

# Matthew 3:13-17

## - The baptism of Christ and our baptism -

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### Introduction

- ❖ The baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ by John the Baptist is the official start of the public ministry of our Lord and Saviour.
  - His baptism is unique in its character because it is our Lord who was baptized. And there is that voice from heaven: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”
  - It is tempting to read questions (and answers) concerning our baptism into this story.
  - The same is true for the doctrine of the Trinity. But, as will be shown, the baptism of Jesus is about his humanity. He received the baptism by John the Baptist as the son of God, the only true man.  
He “**made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness**” (Phil 2:7).
- ❖ The baptism of Jesus reveals some beautiful “hidden secrets and gems” of the gospel.
  - This will be unveiled by looking into the meaning of “the beloved son”.
    - “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become **children of God**—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but **born of God**” (Jn 1:12-13).
    - “Be imitators of God, therefore, as **dearly loved children** and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:1-2).

## Literary and historical context

- ❖ The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist belongs to the second main part of this gospel of Matthew:

Mt 1:1-2:23	The genealogy of Jesus, his birth, the visit of the wise men from the east, the escape to and return from Egypt.
Mt 3:1-4:11	The desert: John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, the temptation of Jesus Christ in the desert.
Mt 4:12-25	Galilee: Jesus begins to preach in the synagogues of Galilee, his first disciples.
Mt 5:1-8:1	The sermon on the mount.

- ❖ There is an interesting parallel to be found between the history of Moses and the people of Israel (Old Testament) as it is told in Exodus 1-20, and the first eight chapters of the Gospel according to Matthew (New Testament).<sup>1</sup>

Moses / Israel	Jesus / Israel
The <b>murder</b> of the newborn boys and the birth of Moses (Ex 1:15-2:10).	The birth of Jesus and the <b>murder</b> of the little boys in Bethlehem and surroundings (Mt 1:18-2:18).
“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and <b>out of Egypt I called my son</b> ” (Hosea 11:1).  “Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: <b>Israel is my firstborn son</b> ’” (Ex 4:22–23).	“And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘ <b>Out of Egypt I called my son</b> ’” (Mt 2:15 < Hosea 11:1).
“Our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they <b>all passed through the sea</b> ” (Ex 14).  “They were all <b>baptized</b> into Moses in the cloud and <b>in the sea</b> ” (1 Cor 10:1-2).	“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the <b>Jordan to be baptized</b> by John” (Mt 3:13).
Moses and Israel went from the Red Sea	Then Jesus was led by the <b>Spirit into the</b>

<sup>1</sup> Broyles, C. (1992, p. 561)

<p><b>into the desert</b> (Ex 15:22).</p> <p>“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these <b>forty years</b>, causing you to <b>hunger</b>” (Dt 8:2-3).</p>	<p><b>desert</b> (Mt 4:1).</p> <p>“After fasting <b>forty days and forty nights</b>, he was <b>hungry</b>” (Mt 4:2).</p> <p>Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 (Mt. 4:3).</p>
<p>“Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the <b>mountain</b>” (Ex 19:3).</p>	<p>“Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a <b>mountainside</b> and sat down” (Mt 5:1).</p>
<p>Moses received the Law (Ex 20:1-17).</p>	<p>Jesus taught the Law (and the prophets) (Mt 5:17-7:12).</p>

❖ Two conclusions can be drawn:

- Jesus is the new Moses, the promised prophet.
  - John in particular showed in his gospel that Jesus is the prophet like Moses as promised in Deuteronomy 18:15(-18):

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. **You must listen to him.**”

Compare Matthew 17:5:

“... a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. **Listen to him!**’”
- Jesus is the son of God. Israel is the son of God (Ex 4:22-23).
  - Jesus is gathering the lost sheep of Israel (Mt 10:6; 15:24-26) as the good shepherd (Jn 10), who also said: “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (Jn 10:16).

## Form and structure

- ❖ This short narrative consists of three parts:
- Mt 3:13: The arrival of Jesus at the Jordan, where John was baptizing.
  - Mt 3:14-15: The short dialogue between Jesus and John.
  - Mt 3:16-17: The baptism of Jesus and the voice from heaven.

## Theological and hermeneutical considerations

### ❖ The baptism of John the Baptist

- This baptism is unique in character. Scholars often refer to the practice of proselyte baptism.<sup>2</sup> But there is a significant difference between this kind of baptism, which is not mentioned in the Bible but known from other sources, and John's baptism.
  - Proselyte baptism: a **gentile** underwent "baptism" after conversion to Judaism and circumcision.  
John's baptism: a **Jew or Israelite** received baptism after confessing his sins (Mt 3:6).<sup>3</sup>
- There is also an important difference between the baptism of John and of Jesus (Acts 19:1-7):
  - John the Baptist: "I baptize you with water for repentance" (Mt 3:1-17; Lk 3:1-22; Mc 1:1-12; Joh 1:19-34). His baptism is connected with: "A voice of one calling in the desert, '**Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him**' " (Mt 3:2)<sup>4</sup>.
    - The disciples of Jesus were also baptizing people (Jn 4:1-2) "for repentance".
  - John pointed at Jesus: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Mt 3:11). This a reference to Pentecost (Holy Spirit) and to the Day of the Lord (fire).

### ❖ The Jordan

- The Jordan is a river of historical importance and has a symbolic meaning. Joshua led the people of Israel through this river near the city of Jericho (Josh 3) into the promised land. All the Israelites passed the ark of the covenant, which was held aloft by the priests while they were standing in the middle of the riverbed. This symbolic action referred to the kingship of the LORD.

### ❖ The "son of God"<sup>5</sup>

- The title "son of God" often carries doctrinal overtones. The title "son" can refer to the second person of the Trinity. In that case, it refers to his godly nature. But after his

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<sup>2</sup> For more information: Dockery, D. (1992, p. 55-58).

<sup>3</sup> There might be a connection with the rituals of the Qumran community, but these rituals were self-administered, not by a prophet sent by God, and they were practiced daily and not as initiation rite (D. Dockery 1992, p. 57).

<sup>4</sup> John's baptism came from heaven, commissioned by God (Mt 21:25).

<sup>5</sup> Bauer, D. (1992, p.769-775).

baptism, this title refers to the true humanity of Jesus. This becomes clear from chapter 4.

- There the devil asks: “If you are **the Son of God**, tell these stones to become bread.” The answer given by Jesus shows the meaning of this title and its identification with man: “It is written: ‘**Man** does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Mt 4:3-4). The Son of God, as man, will live on every word of God! In his genealogy of Jesus, Luke makes the same point: “**Jesus was the son**, so it was thought, of Joseph,...., the son of Seth, the son of Adam, **the son of God**” (Lk 3:21-38).
  - The emphasis is on doing “the will of the Father, especially the will that the Messiah must suffer and die”<sup>6</sup>. (See also Mt 16:21-23.)
- The parallel between Moses/Israel, the son of God, and Jesus, the son of God, is striking (Ex 4:22-23; Hos 11:1; Mt 2:15).
  - Finally, Psalm 2:7 must be mentioned: “He said to me, “**You are my Son**; today I have become your Father.” This is a messianic Psalm.
- The title “son of God” points to an intimate and unique relationship with the Father (Jn 1:18). Jesus spoke of “my Father” in relation to himself and of “your Father” in relation to the disciples. He never spoke of “our Father” including himself and his disciples. His special relationship to the Father is distinctive from our relationship to the Father.

## Exposition

### Verse 13

- ❖ “**Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.**” Little is known about the time that Jesus grew up in Nazareth (Lk 2:41-52). Even less is known about the youth of John the Baptist. He is suddenly introduced by all the gospel writers, except Luke. Luke told some things about the birth of John. After a lapse of time, he is introduced by the gospel writers preaching in the Desert of Judea near the Jordan, baptizing at Aenon (Mt 3:1-12; Mk 1:1-8; Lk 3:1-19; Jn 3:23).

Many people were impressed by his powerful sermons summarized in these few words: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Mt 3:2). He is preparing the way for the Lord (Mt 3:3; Isa 40:3). His appearance reminded the people of Elijah (2 Ki 1:8; Mal 4:5).

- “This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:
  - A voice of one calling in the desert,  
‘Prepare the way **for the Lord**,  
make straight paths for him.’ ”
- Jesus **is the Lord** (Mt 3:3)!

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<sup>6</sup> Bauer, d. (1992, p. 773).

- Lord = **κύριος**: “2. one who is in a position of authority, lord, master; b. of transcendent beings;
    - α. as a designation of God;
    - γ. **κύριος** is also used in reference to Jesus: in Old Testament quotations, where it is understood of the Lord of the new community.”<sup>7</sup>
- Jesus came to John with a special purpose: **to be baptized by him**. Why?

Verse 14-15

- ❖ “But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’”
  - Indeed, it is understandable that John wants to deter Jesus from baptism by him. He is the Lord, John is the prophet. Jesus didn’t need repentance, John did. There were no sins for Jesus to confess.
  - John proclaimed:
 

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Mt 3:11–12).
  - Jesus replied, and his answer was filled with messianic authority:<sup>8</sup> “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” John then consented.
    - Fulfil = **πληρώω**: “to bring to a designed end, fulfil a prophecy, an obligation, a promise, a law, a request, a purpose, a desire, a hope, a duty, a fate, a destiny, etc.”<sup>9</sup>
    - It is proper for = **πρέπον ἐστίν**: “it is fitting, proper, right.”<sup>10</sup>
    - Righteousness = **δικαιοσύνη**: “3. the quality or characteristic of upright behavior, uprightness, righteousness. B. of specific action righteousness in the sense of fulfilling divine expectation not specifically expressed in ordinances.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 578)

<sup>8</sup> Hagner D. (1993, p. 55)

<sup>9</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 828)

<sup>10</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 861)

<sup>11</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 248)

	Israel	Jesus
Out of Egypt I called my son	Ex 4:22-23; Hos 11:1	Hos 11:1; Mt 2:15
Baptised	Ex 3:17-14:31; 1 Cor 10:1-2	Mt 3:13-17
Test/temptation in the desert	Dt 8:1-5	Mt 4:1-11

- ❖ Jesus summed up the history of Israel, the son of God. He identified himself with the people who came to John.<sup>12</sup> John “**came to you to show you the way of righteousness**” (Mt 21:32). Jesus is our righteousness, he “who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” (1 Cor 1:30–31)

#### Verse 16-17

- ❖ “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.”
  - The mode of baptism is not mentioned. It is not known if Jesus was baptized by immersion, affusion or by sprinkling water. Ancient Christian mosaics depict the baptism of Jesus by affusion while Jesus was standing in the water.
  - Baptize = βαπτίζω: “**1. wash ceremonially for purpose of purification, wash, purify**, of a broad range of repeated ritual washing rooted in Israelite tradition.” (In Luke 11:38 the word is used in relation to the ritual cleaning of hands, before eating bread.) “**2. to use water in a rite for purpose of renewing or establishing a relationship with God, plunge, dip, wash, baptize.**”<sup>13</sup>
- ❖ “At that moment heaven was opened,”
  - Heaven = οὐρανός: “2. transcendent abode, *heaven*; a. as the dwelling-place (or throne) of God.”<sup>14</sup>
  - It is God, the Father himself, who opens (the doors of) heaven.
- ❖ “**and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.**”
  - This doesn’t mean that before his baptism Jesus wasn’t filled by the Holy Spirit. He was! But this moment marks the onset of the ministry of Jesus, his official anointing:

<sup>12</sup> There might be a connection between Exodus 15:13: “In your **unfailing love** you will lead the people you have redeemed” and Matthew 3:15. The Greek translation of the Old Testament translates “unfailing love” with “δικαιοσύνη.”

<sup>13</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 164)

<sup>14</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 738)

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God, ...” (Isa 61:1–2; Mt 5:3-5; Mt 11:5).

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Wisdom and Knowledge (1 Cor 12:8; Eph 1:17). He is the Spirit of Love (Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22-23) and of a new life (Rom 8:11).

- Who is **he** in “**he saw**”? Is it Jesus or is it John? According to the Gospel of John, John the Baptist gave the following testimony:

“**I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.** I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (Jn 1:32-34).

- The dove is merely a sign for John the Baptist.
- This and what follows is the testimony of John the Baptist.

❖ “**And a voice from heaven said,**”

- A voice, God cannot be seen, only his voice is heard. He is the invisible one (1 Tim 1:17; 1 Tim 6:16).

❖ “**This is my Son.**” Jesus is the unique Son of God. The only one who can truly say: “**my Father**”.

This title refers to his divinity but in this instance, he identified himself with Israel, *the son of God* (Ex 4:22-23). And he identified himself with fallen man (Lk 3:37, Adam and all his descendants). Man was created in the likeness and image of God (Gen 1:26-27). Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). But he will not demonstrate his sonship by performing miracles (his divinity), but by obedience to the word of God (his humanity; Mt 4:1-4; Dt 8:1-5).

- “**whom I love;**”
  - Whom I love = **ἀγαπητός**: “to one who is in a very special relationship with another, *only, only beloved*”<sup>15</sup>
  - To love = **ἀγαπάω**: **1. “to have a warm regard for and interest in another, cherish, have affection for, love”**<sup>16</sup>
  - God is love (1 Jn 4:16): “Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”

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<sup>15</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 7).

<sup>16</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 5)

- **“with him I am well pleased.”**
  - Pleased = **εὐδοκέω**: “2. to take pleasure or find satisfaction in something, be well pleased, take delight; a. in someone (of God’s delight in someone)”<sup>17</sup>

“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” (Isa 42:1).
- God has pleasure and delight in his son.

❖ **Concluding remark**

- The baptism of Jesus was not a baptism for the forgiveness of sins, but it signaled the moment that the Kingdom of God was near and the official beginning of his ministry among the people.

## Application

❖ **Important (1)**

- The preacher should not draw any conclusions concerning the meaning and mode of our baptism from the baptism of our Lord. His baptism is unique.
  - His baptism differs from the baptism John the Baptist administered to the people. That was a baptism for forgiveness. Jesus didn’t need forgiveness.
  - Our baptism is a baptism in the NAME of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and inaugurated by Jesus Christ after his crucifixion and resurrection.
  - **MEANING:** In his baptism Jesus identified himself with fallen man (Lk 3:37) and with the people of Israel (Ex 4:22-23), who went through the Sea of Reeds and the Jordan, to enter the promised land, the Kingdom of God (Ps 114).
  - The **MODE** of baptism is not mentioned. The word “baptism” doesn’t conclusively indicate immersion, affusion or sprinkling of water. The water was used in a rite for the purpose of renewing or establishing a relationship with God.

❖ **Important (2)**

- The attention should be focused on his humanity, as Jesus himself does in his reply to the tempter (Mt 4:1-4): **“If you are the Son of God, ....”** Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man *lives* on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” The baptism of Jesus and his forty days in the desert are intricately connected.

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<sup>17</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 404)

- When he gave this answer to the tempter, he identified himself with the people of Israel (Old Testament) and began to constitute the Kingdom of God of the New Testament.
    - Where people live on every word of God, God rules, God is King.
  - Our baptism according to Matthew 28:19-20 constitutes and signifies a new relationship with:
    - The Father, who said at the baptism of Jesus: “this is my Son, whom I love”;
    - The Son, who identified himself with fallen man, to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15), which has been completed by his crucifixion and resurrection;
    - The Spirit, who lighted upon Jesus and dwells in every child of God.
- ❖ **“This is my Son”** is not only a solemn declaration but indicative of an intimate relation between the Father and the Son:
- “All things have been committed to me by my Father. **No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him**” (Mt 11:27; Jn 1:18).
  - He is our Lord (Mt 3:3), worthy of our worship (Mt 28:18). Listen to him (Mt 5-7; Mt. 17:5).

### **The Son of the Father teaches us our real humanity, what it is to be human in God’s sight!**

- In his humanity, God takes pleasure and delight! (Phil 2:5-11) Much can be said about his humanity: his love for the Father; his obedience; his forgiveness; his wisdom; his patience; his lovingkindness; his prayers; his blessing; his love for people; his gentleness and humbleness of heart (Mt 11:29).
  - When we love people in Jesus’ name, God will take pleasure and delight in us.
- “All who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (Jn 1:12-13).

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