulfilling God’s promise through the prophet Jeremiah to make a new covenant. (Matthew 5:17-18; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25)

c- Righteousness is credited to a believer by true faith in God, the genuineness of which is seen in obedience to the covenant stipulations. “Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:9; Hebrews 11:8,17-19; John 13:34-35; 14:21) We repent (*op cit.*) and ask the Lord for his forgiveness when we sin and fail to obey.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1) Recall the context.

b) The covenant God established developed into two forms, one before the fall and one after the fall.

2- The post-fall covenant is called the covenant of grace.

d- God revealed through Jeremiah that he would establish a new covenant. (Jeremiah 31:31-34). In the LXX the word for new is *καινός* (*kainos*), new in nature or in quality, i.e., renewed, not brand new. The new covenant is in Christ Jesus. Recall what Jesus said, “after the supper he [Jesus] took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [*kainos*], covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:20)

e- “In Christ we receive righteousness credited to us by our faith. The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup>but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup>He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” (Romans 4:23–25)

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n **this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.**” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1) Recall the context.

b) The covenant God established developed into two forms, one before the fall and one after the fall.

2- The post-fall covenant is called the covenant of grace.

f- For those who do not believe in Jesus as their only Lord and Savior, they will be judged by the previous covenants, including the stipulations (the laws), which they and no one else, except Jesus Christ, have ever been able to or can keep. They're on their own, without being credited as righteous and will be subject to God's righteous wrath against sin.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?

1) Recall the context.

2) In the light of the covenant, we can understand what Jesus meant when he said that “It is proper for us to do this [baptize Jesus] to fulfill all righteousness.” In so doing, he would be fulfilling the whole law and the prophets, so that his faithfulness, the only one ever able to fulfill the whole law, his righteousness would be credited to us who believe in him. Thus, salvation is by doing the works required by God—only our salvation is by Jesus’ works being credited to us by our faith in him. Our salvation is not by our works. Thanks be to God!

➤ FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION: What other daily benefits do we experience from God’s grace in Christ by not having to earn our salvation, as is taught by every other religion. Consider, e.g., relief from stress, anxiety, worry about the future, and related mental illnesses; also: meaning and purpose in life, self-worth.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

- c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?
- 3) The excellent Anglican clergyman and Bible scholar, Leon Morris, observes that Luke begins his account of Jesus’ ministry and mighty acts with our Lord’s baptism, which “marks the call of Jesus to His public ministry, a call accompanied by the gift of the Holy Spirit and confirmed by a voice from heaven.”\* R. V. G. Tasker adds by quoting commentator Paul P. Levertoff: “In undergoing baptism, Jesus is accepting His destiny,”\*\* His divine vocation.

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\* Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 99.

\*\* R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 49.

# *John the Baptist Prepares the Way—The Baptism of Jesus*

Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:13-17

- c. Why was Jesus baptized by John? “[I]n this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15) What did Jesus mean?
- 4) A very important concluding observation by Biblical theology professor, R. S. Wallace, offers a further insight into the meaning of this text. “The NT describes in various terms Christ’s place and role in accomplishing the work of mediation [between humans and God] (cf. Rev. 1:5; Jn. 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:30). An examination of these terms has led the Church to depict the person and work of Christ as the fulfillment of the mediatorial offices\* of prophet, priest, and king. It is taken as significant that in the OT holders of these offices were anointed (cf. Lev. 8:2; 1 S. 15:17; 16:13; 1 K. 19:16). The reality signified by anointing was finally fulfilled at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, when the Spirit descended upon Him, and He entered His active ministry as Messiah, Christ, Anointed One.”\*\*

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\* A study by Edward D. Seely shows that in the Hebrew of the OT and the Greek of the NT, the word “office” does not occur with any text pertaining to prophet or king. Also, “office” is typically not the most accurate translation of the Hebrew and Greek words designating the work of priest. For this and additional reasons identified in the paper, [“A Study of Biblical Texts Pertaining to Prophet, Priest, and King: Are these Roles an ‘Office,’ a ‘Vocation’ or a ‘Function’?”](#) this author prefers the words, “vocation,” or “function” instead of “office.”

\*\* R. S. Wallace, “MEDIATION,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume Three, K-P, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, General Editor (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p. 303.

# For Further Information

For further information on the above subjects, see the following resources:

1. The Baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:15-22)--A Sermon by R.C. Sproul:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45ZI-73\\_XQw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45ZI-73_XQw)
  
2. [“Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity”](#) (PowerPoint) and related documents on my general and academic Websites listed below. All documents on both Websites are free and secure.
  - a. General Website: <https://fromacorntoak12.com> or [edwardseely.com](https://edwardseely.com)
  - b. Academic Website: <https://seelyedward.academia.edu/>