

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. ¹⁶ John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. 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. ¹⁷ 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.”

²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² 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.”

This is God’s Word.

Dear Friends,

Christmas is over. The decorations have been taken down and put away. We are back to a regular worship schedule. Last week we heard about the Wise Men from the east coming to worship baby and now we are in the church season of Epiphany. As we change church seasons we are changing the emphasis from Baby Jesus in the manger to an Adult Jesus beginning his public ministry.

Our theme is still, **“The Savior has Come!”** but now we want to take a look at how he makes an official start to his public ministry. **“John the Baptist prepares the way,”** And then after his baptism, **“The Holy Spirit Anoints him for his work of Redemption,”** and **“The Father gives his approval.”**

I. We have been talking about John the Baptist since the beginning of the church year. We talked about him a number of times in December, at Christmas time, and now once again in January. John had a powerful message. Prepare yourself for the kingdom of heaven is near. Repent of your sins because the promised Messiah is about to appear. The people were drawn to John’s message. They came out to listen, to repent and to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. The anticipation of the Messiah coming was high. Luke records how, **“The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.”**

I don’t know if they voiced this question out loud or if God gave John some insight but John had an answer to their question, **“I baptize you with water. 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.”** John clearly states that he is not the Promised Messiah. John is lower than the lowliest servant in the house, in comparison to the one who is coming. This isn’t to say that John’s preaching or baptism were inferior.

John’s baptism brought forgiveness of sins to people just as our baptism does today, but the work of the one coming after John – the work of Jesus – will bring them so much more. Jesus is the one who will bring the power of forgiveness to John’s baptism and ours. And Jesus will come with the Holy Spirit and fire.

In this context, Jesus is going to bring us the purifying fire of forgiveness by making the payment God demands for our sins. The Holy Spirit applies this purification to us by giving us the gift of faith and other spiritual gifts so we can live a life of faith. John testifies to the greatness of Jesus, but why was Jesus in the water? If Jesus was going to do all these things for all people, why was Jesus being baptized?

John wondered the same thing. Matthew records how John pulled Jesus aside and said, **“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”** And Jesus answer to John was, **“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”**

In other words, Jesus came to fulfill every righteous demand of the Father and therefore he joined his baptism with the baptism of all sinners in order to take their place. The baptism of Jesus as our substitute was part of his work of redemption for us.

Do you have any friends like that – a friend who is willing to take your place even if it means pain and suffering and death? You may have a friend who may take your place and stand in for you now and then at work. You may have a friend who might baby-sit your kids once in a while, or pay for your dinner or ticket to an event without expecting anything in return. In times of war, there are more than one story told about how a soldier would fall on a grenade and be killed, but in so doing would save his fellow soldiers. But even in that ultimate sacrifice, your friend only saves your bodily life.

Jesus took your place to save your body and soul from death and damnation. He came to make sure that heaven’s doors are open to you. He came to make you his own, to give you life, to give you a purpose in life, to give you a reason for confidence, a reason for joy, and a reason for hope. His mandate came from his Father.

Because he loved us, he came to carry it out. That’s why he is in the water. And what happened next was just as amazing for us to hear about.

II. “When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened²² 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.” When Jesus waded into the water, he did so in a spirit of prayer. He knew that one day his steps would take him up a hill where he would be die. People die every day. Their work is forgotten, and they are usually forgotten. Just drive through a cemetery and see how many of the names on the headstones mean anything to you.

But Jesus’ death would be no ordinary death. And God the Father wants everyone who hears the name “Jesus” to know that his life and death means salvation for them. After Jesus was baptized he received a divine endorsement – a show of support and a seal of approval.

When getting an endorsement you always want to get someone who is well known and respected – someone people look up to and want to follow. Endorsements are important in political campaigns. Endorsements are important in promoting products. Endorsements prompt people to pay attention and listen and even join in.

But the biggest rock star or actor or athlete cannot stand up to the endorsement that Jesus received when he was in the water. Heaven was opened 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 Holy Spirit descending on Jesus was an anointing. We call Jesus the Christ or the Messiah. Both those names mean the anointed one and Jesus was anointed to be our perfect prophet, priest and king. He was anointed to come to us through his Word, to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins, and to rule in our hearts as our Savior/King. And as he was anointed by the Holy Spirit he was also endorsed by his Father.

III. The Father spoke for John and all present to hear. What an awesome sound that must have been! And he declared to them that Jesus was not God’s creation, not just another man on the face of the planet, not one who had a beginning like you and me. God said this is **my Son, whom I love.** The Father endorsed Jesus to be the **“only name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”**

It is Jesus or nothing, in God’s mind. And he was pleased with his Son for the way he had, and the way he would, carry out his mandate. He knew his Son’s will, his perfection, his love for lost sinners like you, me, our parents, our children, our neighbors, our human race. By these words the Father claimed that his Son’s work was as good as done and it was perfect.

The Savior has come for you and for me. He came to lift us up out of the pit of our sins by taking our place and paying our penalty. The Savior has come to give you and me a new life – a spiritual life. Let us joyfully learn about him through his Word and let us serve him by inviting our friends and neighbors to come and hear about him and to worship him as he deserves.

The Savior has come. Listen to John’s testimony, hear the Father’s endorsement and let the Holy Spirit work in your heart to make Jesus the center of your life. Amen.