

JESUS WAS BAPTIZED

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 3:13-17

CONTEXT

Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River followed on the heels of John the Baptist's announcement concerning the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. John's ministry was the fulfillment of various Old Testament prophecies concerning a "forerunner," one who was to come before the Messiah announcing His arrival and calling God's people to repent from their sins.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, set an example for us in humility.

As you examine Matthew 3:13-17:

- Understand that though He is sinless, Jesus knew His baptism would validate both His and John's ministry.
- Recognize that a voice—the Father—called Jesus His beloved Son and gave evidence of His authority.



TIMELINE

John the Baptist Is Born to Prepare the Way for the Messiah (Luke 1:57-80)

John the Baptist Calls People to Repentance in Preparation for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-12)

Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness (Luke 4:1-13)

Jesus, the Son of God, Is Born and Grows in Favor with God and Man (Luke 2:1-52)

SESSION STUDY: John Baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River
(Matthew 3:13-17)

Jesus Calls Disciples to Follow Him (John 1:35-51)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Mark 1:9-11
- Day 2:** Luke 3:21-38
- Day 3:** Matthew 3:13-17
- Day 4:** John 1:1-18
- Day 5:** John 1:19-34
- Day 6:** Psalm 146



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

JESUS SET AN EXAMPLE FOR US IN BAPTISM (MATTHEW 3:13-15).

As you read the passage below, circle any words or phrases that are repeated.

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. **14** But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?” **15** Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John allowed him to be baptized.

This passage represents a pivotal moment in Jesus’s life: the inauguration of Jesus’s public ministry, confirmed in the act of baptism. These verses lay important groundwork for considering the truth about Jesus’s identity as the Son of God, the extent of His obedience to the Father, and the nature of His mission on earth.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus’s baptism marked the beginning of His official ministry. Of course, as the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son has been active in the course of human events since the beginning. All the world was created and is sustained through Him (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-17). But in His incarnation, Jesus refrained from any form of public ministry until this point in His life, around the age of thirty. Quietly, Jesus had lived in Galilee for most of His upbringing, where it seems He learned His earthly father’s trade: carpentry. He obeyed His parents and He obeyed the law of God. Now Jesus would fulfill the purpose for which His heavenly Father sent Him.

The scene opens along the banks of the Jordan River, where John the Baptist has been busy baptizing those who responded to his announcement concerning the arrival of the Messiah. But things took an unexpected turn when Jesus Himself showed up and, to John’s great surprise, requested to be baptized.

What reasons might John have had to stop Jesus from being baptized by him?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus needed to be fully God and fully human to be able to save humanity. As the Second Person of the one triune God, He humbled Himself to dwell among us and to identify Himself with sinful humanity, yet He was without sin.

Key Concept: Jesus, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, set an example for us in humility.

Initially John was hesitant with Jesus's request. He was aware of the gravity of the moment and of his own unworthiness to perform the task. What is more, John understood that the power and authority to forgive sins rested with Jesus alone. So Jesus, John thought, should be baptizing him! Upon Jesus's insistence, however, that His baptism by John was necessary in order to fulfill an aspect of God's redemptive plan, John obliged and would baptize Jesus.

In partaking in the act of John's baptism, Jesus would "fulfill all righteousness" and fully embrace the mission for which He was sent into the world (Matt. 3:15). Jesus, being the perfect Son of God, did not need to repent of sin, so that was not His purpose in this baptism. But being the One sent to save us from our sin, Jesus identified Himself with repentant sinners in this act. He humbled Himself to become like us so that we might be saved and exalted with Him.

LEADER NOTE: Christian baptism, distinct from John's baptism for repentance, is the act of immersing an individual in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit following one's profession of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation (Matt. 28:19). Baptism itself, a picture of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, does not save an individual. Rather, it is the public announcement of God's saving work in an individual's life, accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. In accordance with the Scriptures, baptism is one of two ordinances practiced by a local church, the other being the Lord's Supper.

What should we learn and emulate from Jesus's example in being baptized by John?

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

"Our culture seeks validation through achievement. Jesus, however, shows us that true validation comes through obedience to the Father's will, even if that means taking a lower place or associating with the 'wrong crowd.'"¹

—Mike Leake

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SCAN ME

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to dig deeper into the harmony of the Gospel accounts of Jesus's baptism and temptation.

JESUS'S BAPTISM DISPLAYS THE TRIUNE GOD (MATTHEW 3:16-17).

Circle the specific mentions of the distinct Persons of the Trinity.

16 When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. **17** And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

The doctrine of the Trinity—the belief in one God who exists in three distinct Persons—is arguably the most foundational belief of the Christian faith. The Bible contains no mention of the word "Trinity," yet the pages of Scripture are filled with evidence of God's triune identity.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS ONE IN THREE PERSONS: While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4-6), it also affirms that God exists as three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each Person of the Trinity is fully divine—the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Phil. 2), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each Person is distinct from the others (Matt. 11:27; John 10:30; 14:16). This perfect unity within the three Persons of the Trinity is a first-order doctrine.

The record of Jesus's baptism is one of the clearest and most-referenced examples in the Bible of God's triune identity and activity. Jesus, the Son and the Second Person of the Trinity, was baptized. Immediately following the Son's baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and the Father's voice was heard from heaven.

LEADER NOTE: As Jesus resurfaced after being immersed in the water of the Jordan River, the heavens opened for Him. In Scripture, the heavens being "opened" signals divine activity (Ezek. 1:1; Isa. 64:1; Acts 7:56; Rev. 19:11). In this moment, all three Persons of the Trinity were working in concert to initiate Jesus's earthly ministry.

Why is it significant that all three Persons of the Trinity were active at Jesus's baptism?

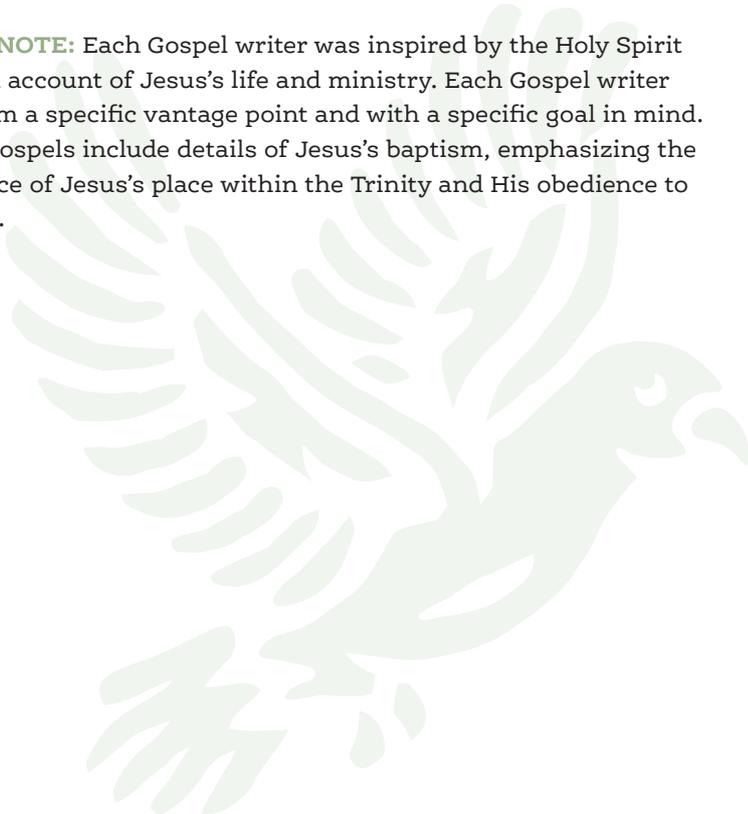
Key Concept: Jesus, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, set an example for us in humility.

Jesus's baptism inaugurated His earthly ministry and served as confirmation of His identity as the Messiah, the Son of God and the Second Person of the Trinity sent on mission to save people from their sins. The voice of the Father, heard as Jesus emerged from the waters, was key in confirming Jesus's identity as the One chosen and sent to fulfill God's redemptive purposes.

What does it mean to be well-pleasing to God?

The Holy Spirit's descent upon Jesus also served as confirmation of Jesus's messianic identity. The Gospel of John recorded the baptism event in greater detail from John the Baptist's perspective. There we find it previously had been revealed to John that the Messiah would be the One upon whom the Spirit descended and rested (John 1:32-34). The events surrounding Jesus's baptism confirmed for John the nature of Jesus's identity and His mission. Observing the activity of our triune God at Jesus's baptism through our reading of Scripture serves to bolster our confidence as those who believe today.

LEADER NOTE: Each Gospel writer was inspired by the Holy Spirit to give an account of Jesus's life and ministry. Each Gospel writer wrote from a specific vantage point and with a specific goal in mind. All four Gospels include details of Jesus's baptism, emphasizing the importance of Jesus's place within the Trinity and His obedience to God's will.



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ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As the group arrives, invite participants to share about a time someone in a higher-ranking position demonstrated humility by serving them in some way. Ask: “How did you feel when that person served you? Did you protest or refuse to be served? Why did that act feel like a reversal of order?”

CONTEXT

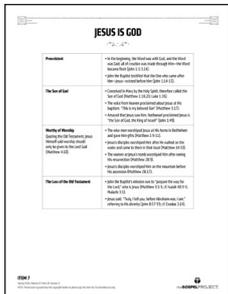
SAY: John the Baptist began to fulfill His God-given purpose by preparing the way for Jesus’s ministry. He did so by calling people to repentance and baptizing them as a symbol of turning away from sin and choosing to walk in obedience to God. John existed to call people to prepare for the Lord’s coming. And then one day, Jesus arrived, but He showed up at the Jordan River with a surprising request.

RECAP

RECAP: Invite your group to share a key idea that stood out to them as they prepared this week.

SAY: John the Baptist protested when Jesus requested to be baptized. *(Pass out copies of Pack Item 7: Jesus Is God, and point out what John knew about Jesus: He was preexistent and He is the Lord.)* He knew that Jesus is the Messiah. John recognized that Jesus was of a higher authority than him, and he did not think it was necessary nor appropriate for Jesus to be baptized by him. Baptizing Jesus would be a reversal of order in John’s estimation, not to mention that Jesus did not need to repent of sin. Even though Jesus was of a higher authority than John, Jesus demonstrated humility by asking John to baptize Him. He showed that He was choosing submission to the Father’s will.

TRANSITION: From here, let’s compare the roles of John, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father in Jesus’s baptism.



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GROUP ACTIVITY

LIST: Direct the group to page 66 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find the activity titled “Roles in Jesus’s Baptism.” Recreate the list on a board and record the group’s findings as they discuss the Scripture text.

Roles in Jesus’s Baptism

Using Matthew 3:13-17, identify each person’s or Person’s role in Jesus’s baptism.

GOD THE FATHER

GOD THE SON (JESUS)

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

JOHN THE BAPTIST

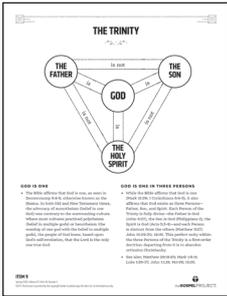
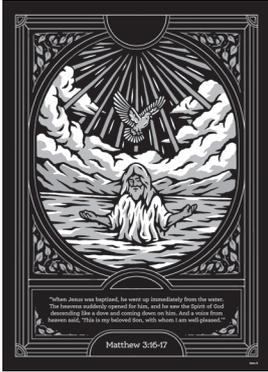
READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 3:13-17.

IDENTIFY: Form four smaller groups and instruct each group to use the text to identify and write down each person’s role in Jesus’s baptism. After a few minutes, regroup and talk through the groups’ findings.

ENGAGE: Focus on John the Baptist’s role in verses 13-15. Say: “Put yourself in John’s shoes for a moment. You know who Jesus is, and yet, Jesus surprises you by coming forward to be baptized.” Ask: “Why do you think John expected Jesus to baptize him?” Jesus Himself never baptized anyone, though His disciples did (John 4:1-2). John mentioned in the previous passage that his baptism with water was ultimately inferior to Jesus’s baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11).

ENGAGE: Now focus on Jesus’s role in verses 13,15-16. Ask: “Why did Jesus ask John to baptize Him?” (*to fulfill all righteousness [v. 15]*) “Why would Jesus say that, already being completely righteous as the perfect, sinless Son of God?” Clarify that Jesus did not need to become more righteous. Through baptism, Jesus declared outwardly His perfect obedience to God the Father in identifying with the sinners He came to save.

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DISCUSS: Display **Pack Item 8: The Trinity** (poster) and pass out copies of **Pack Item 9: The Trinity** (handout). Briefly review the triune nature of God and the Persons of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Point out the affirmation of Jesus's and John's ministries by the response of God the Father and God the Spirit in verses 16-17. Ask: "How was the Spirit's role one of identification (John 1:32-34) as well as anointing and empowering (Luke 4:16-21)? Who needed to hear that God the Father was well-pleased with the Son of God: Jesus, John the Baptist, the disciples, or us?"

DEBRIEF

How did Jesus humble Himself in this scene?

What are some ways we can humble ourselves and walk in obedience to God?

SUMMARIZE

Some of the people John preached to were religious leaders whose hearts were far from God. They were more concerned about the outward appearance of perfect sacrifice to God rather than humble repentance. Jesus's act of obedience demonstrated that having a heart of humility toward God is more important than external sacrifices, as was affirmed by the Holy Spirit and God the Father in their roles in Jesus's baptism. Likewise, humility matched with obedience in our lives will please our God and Savior.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 67). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

 **HEAD:** Often we isolate our thinking about God to only one Person of the Trinity: the Father cares for us or the Son gave His life for us or the Spirit works to guide, convict, and comfort us (or's instead of and's). Yet our triune God is completely invested in our salvation and sanctification.

How is each Person of the Trinity significant and active in your life?

 **HEART:** Baptism signifies the spiritual change brought about in a person's life by the work of our triune God. Yet while we live on earth, the presence of temptation and sin remains a constant struggle. Our God remains steadfast in His commitment to us as we seek to live faithfully in light of His instruction. The Holy Spirit helps us resist sin and pursue holiness in humility.

What significant changes has Christ made in your life as you continue to walk with Him?

Key Concept: Jesus, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, set an example for us in humility.



HANDS: Jesus was baptized by John “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15), and throughout the course of His life, culminating in His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus obeyed the Father and accomplished a perfect righteousness, which He bestows on any and all who believe in Him for salvation. Jesus’s example of humility in His life, including in His baptism, challenges us to live with that same kind of humility. Jesus truly laid down His life and privileges in order to save us. So we should respond with humility and an obedience that humbly reflects the perfect righteousness He has been granted to us by faith.

What are some ways you will set aside your privileges to obey the Lord and humbly serve others?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Believer’s baptism is an important step in the lives of everyone who has trusted in Jesus. If this is an area of your life in which you need to submit to the Lord, reach out to a pastor or group leader to discuss the next steps.
- Like John the Baptist, consider how you need to set aside your expectations in order to obey the Lord in humility and faithfulness.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Reflect on Jesus’s righteousness that was imputed to you when you repented of sin and trusted in Jesus. Now read verses 18-20. Go and tell someone this week how to be reconciled to God.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 67 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 146:1-5 with your group. Thank God our salvation is found through faith alone in Jesus, the perfect Son of God who reigns forever.

References

1. Mike Leake, “Jesus Was Baptized,” *The Gospel Project for Adults Commentary* (Spring 2026): 77.

Notes