

Mark 1:4-11

Why did Jesus Need to be Baptised?

Whenever a baby is born to parents in our congregation we can expect that, not long afterwards, there will be a request to have that baby baptised. One thing a pastor will often ask when parents come to me with that request is, “Why do you want this child baptised?” There can be many different answers to that question, ranging from family or church tradition (It’s the done thing!) to a genuine desire to see their child share in the light and life of Christ.

One day when Jesus was about 30 years old he approached John who was baptising people in the Jordan River and asked to be baptised. John’s immediate response was to ask him, “*I need to be baptised by you, so why do you come to me?*” (See Matthew 3:14).

Have you ever wondered why Jesus needed to be baptised? Today, let’s try and find an answer to that question.

If you were asked why you needed to be baptised I imagine that most of you would say something about the fact that you were born sinful and that baptism washes your sins away. But Jesus was - and always remained - the perfect Son of God; so did he need baptism to wash away his sins? No! But did he need John’s baptism? Even John’s baptism was ‘*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*’ (Mark 1:4). Jesus needed neither *repentance* nor *forgiveness of sins* because he was never a sinner by nature.

Well, perhaps Jesus needed baptism because he was lacking something that he needed to begin his ministry. Perhaps he needed some kind of special anointing with the Holy Spirit that he didn’t have before. Was Jesus incomplete - or lacking something - before his baptism? No! The Bible makes it clear that Jesus had been the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Immanuel - God with us - right from his birth. He didn’t need any kind of spiritual ‘top-up’ before he began his ministry. John the Baptist knew that and even tried to persuade Jesus not to be baptised.

Jesus’ reply to John the Baptist gives us the first reason why Jesus was baptised. Matthew tells us that Jesus said to John, “*Let it be so now: it is proper to do this to fulfil all righteousness*” (Matthew 3:15). What does that mean? Jesus was baptised as part of God’s saving plan to put people back into a right relationship with God.

God's plan was that his only Son would come as a human being; he would identify himself with sinners; he would suffer and die for the sin of the whole world; he would rise again and promise that everyone who believes in him would be made righteous - receive the perfect life of Jesus as a gift. In his baptism Jesus was showing he had come to identify with sinners like you and me who *do* need God's gift of righteousness.

There is another reason why Jesus was baptised. It was to show his glory to the world. We are just entering the church season of Epiphany in which we focus on how the human Jesus began to make known his glory as the Son of God. His baptism is the first revelation of his glory. For the first 30 years of his life he lived as Jesus' of Nazareth, son of Joseph, the carpenter. His glory as the Son of God was hidden. Now it was time for it to be made known.

Mark writes: **As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"** (Mark 1:10, 11). While these signs were obviously confirming signs for Jesus preparing him for the difficult ministry upon which he was about to embark, we have already established that, as the perfect Son of God, he did not lack anything. So why was Jesus baptised? Jesus was baptised to show his glory to the world.

For a fleeting moment God flung wide open the window of heaven and his glory shone on his only Son and on the world to which he was sent. The fact that **he saw heaven being torn open** shows that his ministry is truly 'from above' and not 'from below'. He was not some self-appointed guru or religious leader. Jesus was baptised to show that he really was the Lord's anointed Messiah, sent from heaven.

From the open window of heaven Jesus saw **the Spirit descending on him like a dove**. This was a sign that God had anointed the ministry of the Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power (Acts 10:38). Again, the words he would speak, the miracles he would perform, as well as his dying and his rising again, would all be done in the Spirit and the power of the Almighty God of Heaven and earth.

At the baptism of Jesus, **a voice came from heaven**, as it did again on the mount of transfiguration saying: **"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"**. God confirmed and revealed the nature of Jesus as the *Son of God*; he reaffirmed his own *love* for him, and declared that he was *well pleased* with him and the work he had come to do.

The Gospel writers do not tell us whether it was only Jesus who saw heaven opened and the Spirit descending, and heard the confirming voice of God, or whether others saw and heard as well. Whatever the case, it is obvious that Jesus talked with his disciples about what he had seen and heard, and that the Holy Spirit inspired these things to be written in the Scriptures to reveal Christ's glory to the world.

There is one final reason why Jesus was baptised; **he was baptised to institute Christian baptism**. His baptism reminds us of the benefits of our baptism! This event has a lot to do with us!

The baptism Jesus instituted for us was different from John's '*baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*'. That is why the believers we read about in Acts 19 (who had received only John's baptism) also needed to be baptised in the name of Jesus and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christian baptism is, as St. Paul describes, '*a washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*' (Titus 3:5); or as Jesus says to Nicodemus, being '*born of water and the Spirit*' (John 3:5). At the other end of his earthly ministry Jesus commanded his disciples to administer baptism '*in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*' (Matt. 28:18).

Jesus may not have needed the forgiveness of sins, but we certainly do. In his baptism Jesus identified and joined himself to the sinners for whom he would live, die and rise again. The Bible tells us that our baptism joins us to Jesus and everything he has done for us (Romans 6:3-5). Baptism in the name of Jesus gives us that much needed gift - the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:28, 29) - and so '*fulfils all righteousness*' by putting us in a right relationship with God as Jesus promised. In that sense **heaven is opened** to us like it was at Jesus' baptism.

Jesus may not have needed a special infilling with the Holy Spirit because as God he was in perfect unity with the Holy Spirit all the time; but we certainly do. Jesus' baptism assures us of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that when we are baptised in the name of Jesus we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:28, 29). In that sense the **Holy Spirit comes down and rests upon us** like it did at Jesus' baptism.

In our baptism the voice of God is heard, not thundering from heaven, but read from the pages of the Scriptures; nevertheless, it is the voice of God. It now proclaims that we are **all sons of God**, his children, because of our baptism and heirs of his eternal promise. God's word places his own name on us.

God's word proclaims his love for us as it did for Jesus, and it proclaims that - despite our fallen human nature - he is well pleased with us, through faith in Jesus Christ. We are now covered over with the robe of righteousness that he gives to us and when he looks at us he doesn't see the sin and the sinful nature; he sees Jesus - and with him **he is well pleased**.

That's why you and I need to be baptised. Aren't you glad Jesus was baptised too? He did it for us! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.