

Why was Jesus Baptized?

Matthew 3:13-17

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Life is full of questions. Some questions will one day be answered. Others may never be answered. Maybe you've thought of some of these questions.

1. At a movie theater which arm rest is yours?
2. Why are there no 'B' batteries?
3. If man evolved from monkeys, how come we still have monkeys?
4. If a bunch of cats jump on top of each other, is it still called a dog pile?
5. If a mime is arrested, do they tell him he has a right to talk?
6. Why is it that everyone driving faster than you is considered an idiot and everyone driving slower than you is a moron?
7. Why does quicksand work slowly?
8. Is a pessimist's blood type B-negative?
9. Why does the Easter bunny carry eggs? Rabbits don't lay eggs.
10. If a bald person works as a chef at a restaurant, do they have to wear a hairnet?
11. Why are there interstate highways on the Hawaiian Islands?
12. If Mars had earthquakes would they be called marsquakes?
13. Why do people never say "it's only a game" when they're winning?
14. Did Noah have woodpeckers on the ark? If he did, where did he keep them?
15. Why is tuna sometimes called "tuna fish"? Chicken is never called "chicken bird".¹

And the question we seek an answer to today – Why did Jesus get baptized?

Last week you heard about John the Baptist. He preached a hard message of prophetic judgment calling the people to repent and prepare for the arrival of one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Then one day Jesus himself shows up to be baptized by John. But why? He didn't need to repent of anything. He didn't have to flee from God's wrath. He was God. Thankfully, this question does have some answers that we can discover. Jesus' baptism and the events that immediately followed it bring some very deep answers about Jesus' himself.

As we continue our journey through the Gospel of Matthew, I want to invite you to look at what this passage reveals about Jesus. Matthew has spent the first paragraphs of his Gospel laying out Jesus credentials. We saw that through the genealogy and the fulfillment of prophecies through Jesus' birth and childhood. Now Jesus has grown up and is about to begin His public ministry. But He doesn't just start ministering. He comes to be baptized. As we explore this short little paragraph, we will discover why he got baptized and much more about His identity. Once we've dug through that we'll have opportunity to ponder how we're going to respond to this Jesus and then meet Him at His table.

¹ <http://www.crazythoughts.com/> Accessed Thursday, January 8, 2015.

Matthew 3:13-17 (ESV)

¹³Then 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.”

John preached a thundering message of prophetic judgment. He announces that one will come after Him who will bring a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. Messianic expectation was already high in that period. John’s words must have heightened it further. Surely the promised one would have heralds announcing his arrival. Maybe he would march into Jerusalem on a white horse to the sound of trumpets surrounded by his loyal forces.

But instead a solitary man makes a trip from an obscure village in the far north. Jesus, likely traveling alone for he does not yet have disciples, leaves the Galilee to go to the Jordan River and specifically find John. Matthew points out the purpose of this journey at the end of verse 13. He came “to be baptized by John.” So Jesus did not go on shopping trip to Jerusalem and then hear about this John guy in the wilderness. Then out of curiosity, Jesus goes out into the wilderness and sees others baptized. So he decides “why don’t I do that too?” No. Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized.

He likely joined with others maybe in a lineup to be baptized. John maybe finishes baptizing the person in front of Jesus. Then he turns to meet the next person who desires to go through this baptism of repentance. But then John sees Jesus. We have no record that they met before. John’s & Jesus’ mothers were relatives. But in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist said “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.”” Did John know that Jesus was the one he would proclaim when they were growing up? We don’t know. But we do know that when Jesus presented Himself to John to be baptized, John tried to prevent him. “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” John delivered a baptism of repentance. Jesus did not need to repent of anything. He is 30 years old now. He’s lived the first 30 years of his life in obedience to his Father. By the power of the Spirit and His parent’s guidance, he has never committed a sin – through his childhood; through his teens and through his young adulthood. It’s likely he had to assume a lot of responsibility because we do not hear of Joseph after the birth narratives. So he’s likely died and Jesus has taken on the role of main provider for the family.

But now He stands before John at the beginning of his ministry. John realizes that he needs the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. Jesus does not need the baptism of repentance. But Jesus changes the meaning of His baptism by John. You're allowed to do that when you're God. Jesus himself answers the question "why did Jesus need to be baptized" since He did not need to repent of anything?

Why did Jesus need to be baptized? "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." But what does that mean? Well notice a couple of things included in Jesus' response. He acknowledges that this is an unusual baptism with his use of "now" and "fitting." Anyone who really knew Jesus would understand that it was not fitting for John to perform a baptism of repentance on Jesus. And the use of "now" implies that if Jesus' baptism was at another time might not be so fitting.

But it is now. It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. "Us" refers to John and Jesus. They will both be involved in the baptism. But what does fulfill all righteousness mean? It totally depends on the meaning of the word righteousness. In some places in the Bible, righteousness means right living before God or being good or obeying a command. But there is no command in the Old Testament for the Messiah to get baptized. Righteousness in Matthew means conforming to God's will especially in the area of His saving activity. So to fulfill all righteousness would mean to fulfill or accomplish God's saving activity. Jesus' baptism fulfills or launches God's ultimate saving activity. So though normally at other times it would not be fitting for Jesus to be baptized, now in this moment in history with Jesus standing before John, it was fitting.

So John baptizes Jesus. Immediately he comes out of the water. But as soon as Jesus is up and out of the water, it becomes clear that this is no ordinary traveler who made a journey from Galilee to get closer to God.

What happened after Jesus' baptism?

1) *The heavens were opened. (16a)*

Now we can only imagine what this was like. But throughout the Bible, this only happened on the rarest of occasions and indicated a direct communication from God. At the very beginning of the prophet Ezekiel's ministry he writes this (Ezekiel 1:1) – In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. Then as Stephen is being stoned to death in Acts he declares "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Then in Revelation 19:11, the apostle John writes “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.” So – the heavens opening was a rare & earth shattering event. Notice Jesus doesn’t open the heavens. The heavens were opened. It was like God opened the communication gates of heaven to reveal something momentous.

2) *Jesus saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. (16b)*

The Spirit comes to bear witness to Jesus. Jewish readers aware of the Scriptures would immediately be drawn back to Isaiah 42 with this image. There the prophet speaks for God who says “Behold my servant, whom I uphold . . . I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.” The Spirit was coming upon Jesus at this moment to carry out God’s great saving work. This does not mean that Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit in Him before that moment. This descent of the Spirit identifies Jesus as the Promised servant.

3) *The Father’s voice speaks from heaven (17a)*

Now the Jewish people of the time believed that no prophetic voice had been heard from God for 400 years since Malachi. They had lived waiting for God to speak through a prophet. John the Baptist initially broke that silence. But now God will break this in an astounding way. He Himself will speak. The voice is God’s from heaven and testifies that God Himself has broken the silence and again reveals Himself to man.

4) *The Father declares that Jesus is His beloved Son in whom He delights. (17b)*

These words recall Psalm 2:7 where the king from David’s line is called God’s son and was understood to be Messiah. But these words also bring us back to the Servant Son of Isaiah 42 “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, in whom my soul delights. “This is my beloved Son in whom I am pleased or delight.” The Father introduces the title of Son of God that will be given to Jesus. God was already at work preparing for this news. Jesus was the actual Son of God through the virgin birth. Matthew has applied the prophecy of Hosea to Jesus – Out of Egypt I called my Son. In the next chapter, the devil will address Jesus as the Son of God. This voice from heaven confirms the eternally existing relationship of divine love between Father and Son.

So through Jesus’ baptism, God has presented Jesus as one for whom the heavens opened; One upon whom God has placed His Spirit as promised in the Isaiah 42; One for whom God broke His prophetic “silence” to inaugurate a new age of revelation and salvation; One is the very Son of God.

So what really happened at this event? **Jesus was verified as the divinely ordained servant and Son of God.**

Yet this all occurs through an act of humility. God the Son comes to be baptized by a sinful human being. It is a great mark of humility for Jesus to willingly submit to this and follow through with it and direct John away from reversing the practice. Jesus shows his willingness to identify with His people and obey His Father. One commentator asks How hard, really, was it for him to appear humbly at the waters of John's baptism? Did he really wrestle with such mundane things as self-image, and appearances, and his role? I think so. He was that human. All the things that we struggle with, he experienced (cf. Heb 4:14–16). That is why he is our example. That is a key element for his entrance to history. He not only accomplished salvation for us, but he also gave us the model of what a real human life lived in the power of the Spirit is like.

Yet this humble act brings the highest exaltation. The heavens were opened to him.

The Spirit of God descended upon Him in a very public anointing way. God broke 400 years of prophetic silence to affirm Him. God proclaimed for all to hear that this was His Son in whom He delighted –the very wording which points us to the Servant of Isaiah who will suffer and die for His people. In just a few minutes Jesus is deeply humbled yet highly exalted.

And this is the story of Jesus throughout His life. This is the stunning paradoxes that constantly accompany His travels. He left the glories of heaven to become that most vulnerable of creatures – a human infant. He was a little child yet worshipped by wise men from the East. He is physically powerless to stop King Herod's attempt on his life yet outlives the king to become the king of kings. He bears the honor and scorn of the title Nazarene. At his baptism he is glorified by the highest exaltation any human can receive yet he has just been baptized along with others.

This Jesus is King and Servant; Lord and humble; All powerful yet never using His power for personal gain. He comes humbly and quietly to accomplish the greatest work in all of history for you and me.

How will we respond?

I think we can boil it down to 2 responses. You may reject Him. We can reject Jesus in a variety of ways. We may be hostile towards him or deliberately and consciously decide to reject Him. We can reject Him through unbelief. Or we can reject him through an apathetic do nothing response.

Or we can worship and obey Him. Jesus, the exalted Son of God who humbled Himself for baptism also humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross so that we might be saved. He has come to

save us not just from Hell when we die; but from our sins which tragically separate us from God; from the penalty of sin; from the ongoing power of sin over our lives so that we can leave behind that which has plagued us and kept us from obedience and growing in holiness. Maybe you have never trusted Christ with your life. But today God has opened your eyes. Today God has shown His Son to you and that truly is the Savior – your Savior! Will you receive Him today by putting the trust of your life upon Him?

If you already know Christ, how has your worship and obedience of Him been lately? Have you started 2015 by worshipping Him daily through the word and meditating on the Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to make your heart warm towards God?

Or you can worship and obey Christ by joining the next discovery class. If you would like to explore that further, I am starting a new discovery class next Sunday at 9:30. I would invite you to join me and others for discussion and study about Christianity, Baptism and Church Membership. Would you take a connection card right now and put on your name and check the baptism/membership box. We will provide you with more information about this. If you have not been baptized, why not? Why not make 2015 the year when you step forward to obey His command to be baptized.

Or you can worship and obey Christ by bringing your greatest needs to this one. If He is who He said He is and the Bible tells us He is, then He is living and resurrected and here right now. He is watching over your life and my life. He was raised with resurrection power that He makes available to His people today. Whatever challenge/problem you may be facing today, it is not too big for Jesus. It is not too complex for God. It is not a surprise to God or something beyond Him. Turn and bring to Jesus your greatest needs. Pray; ask; persevere in seeking Him.

So proclaim His glory. Ponder His humility. Reflect on your own willingness to obey Him and live a life that glorifies Him. Enjoy the table He has prepared for you.