

Matthew 3:13-17 “The Trinity at the Jordan”
Isaiah 41:21-42:17
Psalm 2

January 4, 2015

Last week, Pastor Jon read Isaiah 40 to introduce the first half of Matthew 3.

Isaiah 41 focuses on the ministry of John the Baptist –
the wilderness bearing fruit –
“I give to Jerusalem a herald of good news.”

But then in Isaiah 41:28-29,
the LORD says, “But when I look, there is no one;
among these there is no counselor who, when I ask, gives an answer.
Behold, they are all a delusion;
their works are nothing;
their metal images are empty wind.”

In contrast to the emptiness and delusion of idols,
the LORD says in chapter 42,
“Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.”

Remember this language – because the Father will say this about the Son in Matthew 3!

And he goes on to say,
“I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring justice to the nations.”

And in Matthew 3, the Spirit will descend like a dove and come upon Jesus.

Isaiah 42:8 is also where the LORD says,
“I am the LORD; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.”

The OT is very clear that there is only *one God*.
And his *name* is Yahweh.

In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus will say in Matthew 28,
Go, make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name [singular]
of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

God does not give his glory to another.
Therefore, when the glory of God is seen in Jesus,
we know that Jesus is God.
When people worship an angel, the angel always, “No, don’t do that!”
But when people worship Jesus, Jesus accepts their worship!

That's why C. S. Lewis said that if Jesus is not Lord,
then either Jesus is a liar, or else he is a lunatic.

You cannot simply "respect" Jesus.
Anyone else who accepts the worship of his fellow creatures
is either deluded or devious.
If he is who he says he is,
then you need to worship him!

What are you going to do with Jesus?

Our Psalm of response, Psalm 2, challenges you with the same point.
What are you going to do with the Son of God?

Will you humble yourself and submit to the Son of God?
Or will you insist on maintaining your tiny little kingdom of one?

Sing Psalm 2
Read Matthew 3

Introduction: The Baptism of John and the Baptism of Jesus

What does it mean to *repent*?

Last week, Pastor Jon showed us how repentance is a turning from darkness to light –
a continual and persistent turning from darkness to light
(because too often we love the darkness...).

As we have been seeing in the Sunday evening series on Jeremiah,
the problem for Israel was that their repentance wasn't good enough.

Their repentance was half-hearted.
They did not turn to the Lord with *all* their heart.

And so we have a problem!
After all, I don't know about you,
but at its best, my repentance only makes it to about three-quarter hearted!
At its worst, it probably doesn't deserve to be called repentance!

Stanley Hauerwas says it well:

"John's call for Israel to repent
is not a prophetic call for those who repent to change the world,
but rather he calls for repentance because the world is being and will be changed
by the one whom John knows is to come." (46)

Repentance is first and foremost a matter of life and death.
Fire is coming.

As John says in verses 11-12:

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Judgment is coming.

Jesus is the one who will bring fire on the earth.

Jesus is bringing Spirit and fire baptism:

“and the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Time’s up!

What are you going to do with Jesus?

Is he a liar? a lunatic? or is he your Lord?

Jesus has come to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Jesus speaks of this in Luke 12:49-50 –

“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!

I have a baptism to be baptized with,

and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!

Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth?

No, I tell you, but rather division...”

John understands that Jesus has come in order to bring judgment on the earth.

That may seem odd at first.

After all, the angels sang “peace on earth” at the birth of Jesus!

But peace will only come when the King makes all things right.

And the problem is that, right now, things are very, very wrong!

Sometimes the only way to peace is through division.

But if Jesus is going to bring Spirit and fire baptism on the earth –

then that means that all the earth will be destroyed,

because, as Isaiah said, there is no man who can stand before God.

There was no one to intercede (Is 59).

This is why Jesus must first be baptized.

At first John doesn’t get it:

1. “To Fulfill All Righteousness” – Why Must Jesus Be Baptized? (v13-15)

¹³ Then 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?”

John is the greatest of the Old Testament prophets.

He has the most honorable place of all the prophets:
 he is called to be the herald of the Son of God.
But he understands exactly who Jesus is!
And so John does not want to baptize Jesus!
 “I need to be baptized by you!”
 I’m baptizing people with water for repentance,
 so that they will follow you!
But my baptism with water is *nothing*
 compared to your baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire!

¹⁵ *But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.*

As Pastor Jon has showed us,
 the word “fulfill” is a very important word for Matthew!

To fulfill means to complete – or to fill with meaning.
Jesus fulfills the whole story of Israel –
 the exodus, the conquest, the kingdom, the exile, the restoration

We sometimes think of messianic prophecy as a list of prophecies that Jesus fulfills,
 but Matthew teaches us that Jesus is the completion of the stories.

So what does it mean for Jesus to say, “thus it is fitting for us to *fulfill all righteousness*”?

God had said of Abraham:

 “I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him
 to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice,
 so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” (Gen 18:19)

Righteousness has to do with how you order your community.
Justice has to do with how you determine particular cases.

When Jesus says “thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”
 he’s not talking about a particular prophecy – or a particular statute.

He’s saying, “John, think of the big picture here.
 How am I supposed to bring Spirit and fire baptism upon the earth,
 if I do not first enter into the exile and repentance of Israel?”

Jesus doesn’t need to be exiled –
 but he will be exiled!
Therefore, if Israel is going to be restored,
 then Jesus needs to identify with Israel in exile and in repentance.

He is like in *every way* – except sin.

Christ identifies with humanity in a very particular way –
bringing all the curses of humanity on him.

And in the baptism of Jesus,
Jesus takes up John’s baptism and adds something new –
himself (or, should I say, the Holy Spirit).

This is why, in the book of Acts, those who had received John’s baptism
needed to be baptized by Paul (in Acts 19).

They had received John’s baptism,
but they did not know anything of the Holy Spirit.

John’s baptism and Jesus’ baptism look a lot alike –
but only with Jesus’ baptism do you see the conjunction of water and the Spirit.

Because:

2. “This Is My Beloved Son” – The Trinitarian Nature of Baptism (v16-17)

¹⁶ *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him,^[b] 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,^[c] with whom I am well pleased.”*

In Genesis 7:11, the windows of the heavens were opened,
and the great Flood poured out upon all the earth.

In Genesis 8:11, Noah sent the dove out of the ark
and it brought back the olive branch, signaling that peace had returned to the earth.

I’m not the first to make this connection!

The apostle Peter pointed out that the Flood was a type of baptism –
a washing with water that brought judgment on the earth!

And through the Flood, God saved Noah and his family – eight in number –
even as now, through baptism, God saves us.

We shouldn’t shy away from saying that “baptism saves” (that’s Peter’s language in 1 Pet 3:21).
Baptism saves –

but that doesn’t mean that everyone who gets baptized is saved.

In the same way, *preaching* saves –

but that doesn’t mean that everyone who hears a sermon is saved!

Only those who believe the message are saved!

Likewise, only those who receive their baptism by faith are saved!

And just like in the days of Noah,
when Jesus went up from the water –
as he was climbing up the bank of the Jordan River –

the LORD spoke.

With Noah, God had established his covenant – never again to cut off the earth by water.

That's why the prophets generally don't speak of a coming judgment by water!

The coming judgment is a judgment by fire!

(And all through the scriptures, this pattern continues:

if water doesn't work, try fire!

The laws regarding mold and uncleanness in the OT

all start with trying to clean with water.

If that doesn't work – burn it!

It is simply following the pattern of the scriptures:

start with water – if that doesn't work – try fire!

It has been really interesting to realize that this is still true.

My brother-in-law, Dave, has lost his house to mold.

Water didn't work.

So now they'll have to burn it!)

And this pattern continues into the NT.

2 Peter 3:5-7 says that

“the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God,
and that by means of these the world that then existed
was deluged with water and perished.

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire,
being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”

First water – then fire.

Okay, so we've seen the images of the Flood – and of the return from exile –
but that's only the beginning!

Third, we have the image of priestly consecration.

John the Baptist—who himself is the son of a priest—

is consecrating Jesus for service in a new priesthood.

Every priest who entered holy service had to be washed with water,
and sprinkled with blood.

Jesus baptism in the Jordan is his washing with water,
and his death on the cross is his sprinkling with blood

(which is why Jesus refers to his death as a baptism (Mark 10:38)

Fourth, we have the image of Israel crossing the Jordan River

Joshua 3-4 recounts the crossing of the Jordan

when Israel entered the promised land.

For John to proclaim a baptism of repentance in the Jordan River

was to call Israel to repent of their rebellion against God,
and to look for the Joshua who would restore the Kingdom of God.
And now Jesus (in Hebrew, Joshua) has come.
And this theme also connects to the Elijah and Elisha theme -
as the prophets called Israel to repentance in the days of the Kings.

And fifth, we have an echo of creation itself.
Remember from Genesis 1:1-3
“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”
(there you have the Father)
“And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”
(there you have the Spirit)
“And God said, ‘Let there be light.’”
(there you have the Word)
In John’s gospel this is made explicit:
“In the beginning was the Word.”
In Genesis 1-2 God breathes his Spirit into Adam, the Son of God,
and places him in a garden full of rivers.
In Matthew 3, Jesus is declared by the Father to be the Son of God,
and is anointed by the Holy Spirit.

So, Creation, Flood, Exodus, Conquest, Kingdom, Exile –
all the themes of redemptive history are woven together here!

Because here at the Jordan River – the place where Israel first entered the land –
and the place (let us not forget) where the Syrian Naaman was told to wash 7 times! –
here there comes a New Creation that will go to all the earth!

Indeed, that is why Jesus says in Matthew 28 –
“Go, make disciples of all nations” –
and how do you make disciples?

There are two things – two parts to discipleship:
1) baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and 2) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Baptism is – and *must be* – Trinitarian.

We are baptized in the *name* (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Matthew’s gospel was especially important in the Trinitarian controversy of the 4th c.

During the fourth century a pastor named Arius (they called them presbyters back then),
began to teach that the Son of God was entirely different in essence from the Father.
He claimed that the Son was the first of all creatures—though above all creatures.

His bishop, Alexander, objected, insisting that the Son was one with the Father.

This launched the Arian controversy—
the debate that resulted in the production of the Nicene Creed.

The Arians said that God is so exalted and so transcendent,
that it was simply impossible for God to get directly involved with his creatures.

So they claimed that the Father begot the Son as a lesser being
who would do his dirty work for him.

The church wrestled with this for sixty years.

Most understood from the start that Arius was wrong.
But just because you know that one view is wrong,
doesn't mean that you've figured out which view is right!

They knew that Arius was wrong because their practice of baptism followed Matthew 28:20
“go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”
We are baptized into the *one* name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
If these three names are called one name,
then we have to say that these three are one God.

Our Shorter Catechism says it this way:

Q. 5. Are there more Gods than one?

A. There is but one only, the living and true God.

Q. 6. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost;
and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

How can we say this?

Jews and Muslims think that we have blasphemed the one true God.
Rationalists think that we have taken leave of our wits.

How can you say that there is one living and true God,
and yet this one God exists in three persons?

For the early church the question was more precise:

“How is Jesus—the Son—related to God the Father?”

Why is this question so important?

Does it really matter whether we can figure out how the Father and the Son are related?

The question is not merely an abstract point of doctrine.

The question is “who is our savior?”
And “how are we saved?”

The reason why the early church was convulsed with controversy for sixty years
was because they understood that what was at stake was nothing less than our salvation.

This is what Matthew reveals in Matthew 3.

The first explicit revelation of the Trinity occurs in the baptism of Jesus.

On the one hand you have something profoundly Jewish.

The whole passage reverberates with the language of the coming of Messiah,
and the restoration from Exile.

The quotation from Isaiah 40:3,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight”
is all about return from exile.

Jesus is being portrayed as the one who would bring about the Spirit and fire baptism
promised in Ezekiel 36,

the one who would bring vindication to Israel,
and destruction to their enemies.

And the consecration of Jesus as priest, by a divine anointing with the Spirit,
demonstrates that this Jesus is the Messiah.

But when you read Matthew 3 in the light of the rest of the New Testament,
you realize that something else is happening as well.

Indeed, just reading Matthew 28:20–

“baptizing them in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”–
suggests that there is more happening at the Jordan River than meets the eye.

We are witnessing the first clear revelation of the Trinity.

The unity of God was never in doubt.

Deuteronomy 6:4 had made it clear that “the Lord our God, the Lord is ONE.”

No Israelite had any excuse for missing that one.

But now God is revealing his threeness.

If in Genesis 1-2 we saw the unity of the Triune God in the work of creation,

here in Matthew 3, we see the three persons of the Trinity in their personal relations.

You may have wondered at times,

how do we express the difference between the persons of the Trinity?

Since they are one in essence, one in glory, one in power,

how are they different?

This is expressed in their personal relations.

The Father is not the Son.

The Father always relates to the Son as his Father.

This is revealed in Matthew 3:17 when the voice from heaven declares,

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

And while the Son is equal in glory and power with the Father,

he is *not* the Father.

In his being, he is equal with the Father,

but in his relationship to the Father, he is always Son;

and in their work of creation and redemption,
he submits to the Father.
We see this in the Father's words as well.
While "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"
is giving honor and glory to the Son,
it is the statement of a superior.
A son would never say, "this is my beloved Father, with whom I am well pleased"
It is not a father's job to please his son—it is a son's job to please his father.

And likewise, we see at the Jordan River the personal property of the Holy Spirit,
to serve as the bond of love and glory between the Father and the Son.
The Spirit of God descends as a dove and came to rest on Jesus.
We so often focus on the deity of Christ,
that we assume that he didn't need the Holy Spirit.
But if the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and if the Spirit is the bond of love and glory
between the Father and the Son,
then the Son needs the Spirit.
And the Spirit sustains and empowers the Son in his work of redemption.

As man, Jesus is the Son of God,
and as the human Son of God (the second Adam) he needs the power of the Holy Spirit
in order to succeed where Adam failed—and to pay the price for Adam's fault.
But the only way that the second Adam (the new Israel) can succeed
is if the Second Person of the Trinity—the eternal Son of God—becomes a man.

This is Jesus.
He came, as John said, to "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire."
In other words, he came to bring salvation to his people, and destruction to their enemies.
But in order for him to do this,
he himself first had to endure baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
And at the Jordan River he was baptized with water and the Spirit,
and in his death he was baptized with fire:
"I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!
I have a baptism to be baptized with,
and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:49-50)

Baptism is an act of judgment.
Just think of the baptisms in the OT:
The Flood (1 Peter 3) which saved Noah and his family,
but destroyed the rest of the world;
The Red Sea (1 Cor 10) which saved Moses and Israel,
but destroyed the Egyptians.

The Spirit and fire baptism that Jesus came to bring is no different.
On the day of Pentecost,

when the Spirit and fire are poured out upon the church,
what was the response of the people?
“They were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles,
‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37)
They understood that if the Spirit and fire had been poured out upon the church,
in other words—that salvation had come to the disciples of Jesus—
then all that was left for them was destruction.
And so Peter replied:
“Repent and be baptized every one of you
in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins,
and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

If you want to participate in the new creation,
the restoration of the Kingdom of God.
If you want to escape the wrath of God’s judgment,
Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins,
and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Water baptism does not guarantee that you will go to heaven
(don’t forget Simon Magus in Acts 8),
but it does visibly mark the difference between those who belong to the Kingdom of God,
and those who don’t.

If we take seriously the words of the apostle Peter,
then God uses baptism (together with repentance and faith),
to bring the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Just as Jesus had to be baptized “to fulfill all righteousness,”
so we also must be baptized if we wish to partake of him.

Jesus received the anointing of the Holy Spirit in his baptism.
And Peter says in Acts 2 that if we wish to receive the Holy Spirit,
then we must repent and be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ.

We must turn away from our petty and pathetic little kingdoms,
and bow the knee to the great King.

In the end, only liars and lunatics will not confess that Jesus is Lord!