

Matthew 3C

- In our previous study, we learned about Sadducees and Pharisees, the antagonists in the story of the Gospel
 - We'll have opportunity to talk more about them many times during our study of Matthew's Gospel
 - So for now, let's set them aside to move forward in the chapter
 - Tonight, we pick up in Chapter 3 at v.13 with the first mention in Matthew's Gospel of Jesus as an adult
 - And it comes at the moment Jesus begins His ministry, the moment when He transitions from private life to public life

Matt. 3:13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.

Matt. 3:14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"

Matt. 3:15 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.

Matt. 3:16 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,

Matt. 3:17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

- Jesus travels out from His home in Galilee to find John, seeking to be baptized
 - John immediately objects to Jesus' request
 - John says to Jesus that he (John) had need to be baptized by Jesus, not the other way around
 - Naturally, we assume that John knew Jesus was the Messiah
 - And therefore, John felt it was inappropriate for him to baptize Jesus
 - But in reality, the opposite was actually true

- At the moment these two men met in the desert, John didn't know Jesus was the Messiah
- For if John had known Jesus was the Promised One, he would have been willing to baptize Jesus without question
- Let me explain...
- To understand this situation properly, we need to consult John's Gospel where John the Baptist retells the story of this encounter

[John 1:29](#) The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

[John 1:30](#) "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'

[John 1:31](#) "I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water."

[John 1:32](#) John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.

[John 1:33](#) "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'

[John 1:34](#) "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

- Notice first, that this passage begins with the phrase "the next day"
 - We're on the day after John baptized Jesus, and on that day, John knows Jesus is the Messiah
 - How does John say he came to learn of Jesus' true identity?
 - He says it was because after he baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove and landed on Jesus
- But then in v.31, John adds that he did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah before that moment...and he repeats this statement in v.33
 - So John didn't know Jesus was the Messiah when Jesus came asking for baptism
 - He only knew after the event took place
- And why was John so determined to convince us that he didn't know in advance?

- I think it's because it probably seemed suspicious that John names his own cousin as the Messiah
 - People might have questioned why John selected a family member to be the Messiah
 - To defend his choice, John insists he didn't know in advance...
 - Only after the baptism had completed, did the dove appear to confirm Jesus' true identity
 - This was the sign God told John to watch for, to know the Messiah
- Now if John the Baptist was in the dark about Jesus' true identity, then we can be certain everyone else was too
 - This fact reinforces for us the true humanity of Christ
 - He lived an absolutely normal human life, because He *was* fully human
 - Jesus was not a superhuman or Clark Kent figure who could stop bullets and see through walls
 - Jesus' life prior to this moment was unremarkable
 - He truly was just a man, without anything to suggest He was God and the Creator
 - Yet, Jesus was sinless, so apparently a person can live a sinless life without drawing much attention to himself
 - I know the feeling (*joke*)
 - This would also explain why the Gospels contain so little detail of Jesus' early years
 - Why record details of a mundane, ordinary life?
 - So John didn't know Jesus was the Messiah until after the baptism happened
 - He only learned the truth because he saw the sign God foretold of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove after he baptized Jesus
 - And even if John had thought Jesus might be the Messiah, that would have *increased* John's desire to baptize Jesus

- After all, the Lord had told John that he would learn the Messiah's identity by a baptism of the Holy Spirit
- So if John had suspected Jesus was the Messiah, John could only have confirmed his suspicions by going through with the baptism
- So if John didn't suspect Jesus was the Messiah, why did he hesitate to baptize Jesus?
 - I think the reason goes back to Jesus' sinless nature
 - Remember, John probably knew Jesus well...they were cousins only 6 months apart in age
 - They probably grew up playing together from time to time
 - And so, John surely knew his cousin was the last person who needed to repent of a godless, sinful life
- Remember, John was ministering to tax collectors, Roman soldiers and prostitutes, the lowest of the low, performing a baptism of repentance
 - These people knew they were far from God
 - They were ashamed of their lives and felt convicted to get right with God
 - They were repenting, seeking to change their lives and to return to God
- But Jesus...Jesus was a blameless, upright man
 - John knew Jesus to be the one person in the family Who always seemed to do and say the right thing...the loving, selfless thing
 - So of all the people John knew, Jesus was easily the last one who needed to receive his baptism
- So when John saw his godly cousin, Jesus, coming out to join that rogues' gallery of repentant sinners, John was incredulous
 - John says if one of us should be repenting to the other, it should be me repenting to you, Jesus
 - John wasn't calling Jesus the Messiah

- He was simply saying I have more sin than you do, so I need you to baptize me
- Of course, John was both right and wrong
- On the one hand, John was right that he had more sin than Jesus
 - In fact, John didn't realize how right he was
 - John had infinitely more sin than Jesus because Jesus was perfect, sinless, God incarnate
- But John was also wrong to think that Jesus shouldn't be baptized
 - Because Jesus wasn't coming to receive a baptism of repentance
 - Jesus had no need to repent
 - He was coming to John to serve a difference purpose
 - Jesus was obeying the command of His Father and ensuring that John would likewise obey his calling
- Specifically, Jesus says this moment was fitting to fulfill all righteousness
 - The Greek word translated fitting literally means to be clearly seen
 - In other words, Jesus is saying, "in doing this, we will be displaying righteousness as we obey the Father"
 - Jesus didn't need to be baptized for repentance, but He did need to receive John's baptism to be obedient to the Father
 - And that meant it was required to fulfill all righteousness
 - But if Jesus' baptism by John wasn't a baptism for repentance, what specifically did it achieve?
 - First, it served as the capstone moment in John's ministry of announcing the coming Messiah
 - John was raised up by God as the voice crying in the wilderness, declaring the Messiah was soon to arrive
 - For the past 6 months or so, John had been obeying that call, baptizing all those who believed his message
 - And now that the Father was ready to reveal Jesus as Messiah, John's ministry was coming to an end

- It was time for John to step aside, to retire so to speak, and handoff to Jesus
 - That handoff would take place through a baptism moment
 - So the act of John lowering Jesus into the water and raising Him up, symbolized John's passing the baton to Jesus
- Secondly, Jesus' baptism served as the moment the Father unveiled Jesus as Messiah, empowering Him to begin His public ministry
 - In v.16. Matthew says that as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened
 - And at that moment, John saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon Jesus
 - The resting of the Spirit of God upon Jesus is the moment Jesus obtained supernatural power
 - The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to accomplish the miracles He used to authenticate Himself to the crowds
 - This the mystery of God taking on flesh
 - Paul describes it this way

[Phil. 2:5](#) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
[Phil. 2:6](#) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
[Phil. 2:7](#) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

- Before coming to Earth, Christ existed in the form of God
 - God's form is a mystery to us, but whatever that form is, Jesus had it
 - He had equality with God, or as John says, Jesus the Word was with God and was God
- Yet Jesus did not consider His position something to be grasped or to cling to
 - He was willing to forgo His form as God and His position of equality with the Father

- To do that, Christ had to empty Himself – literally in Greek, it means Jesus made His form void, putting it aside
 - And in the place of the form of God, Jesus assumed the form of a man, a servant of God
 - Can a man walk on water? Can a man heal disease with just his word? Can a man raise people from the dead?
 - No, only God can do those things
 - And when Jesus emptied Himself, giving up the form and power of God, to take on the form of flesh, He gave up the ability to do these things
 - Jesus never gave up His identity...He was always God
 - But when He became man, Jesus did give up His form as God and His power as God
- In other words, Jesus didn't just look like a man, He was a man
 - The writer of Hebrews, quoting the Psalms, puts it this way:

Heb. 2:6 But one has testified somewhere, saying,

“What is man, that You remember him?

Or the son of man, that You are concerned about him?

Heb. 2:7 “You have made him for a little while lower than the angels;

You have crowned him with glory and honor,

And have appointed him over the works of Your hands;

- The Father made Jesus a little lower than angels for a while
 - Who is lower than an angel? Mankind
 - This is what it meant for Jesus to become man...it meant entering into the very Creation He made
 - And by entering into it, He chose to become limited by it
 - So if Jesus were to perform miracles to authenticate His ministry and message, where would the power for those miracles come from?
 - The answer is, the Holy Spirit
 - The Third Person of the Godhead came upon the Second Person of the Godhead to empower Him for His ministry on earth

- By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus validated His claims to the Messiah, the Son of God foretold in Scripture
- So every time Jesus performed a miracle before the people, it was actually a work or testimony of the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit testified that Jesus was the Messiah
- We can see multiple examples in Scripture confirming this understanding
 - First, the Gospels make frequent mention of the Spirit's role in directing and empowering Jesus' ministry
 - In Matthew 4, we'll see Jesus led into the wilderness by the Spirit
 - In Matthew 12, we'll see Jesus Himself crediting the Spirit for His power to cast out demons
 - In that same chapter, Jesus says that when the Pharisees tried to discredit Jesus' miracles, they were guilty of blaspheming the Holy Spirit
 - Also, Luke reports that Jesus' communion with the Father while He lived on earth was made possible by the Holy Spirit
 - It was as if the Spirit served as a conduit connecting Jesus with the Father in Heaven
 - And this conduit operated in both directions
 - Because in Acts, we're told that God revealed His will to Jesus and the apostles by means of the Holy Spirit
 - Then, we find an intriguing moment in Mark's gospel when Jesus could not perform miracles in His hometown, Nazareth

Mark 6:1 Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him.

Mark 6:2 When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?"

Mark 6:3 "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him.

Mark 6:4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household."

[Mark 6:5](#) And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.

[Mark 6:6](#) And He wondered at their unbelief...

- Mark says Jesus could not perform miracles in Nazareth, except for a few isolated healings
- Mark didn't say Jesus "would" not perform miracles, but rather Jesus "could" not perform them
- Clearly, Jesus wasn't in full control of when and where He used His miraculous power
 - Jesus was dependent on the Spirit to empower Him for ministry according to the will of the Father
 - Since the Nazarenes refused to believe in Jesus, the Spirit declined to do more than a few miracles
- Finally, it's notable that there is no record of Jesus performing any miracles prior to His baptism
 - Jesus' very first miracle was turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana
 - That event happened in the week following His baptism with John
- So in taking on flesh, Jesus voluntarily relinquished His form as God along with His power
 - Therefore, Jesus required the power of the Holy Spirit to perform the miracles He would do in His earthly ministry
 - And the moment the Holy Spirit arrived to begin that work, was when Jesus received His baptism
 - Jesus' water baptism provided a picture to the onlookers around the river, a symbolic representation of the arrival of the Holy Spirit
 - So that just as Jesus' physical body was immersed in water, so was Jesus' spirit immersed with the Holy Spirit
 - Now Matthew also tells us that Jesus' baptism was accompanied by a theophany, or a physical manifestation of God

- The Holy Spirit's arrival was portrayed as a dove landing on Jesus
- Obviously, the Holy Spirit is not a dove, so this was a vision God created to communicate the Spirit's arrival
- But the choice of a dove was significant
 - The first mention of the Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2 uses a Hebrew verb translated as "fluttering"
 - It is commonly used to describe a mother bird hovering over her nest
 - Jewish rabbis had concluded that the Spirit took the form of a dove as it fluttered in Genesis 1:2
 - So to a Jew, the dove was a clear symbol of the Spirit
- And then to make sure John got the message, the Father spoke from Heaven testifying that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah
 - He was the One in whom the Father is well-pleased
 - To be well-pleased is a typical biblical understatement...the Father is saying He couldn't be more pleased than He is in His Son
 - This is the first of three times the voice of the Father is spoken audibly from Heaven in support of His Son
- But remember, this vision and the voice were only witnessed by John
 - John alone was told to look for such a vision as confirmation of the Messiah
 - No one else in that moment was privy to this vision
 - Notice in v.16, the text says "he" (singular) saw the heavens open and the dove descend, not "they"
 - And in John's Gospel, John the Baptist says that he saw this sign and he testifies that Jesus is the Son of God
 - In other words, the crowds were expected to receive John's word as the prophet of God
 - The word of the prophet alone was to be sufficient, and the baptism moment served as the moment for that testimony

- Only John needed supernatural confirmation to ensure he understood the truth he was to proclaim
 - That's still true today generally...God reveals Himself to His people by the word of His prophets in our Bible
 - Those men received supernatural manifestations of God in many cases, to validate they were hearing from God
 - But we're expected to receive their testimony on the basis of faith
- So the very next day, John the Baptist was declaring that Jesus was the Lamb of God
 - But John still didn't fully grasp all that was coming for his cousin
 - He knew Jesus was to be a sacrifice for sin, but John didn't immediately appreciate that Jesus would also reign as King
 - In fact, later in the Gospel of Luke, we find John the Baptist sending some of his followers to ask Jesus if He was the Expected One?

Luke 7:19 Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?"

- John 's question is confusing to us
 - John seemed completely convinced of Jesus' identity the day after His baptism
 - So why was John still wondering months later?
- John had been influenced by a misunderstanding of Scripture by the Jewish rabbis of that day
 - Over the centuries, the rabbis of Israel had read Old Testament passages that foretold a Messiah dying for the sins of Israel
 - They had concluded God was sending a suffering prophet to die for the sins of His people
 - But they also read OT passages declaring a Messiah would reign over a worldwide Kingdom

- So they also concluded that God would send Israel a conquering King to sit on the seat of David
- Since they couldn't understand how one Messiah could both die and conquer, the rabbis concluded that God would send two Messiahs
 - One Messiah would be a suffering servant sent to die, while another Messiah would come as a conquering, reigning King
 - Obviously, we know the rabbis came to the wrong conclusion
 - There would not to be two coming Messiahs...there would be one Messiah who would arrive twice
- Jesus came the first time as a suffering prophet to die for our sins
 - And He will return to earth a second time in power and glory to reign over all the earth as King
 - In the meantime, He lives to intercede for us with the Father as our High Priest
- So after the dove arrived, John realized that Jesus was the suffering prophet, the Lamb of God
 - But later, John starts to wonder if Jesus might be more than just the suffering servant
 - Perhaps Jesus would also be Israel's conquering King
 - So to be sure of his suspicions, John sent His disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Expected One, meaning the other Messiah
 - Jesus' answer to John confirmed that Jesus fulfilled all the Messianic promises, not just some
- So John's baptism of Jesus brought John's ministry to an end and it began Jesus' ministry...but it served one more purpose
 - It established a model for Jesus' followers to repeat so we can identify with our Lord
 - Just as Jesus received water baptism to fulfill all righteousness so are His followers called to do the same
 - As Jesus commanded at the end of Matthew, in a passage commonly called the Great Commission

[Matt. 28:18](#) And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

[Matt. 28:19](#) “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

[Matt. 28:20](#) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

- As I mentioned in an earlier week, the Greek word translated baptize means to dip
 - So the concept of baptism is to be immersed or dipped into water
 - Furthermore, notice that in the text in v.16. Matthew describes Jesus as “coming up” from the water
 - You don’t come up out of a sprinkling experience
 - Plus, if all John wanted to do was sprinkle people with water, he wouldn’t have needed to travel all the way to the Jordan river to baptize
- So from all evidence, the biblical act of baptism is always and only immersion of the entire body into water
 - Sprinkling some part of a person’s body does not constitute a baptism
 - That is merely a manmade ritual with no spiritual significance
 - And so it does not substitute for a baptism
- Furthermore, only a proper baptism fulfills righteousness, as Jesus said to John
 - Because only full immersion in water can serve the purpose God had in instituting baptism, both for Jesus and for us
 - The imagery of baptism is very specific and quite profound
 - Paul explains the meaning of baptism in Romans 6

[Rom. 6:3](#) Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

[Rom. 6:4](#) Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

[Rom. 6:5](#) For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,

- Paul makes a comparison between baptism and Jesus' death and resurrection
 - Paul is talking about our baptism by the Holy Spirit
 - When we placed our faith in Jesus Christ, confessed Him and were saved by our faith, we received the Holy Spirit
 - Scripture calls the moment the Holy Spirit came to dwell inside of us, the baptism of the Holy Spirit
- Every believer has this experience at the moment they come to faith in Jesus
 - The baptism of the Holy Spirit is how we are born again spiritually
 - So just as our Lord had the Spirit of God land upon Him, so have we received the Holy Spirit also
 - Jesus blazed the path that we follow by faith in Him
- Paul says that the baptism of the Holy Spirit resulted in our spirit being identified with Christ
 - So that by our faith, what is true for Christ has been credited to our heavenly account
 - Beginning with His death on the cross
 - So Paul says we have been baptized by our faith into Christ's death, so that when the Father looks upon His children he no longer sees our sins
 - By the arrival of the Holy Spirit, we are united with Christ in His death so that our sins rested on Christ as He hung on that cross – they died with Christ
 - But more than that, Paul says we have also been united with Christ in His resurrection

- Once again, because the Holy Spirit has come to live in us, we will follow in Christ's footsteps
- So though Christ died, yet He lived again, rising from the dead by the glory of the Father
- And so will those who have placed their faith in Him
- So by the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the moment we believed in Jesus, we immediately came to share in His death and in His resurrection
 - We don't need to die to pay for our own sins
 - Christ's death has paid that price for us
 - And we don't need to worry that the death of our body will be the end of us
 - Because the same Spirit Who raised Jesus' body will raise us
- But we share one more aspect of baptism with Jesus...no one can see the moment the Spirit came to live in us
 - That crowd that surrounded Jesus didn't see the Spirit
 - They didn't hear God's voice
 - They only saw Jesus' body enter the water and come back up
 - Similarly, when you came to faith in Jesus Christ, no one saw a dove landing on you
 - You didn't start to glow or levitate
 - You believed, you confessed, you were saved
 - The Spirit came to make His home in your heart, but that moment was invisible to everyone
 - But just as the Father didn't want Jesus to remain a secret, neither does He want Jesus' followers to remain invisible
 - He wants us to testify, and to help us accomplish that purpose, He has given us the beautiful picture of water baptism
 - As a believer enters the water to be baptized, he or she is telling a story, a spiritual story, a story that can only be told in pictures

- The water of our baptism represents the earth, the ground in which we bury dead bodies
 - So as a believer is lowered into the water, we're picturing the burial of a body
 - And as we raise that person up out of the water, we're picturing resurrection
 - That's a physical picture of what has already happened by the Spirit in our hearts
- Just as Jesus was immersed in water to represent His immersion by the Holy Spirit, we too are called to do the same
 - We enter water to testify that we have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ's death and resurrection
 - No one saw the Spirit, but anyone can see the water
- Now perhaps this is the first time you've understood the baptism in this way, in the way the Bible explains it
 - The baptism Jesus commanded for His Church follows in His footsteps
 - First, it's an act to fulfill righteousness, meaning to obey God
 - Water baptism does not make us righteous any more than Jesus' baptism made Him righteous
 - Secondly, water baptism is a coming-out party of sorts
 - It associates us with Jesus, declaring us to be followers of the Messiah
 - Just as Jesus' water baptism announced Him to the world as our Messiah
 - Thirdly, our water baptism inaugurates our public service in the body of Christ, just as it began Jesus' public ministry
 - Our opportunity to serve the Lord is set loose when we obey the call to be baptized
 - Because the first command every believer receives is to be baptized

- But if we will not obey His first command, Jesus isn't going to move on to step #2
- He will wait with us. expecting us to do what we've been asked
- Finally, just as Jesus' baptism marked a transition between John's ministry and Jesus' ministry, so does our baptism mark a transition
 - Every believer has an old life and a new life, an old self and a new self
 - Depending on when you came to know Jesus, that old life might have been rather brief or it might have been decades
 - But regardless, every believer has a before and after story
 - The moment of your faith in Jesus is a private dividing line between those two worlds
 - But your water baptism is the public dividing point, the moment when you embraced your new life and declared it was all you wanted
 - Every believer is expected to follow the Lord's footsteps in baptism, as in everything else
 - That's why we're called Christians...the word literally means "little Christs"
 - It was originally coined to mock Jesus' followers, but the Church soon embraced it because it's a perfect description of what we want to be
- Now perhaps when you were an infant, your parents took you to a church and had someone sprinkle water on your head
 - They dressed you up, took pictures, got a certificate and had a party
 - And thereafter, they told you that you were baptized
 - If that's the only kind of "baptism" you've ever received, then on the authority of Scripture, I must tell you that you have never been baptized
 - If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ but you have never walked into the water to be baptized as Jesus commanded, then you still owe Jesus a baptism

- We would love to help you obey that command, to fulfill all righteousness in your walk with Christ
- VBVF will hold a baptism later this Spring, and we want to include anyone who has placed their faith in Jesus, but has yet to receive baptism
- If that's you, then please see me immediately after this service so I can discuss it with you