Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Messiah's Divine Confirmation, Part 1
Scripture: Luke 3:21-22
Code: 42-46

We come now to our study of God's Word. We are going through the gospel of Luke and we find ourselves in the third chapter of Luke at a very important point. All the prologue is past and we now begin the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything from the beginning of Luke's gospel through the 20th verse of the third chapter sets the stage for the ministry of Jesus Christ. That ministry becomes the theme and the focus of Luke's gospel, beginning in chapter 3 verse 21. And the launch point for the ministry of Jesus Christ is the event of His baptism. Let me read these two verses to you.

"Now it came about when all the people were baptized that Jesus also was baptized and while He was praying heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove and a voice came out of heaven, 'Thou art My beloved Son. In Thee I am well pleased.'"

I suppose words like powerful, dramatic, divine, majestic, theological, fulfilling, significant are all words that describe those two verses. And again, Luke in his customary way, with a very economy of words, briefly can say so much and open up to us such wide panoramas of truth. In these two verses Luke begins the story of the ministry of Jesus Christ and it begins with a simple statement in verse 21, "Jesus also was baptized."

There's no fanfare. Luke says nothing more than that about the baptism itself, but focuses on what was going on at the baptism. Jesus was praying, heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit came down, and the Father's voice came out of heaven saying, "Thou art My beloved Son. In Thee I am well pleased."

Now to understand the passage, you would need to understand the final statement by the voice from heaven, the voice of the Father, is the main point that Luke is making. These brief verses that I've just read are the final transition from John the Baptist to Jesus. But this event is far more than just a transition. It is the testimony of the Father to the Son. In other words, it is the divine confirmation of Jesus as the Messiah. It is the word from heaven. It is the anointing of the Holy Spirit from heaven indicating that this Jesus is in fact the anointed Messiah, Son of God, Savior. He is the One who was promised by the angel Gabriel when he announced that Mary would have a child who would be the Son of the Most High. He is the One who was affirmed by the angels when they said to the

shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest, for today was born a Savior, Christ the Lord."

It is thirty years later now since the birth of Christ, thirty years and at least nine months later than the annunciation of Gabriel to Mary. And now it is time for the thirty-year-old Jesus, as indicated, by the way, in verse 23, it says, "When He began His ministry He was about thirty years of age." So it is now thirty years that have gone by, it is time for Jesus to be launched into His ministry and the launch has as its most notable feature, a voice out of heaven affirming that He is the Son of the Most High God with whom the Most High God is well pleased.

This event, this baptism, this opening of heaven, this descent of the Holy Spirit, this voice from the Father, takes place about six months after John the Baptist had begun his ministry. The time was the summer of the year 26 A.D.

Now when Jesus comes from Nazareth to Galilee to be baptized at the age of about thirty, He comes from obscurity. He has lived for thirty years in real obscurity. Obscurity as far as the people of Israel knew, He had no ministry, He had no public persona. He had no public profile. In fact, He was utterly unknown to the people of His own town Nazareth. In fact, when He announced Himself to be the Messiah there, they sought to kill Him. There was nothing about Him that would indicate He was God in human flesh, nothing about Him as you might be surprised to hear, in spite of the medieval paintings. He didn't have a halo around His head and He didn't wear some special heavenly garb. There was no emanating light coming from Him. He was living in obscurity for thirty years, working in the obscure town of Nazareth as a part of His father's business as a carpenter. But it is time now for Him to begin His ministry, time for Him to start His life work and fulfill His divine commission.

So, He goes down to the Jordan river where John is to be baptized. He meets John. In the first chapter of John's gospel — that's a different John, the apostle John — the apostle John records that John the Baptist didn't recognize Jesus. That's not surprising. They were relatives. Their two mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, were relatives. You remember that they got together early in the gospel of Luke. We read about that. Mary was pregnant and Elizabeth was pregnant with John, the herald of the forerunner of the Messiah, who would be born to Mary. Since they were relatives they got together because they had been the recipients of mutual miracles by which they were going to bear a child. Elizabeth was past childbearing and had been barren all her life. And Mary was a virgin. And in both cases the conception was miraculous. And so they got together as relatives.

It is conceivable that the children, John being about six months older, at least, than Jesus may have gotten together at some time in their childhood. But through their adult life, they lived in two different

places. Jesus lived in the town of Nazareth, which is on the northern edge of the area of Israel, or Palestine, up in the north part of the Galilee. And John the Baptist lived in the south and the east part, down east of Jerusalem, down into the wilderness of Judea. And according to chapter 1 and the end of the chapter, he lived there for his entire life, living in the deserts until he launched his ministry about six months before Jesus showed up. So they were in two different places.

Nothing indicates to us that John was anywhere but the wilderness, or that Jesus was anywhere but Nazareth. And so, when Jesus first showed up, the gospel of John tells us John didn't recognize Him. Obviously he knew the Messiah was coming, he had certainly been told by his mother that his relative, her relative, Mary, had given birth to the Messiah and that the Messiah was actually a relative of his. His mother, no doubt, had told him the story, but not seeing Jesus in the intervening years, didn't know what He would look like. And so, when you come to John chapter 1, verses 31 to 33, John twice says that he didn't recognize Jesus, because, of course, he didn't know what He looked like.

Eventually he did recognize Jesus at His baptism and later after the baptism, probably the next day when Jesus again came down to where John was baptizing he pointed to Him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." But they didn't know each other and that's why John didn't recognize Jesus when He came there.

By the way, just as an interesting note, there was a two- or three-day, probably three days, when Jesus...day one, was baptized by John; day two was marked out as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; and then on the third day, came to where John was. That would be the only time in their lives when they were actually together. John went on ministering six months longer before he was imprisoned and then was imprisoned up to a year. Jesus' ministry, of course, went on as well. So for six months at least their ministries went along together, but they were in two different locations and they didn't meet. So here you have just the one brief time when they met. And Jesus came for the purpose of being baptized. That was His objective and what was to happen there was critical. Putting Jesus into the water wouldn't necessary signify anything. John was doing that with masses and masses of people. In fact, it tells us in verse 21, "It came about when all the people were baptized that Jesus also was baptized." He was one among many just being baptized there. There was nothing to single Him out. Unless there was some divine intervention to identify Him, no one watching would know that this was any other than just another Jew coming down wanting to prepare himself for the Messiah by repenting of his sins and going through this baptism of repentance.

And so, when Jesus was baptized, all heaven broke loose because this was not just another baptism. This was a singular event to launch the ministry of the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. What John is focusing on in verses 21 and 22 is the voice that comes out of heaven. When you study the Greek language, you learn its grammar, its construction. And what you have here in the Greek construction is a main clause at the end of verse 22, "A voice came out of heaven, 'Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased.'" Here is God, out of heaven proclaiming Jesus as His Son, the Son of the Most High God, as Gabriel had said He was, Immanuel, God with us. And the Father is also proclaiming His perfection saying He is well pleased with everything about Him.

That is the main clause of these two verses and everything else is subordinate to that. What you have here are three infinitive clauses. In the Greek language, some of you who know Greek and even remember your English grammar will remember the words "infinitive" and "participle." Infinitives and participles are verb forms that modify a main verb. They're subordinate, and that's what you have. The focus of what Luke writes is the last statement, the statement of the Father that this is My Son. Everything else subordinates that. It was a time when people were being baptized, that Jesus was baptized and He was praying and heaven opened and the Holy Spirit came down, and all of that culminated in the voice coming out of heaven which is the main emphasis. So it is the divine testimony of the Father to the Son that Luke is interested in.

And it's interesting to me that Luke doesn't give us any details about the baptism. He doesn't give us anything in terms of meaning of the descent of the Holy Spirit. He just says the Holy Spirit descended in a form that was visible like a dove. But he does give us the very word of the Father which is the main issue.

So, thirty years of perfect, sinless growth and maturing are over with. Thirty years in which Jesus has increased in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man, as chapter 1 verse 52 says. All the preparation is past and now He is ready to begin His ministry. So He leaves Nazareth and takes the sixty-seventy-mile hike down from Nazareth to Judea and out to the Jordan river where John is because there He is to be baptized.

Luke's account is very brief but that's all right. The Holy Spirit inspired Luke only to say just a brief amount because Matthew wrote about this event, Mark wrote about this event, and so did John. So we have four gospels to deal with and we can weave the accounts together and get a full understanding.

One footnote before we look actually at the text, just a big picture footnote. In this two verses we have the Trinity. We have the Son being baptized. We have the Holy Spirit descending. And we have the Father speaking out of heaven. All three are present. Here is one of the great trinitarian texts of the New Testament. There is the Father's presence, the Spirit's presence and the Son's presence, and here is the key word, simultaneously. And that is very important because there is a heresy that's been around for a long, long time. It's ancient name is "Sebelianism." It's... Another name that was used... It was used to refer to it in the past is "Modalism." It is the idea, it is the heresy that God is one God who sometimes appears as the Father, sometimes appears as the Son, and sometimes appears as the Spirit, that He has different modes, but He is not three in one simultaneously, He is not eternally three persons, He is eternally one person who puts on different masks at different times.

This... This ancient heresy has been dealt with through the years, time and time and time again, but has reached a point of popularity today because it is part of what is known as the "United Pentecostal Church," which is a “oneness” church, which denies the eternal Trinity. Now if you do not have an eternal Trinity, you have the wrong God. If you have the wrong God, you have the wrong Jesus and the wrong gospel. This is a sweeping heresy because it is a fountainhead heresy that literally pollutes all the rest of theology. You cannot have Modalism in this event because you have the Son being baptized, the Spirit descending, and the Father speaking simultaneously. This is one of the many passages that hits the “oneness” view with a death blow.

In fact, a good way to look at the text is to just take it from the viewpoint of the three persons of the Trinity. Let's begin with the Son. With the Son the baptism, with the Spirit the anointing, with the Father the testimony; those are the three that we'll look at.

The Son, first of all, verse 21, we'll just get into this and maybe a mention or so about the Holy Spirit. "It came about when all the people were baptized that Jesus also was baptized and while He was praying heaven was opened."

Now it came about, and then all the infinitive modifying statements, that the Father affirmed or confirmed the identity of Jesus as His Son, the Son of the Most High, the anointed Messiah, Savior of the world. But let's look at some of these infinitive details because they're very important.

The first one has to do with the baptism of Jesus. "When all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized." “All the people,” that just means the crowds. Go back to verse 7, "There were multitudes coming out to be baptized." In fact, Matthew tells us that all Jerusalem and Judea and all the region around the Jordan, Matthew 3:5 I think it is, were coming out to be baptized by him. John

was very popular. Large crowds were coming day after day after day after day to be baptized by John. John's baptism was the baptism for repentance. They... The people were told that they could get ready for the Messiah. The Messiah was coming. He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. He was the one coming in the spirit and the power of Elijah, fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi. He was the one announcing the arrival of the Messiah. And if you wanted to be ready for Messiah's arrival, you had to confess your sin, repent of your sin and go through a baptism that outwardly symbolized the recognition that you needed to be cleansed, that you needed to be washed. And so "all" refers to all who were baptized.

Not everybody was. Not everybody in the nation was baptized. Not everybody who came to John was baptized. In Luke chapter 7 verse 30 it says Pharisees and lawyers rejected God's purpose for them, not having been baptized by John. There were people who weren't baptized, so the "all" doesn't mean the whole nation. It may not even mean everybody who came down to the Jordan to listen. But there were many being baptized and at the time when all who were being baptized were being baptized, Jesus also was baptized. At the peak of John's ministry is the idea, when all the crowds were there so that the baptism of Jesus, listen, is a very public event. I read one commentator who said it was after the baptism of the crowds that Jesus came and had a private baptism. Not the case, and that is explicitly indicated in Luke 3:21. It was at the time when everybody was being baptized that Jesus also was baptized.

Now that's all Luke says about His baptism. It was enough to refer to the rest of the gospels to fill in the blanks, the details. So here at the height of John's ministry, people are coming, being baptized. Jesus comes. He looks like everybody else. There's no halo. There's no emanating Shekinah glory. There's no special messianic vestments or robe that He wears. He is like everybody else. He comes down and He gets in line with the crowd and John doesn't recognize Him, as the gospel of John tells us, chapter 1 verses 31 to 33. But obviously at the point of His baptism, according to John 1, John is made aware of who He is. John doesn't recognize Him until Jesus comes to John and says, "I want you to baptize Me." And He identifies who He is.

Now to pick up the story there, I want you to turn to Matthew chapter 3, Matthew chapter 3 and we'll look at verse 13. This is not a private audience, this is when the crowds are there, the place is just stirring. "Jesus arrived from Galilee," verse 13, "at the Jordan to John to be baptized by him." When all the people were being baptized, Jesus showed up. The word "arrived" is an interesting word in the Greek, *paraginomai*. The lexicons say it means "to make a public appearance," technical term, to make a public appearance. That's exactly what Jesus did. He's had thirty years of obscurity. It's now time to make a public appearance. He comes down the sixty or seventy miles from the Galilee and He arrives to make that public appearance at the Jordan to John and the Greek construction here,

"for the purpose of being baptized by him."

He came to John, who was His relative, who was His forerunner. They knew each other existed. Jesus knew of John's ministry, of course. He... His mother would have known of Elizabeth. He would have grown up as a boy knowing about His relative, John, though they did not meet. There's no indication in Scripture they met. John knew, of course, about the Messiah, about Jesus. He knew about His family. He knew He was in Nazareth but he didn't know what He looked like. Here comes Jesus and He is going to be baptized by His relative and forerunner, John. This, as I said, would be their only real meeting. He would baptize Him. The next day Jesus would come again. He would identify Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And there was probably one more day in which Jesus and John spent some time together. After that, they separated, never, at least indicating in Scripture, never to be together again; John ministering another six months and then being in prison until his death. But Jesus comes to be baptized.

Now when John finds out who He is and he has to have a discussion with Him to find out this is in fact Jesus, the Messiah, verse 14 says, "John tried to prevent Him." John tries to stop Him from being baptized. He says this to Him, "I have need to be baptized by You and do you come to me?"

Now this is a wonderful testimony. This is a wonderful and important testimony. John knows about the Messiah and he knows the Messiah is the Son of the Most High God. Obviously his mother Elizabeth had affirmed that. His father, Zacharias, acknowledged in his great, great praise to God after the birth of John, the greatness of the coming Messiah, recognized that He was divine and heavenly. John knew that the Messiah was the Son of God, that He was holy and pure and sinless. He knew that. And so he says to Him, look, I am not going to baptize You. You need to baptize me. Why are You coming to Me to baptize You?" This is testimony from John, the great prophet and forerunner of the Messiah, listen, to the Messiah's sinlessness. Here is the greatest man who ever lived up until his time. According to Matthew 11:11, that's what Jesus said. Here is the greatest of the prophets, therefore, here is the great forerunner of the Messiah, here is the herald of the Messiah, here's the one who introduces the Messiah, and the first thing he says about the Messiah is He is sinless, and therefore it is impossible that He should go through John's baptism.

Why? Because John's was a baptism of repentance. You go back in Matthew 3 to verse 6. The people who were coming were being baptized by John in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. In verse 11, "I baptize you with water for repentance." Now do I need to remind you what John's baptism was? It shouldn't be difficult to understand. The Messiah was coming. How do you get ready for the Messiah? How do you get ready to receive the Messiah? How does anybody get ready to

receive Christ? By confessing sin, by repenting of sin, that's what John preached. The Messiah's coming, the Messiah's coming, the kingdom is at hand, you must be ready to receive the Messiah by confessing your sin and repenting of it. And the outward symbol of that is to come down here in the river and let me baptize you.

Why that? Well, because there was a baptism in Judaism called proselyte baptism, when a Gentile outside the nation of Israel, outside the covenants, as it were, outside the Abrahamic lineage, when a Gentile came and said, "I want to be a part of Judaism, I want to be a part of this people, I want to worship the true God." That's what's called a proselyte, somebody who is...who is an outsider but is entering in. There was a proselyte baptism. It was a symbolic thing that here was a person outside the covenant, outside the promises, here was an alien, here was a stranger. Here was an outcast. Here was a Gentile, somebody who didn't know God. And they were being introduced into the family of God's people and they needed, therefore, to admit their alienation, admit their sin, admit that they were cut off and that they needed to be washed and cleansed of that. And that's what proselyte baptism did. It was a public demonstration that I confess of my alienation from God, I confess my sin, I confess I'm a stranger to God's law and God's holiness, and I want to be cleansed, and I want to enter in. So Gentiles would do this.

Well, John was applying Gentile proselyte baptism to Jews, which was tough to swallow, because they prided themselves on being the children of Abraham and the sons of the covenant. John is saying if you want to get ready for Messiah, you have to recognize you're no better than a Gentile, you're no better than an outcast, you're no better than a stranger, you're no better than a non-covenant person, and you have to confess that to the degree that you'll go through proselyte baptism, publicly making that confession.

Well, Jesus shows up. First question: You're the Son of the Most High God. You're not alienated from God. You're the sinless one. You're the holy child, remember, the holy child, the angel said. You're holy. You have no sin. You are not alienated from God, You don't need this baptism. In fact the protest is a reasonable protest. John may be saying, I need to protect You from somebody drawing the wrong conclusion here. If You come down in the water and I baptize You, somebody may assume by that that You are testifying to being a sinful person. This can't happen. John says, look, what needs to happen is You need to baptize me, since I'm baptizing everybody else and can't baptize myself, but I'm a sinner, why don't You just do me? That's a better plan. But I can't...I can't...I can't let You be baptized by me.

Well this was His purpose. He came to be baptized by him. That's an infinitive with the word *tou* in the Greek, t-o-u. That's purpose. I came for this very purpose. And I think John's reaction is reasonable. In fact, one of the fascinating things to do is to read the historical commentaries on the baptism of Jesus and the reasons people give why He did it, all kinds of things. One very ancient writer suggested that Jesus came to be baptized to please His mother and His brothers. This is written in a thing called *The Gospel According to Hebrews*...*The Gospel According to the Hebrews*, which is an apocryphal, non-canonical, non-inspired book. And it says, "Behold the mother of the Lord and His brethren said to Him, 'John the Baptist baptizes for the remission of sins. Let us go and be baptized by him.' But He said to them, 'What sin have I committed that I should go and be baptized by him.'" So there was this little argument and Jesus finally caved in, even though He was sinless, because that's what His mother wanted. That's a spurious source and a rather foolish idea since there's nothing in the Bible to indicate that at all.

And then there's the gnostic sort of the esoteric, philosophical idea that Jesus was a sinner up until the time of His baptism and He came to be baptized, like all other sinners, because He was a sinner but it was at the moment of His baptism when the...when the deity element called the *logos* deemed by philosophers, the deity element came down and dwelt in Him, up to then He was a sinner, at that point He gets indwelt, incarnated by the deity element, ceases to be a sinner and this is that cleansing, preparatory act that transitions Him from being a sinner to being a non-sinner. How do you deal with that? You just quote the fact that the child who is going to be born to you, Matthew 1, shall be called Immanuel, which is God with us. He was God from the very beginning and also the testimony of the angel Gabriel to Mary, "This holy child." This is not a sinner who became a non-sinner.

He came to be baptized and John, imperfect tense, kept on trying to stop Him. So there must have been a dialogue. All you get is one statement to sort of sum up the dialogue. But it's a compound verb here, trying to hinder Him, or prevent Him, verse 14. It's a... It’s a... The force is intense. John is saying no, and the dialogue goes on. No, I just... I don't get it, I can't see it. I don't understand it. I'm not going to do it. It's going to send the wrong message, the wrong signal.

But Jesus said this, verse 15. By the way, this is the first thing Jesus says since He was twelve that's recorded in Scripture. Eighteen years of silence are now broken. And what He says really is amazing. "Permit it at this time for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." And John gave in and did it, permitted it.

What is Jesus saying here? He's saying He has to do this. He gives you the answer, "to fulfill all righteousness." He has to do it to fulfill all righteousness. What does that mean? If you go to the first chapter of the gospel of John, you find out that John was very much aware — you don't have to look it up, I'll just refer to it — John was very much aware that his baptizing ministry was from God. Listen to John 1:33, John the Baptist says, "I didn't recognize Him." I didn't recognize Jesus at first. But He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'" God told me who this was, God told me that the...the one that I would see the Holy Spirit come down on and remain on, that would be the One.

But I want you to notice the first part of the verse. "He who sent me to baptize in water said to me." Okay, let me just cover that for a minute. He who sent John to baptize in water said to him. That's God. And then God said, "The One I set My Spirit on, He's the Messiah, that's how you'll recognize Him, You'll know that." And, of course, Jesus had already revealed Himself to John and they were having the dialogue and heaven was about to confirm it, as God had said. But the point I want you to see is that John had been sent by God to baptize in water. That's very important. God wanted people baptized by John. That was a command. God sent John to baptize people in water. That's what righteous people were to do, OK? That's what God asked of righteous people. You understand that. So Jesus wanted it done to Him, listen carefully, because Jesus needed to fulfill all righteousness. What that's simply saying is that whatever God required, Jesus did, because Jesus would live a life of perfect righteousness. There would be no sins of commission, He would never do what He shouldn't have done, and there would be no sins of omission, He would never fail to do what righteous people did.

This is easy to understand. Did Jesus go to the Passover? Did He? Many times. Did He take of the Passover meal? Many times. Well, did He need to participate in a meal that commemorated God's deliverance of His people from Egypt and that looked forward to the expiation of sin by the final Lamb that would come? Did Jesus have to partake of a Passover meal as a testimony to His need to be delivered from sin? No, but righteous people kept the Passover because God instituted it.

There's another incident that helps explain this. In the 17th chapter of Matthew, verses 24 to 27, there's a little dialogue between Simon Peter and some people from the Israeli IRS, the tax people. The tax people come to Simon and they, “Simon, Simon does your master pay taxes?” Does He pay this two drachma tax, kind of like a poll tax, census tax? Does your master pay the tax? And Peter says, "Yeah, He does, He pays the tax." And then Jesus says to him, "Peter, let me explain to you. Who pays the... Who pays the tax? Does the king's son pay the tax or do strangers pay the tax?" Peter says, "Hah, that's easy, strangers, the king's son never pays taxes. It's not how the system works. If you're the king's son he doesn't get... You don't get taxed. It's all the strangers that get

taxed."

"Nevertheless," Jesus says, "you go down and throw your little hook in the lake, pull out a fish, you reach in his mouth, you'll find a *statr* there. That's enough to pay both of ours. Go pay the tax." Jesus was saying this: I don't need to pay the tax, I'm the King's Son, but I'm paying it because that's what God requires of righteous people. You render to Caesar what is Caesar's, you render to God what is God's." Now in Jesus' life, if God said this is what I want righteous people to do, Jesus did it. You understand that? And it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the fact that He was a sinner, it's not a confession that He was a sinner, it's only an acknowledgement that whatever God established as righteous conduct, Jesus did it, so that righteousness for Him, listen to this, was not just negative, it wasn't just not doing what you ought not to do, but it was doing everything that God ever required of a righteous person.

I'm sure... I'm sure that Jesus ate the Passover meal. I'm sure Jesus ate the part of the offering, the sin offering when it came back to His family, He partook of that. He participated as a family member in the sacrifices that were made by the father for the family. Jesus was a part of all of those things that God had ordained for righteous people to do, and that's why He did what He did.

There's no other way to explain it; that's exactly what He says. I don't know why people get confused. But I'm telling you, everybody you read has a different spin on why Jesus was baptized. And frankly, it's not that difficult. Some say His baptism was an initiatory rite into His ministry. Some say He was really going through proselyte baptism because He wanted to identify with the Gentiles, and in order to show the Gentiles that He was identifying with them, He went through Gentile baptism. Well, that... Where does it say that? All the Jews were going through that, it doesn't set Him apart.

Some say Jesus was really affirming the ministry of John. Well, why did He need to affirm the ministry of John? John needed to affirm Him. And some even say He was acting like a sinner as a preview of when He would die on the cross bearing sin.

Those are nice suggestions and I think there are some element perhaps of consideration in all of those, but the bottom line is John certainly wouldn't have been...would have had no reluctance for Jesus to have an initiatory rite, no reluctance for Jesus to have identified Himself with affirming John's ministry, etc., etc. But the bottom line is John was reluctant and he was reluctant because he knew what his baptism meant. It meant that you were confessing to be sinner and that's all it meant and he was very concerned that if Christ did this He would be portraying Himself as a sinner and he tried to stop Jesus from doing that. And Jesus turned it around the other way and said, "But, John, on the

other hand, this is what God has asked righteous people to do and I'll do it because I do everything that is required by God."

Jesus is not a sinner. Hebrews 4:15 says He is without sin. He's holy, harmless, undefiled. That's why God at the end of His life highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every name. Jesus is not a sinner. But this is a righteous act and Christ would do everything that was right, everything that God required, everything that God defined as righteous.

Why? Well, we go back to the same truth. Jesus needed to live a perfect life, so that perfect life could be credited to your account. Remember when we discussed that? You understand the doctrine of imputation, the doctrine of justification, just a brief, a very brief review. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you're saved, but...but that's... That's a simple perspective. What's the grander scheme of things? It's this. On the cross, 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made Him who knew no sin," Jesus, the sinless one, "God made Him who knew no sin sin for us." OK? On the cross God treated Jesus as if He had committed all your sins, right? In other words, God punished Jesus for your sin and my sin, for all the sins of all who would ever believe. God treated Jesus as if He lived your life, as if He lived my life. Then turns around and that same verse says, "That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

On the cross God treated Jesus as if He lived your life. Turns right around and treats you as if you lived His. That is the amazing reality of the imputation of righteousness. Jesus needed to live a perfect life so that perfect life could be credited to your account. He couldn't just come down on Friday, die on Friday, rise on Sunday and go back. There would have been no righteous life. There would have been no righteous childhood, no righteous teen-age years, no righteous adulthood, no righteous life in which Jesus never did anything wrong and always did everything that God required. That perfect life is what is credited to your account. That's the righteousness of God in Christ credited to you. It's the righteousness of God lived out in the life of Christ and now put to your account so that when God looks at your name in the book and it says "John MacArthur," under it, it says "Lived a perfect life."

You say, "Really." Yes, that's right. What happened to his sin? It was placed on Jesus Christ and He was treated by God as if He had committed it all. So, on the cross God treats Jesus as if He lived your life, turns right around and treats you as if you lived His. He needed to live a perfect life to be credited to your account. That's the righteousness of God. That's a righteousness Paul talks about in Philippians chapter 3. He says, "A righteousness not of my own, but which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God." God, according to the words of Isaiah, clothes you

in righteousness, the righteousness of Christ.

So why did He have to be baptized? To fulfill all righteousness, to do what God required to be done, to do what was right to be done so that that perfectly righteous life would satisfy God and then be credited to your account and to my account. That is, to me, that is really a lost truth in the churches today. We all understand that Jesus died on the cross to bear our sins, very few people understand that God then exchanged for our sins the perfect life of Christ and credited to our account and God treats us as if we lived His perfect life. That is the wondrous reality of grace and imputed righteousness.

Now with that we can go back to Luke. So there's the dialogue between John and Jesus and finally John caves in and says, OK, OK, I understand, and baptizes Jesus. Now at that point you might think, oh boy, now somebody is going to get the wrong idea, somebody is going to think that Jesus is a sinner. But no they're not and I'll tell you why they're not. Because at the very time that Jesus is praying and coming up out of the water, the Holy Spirit comes down, and out of heaven comes this voice, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," which is a way by which God announces the absolute holy perfection of the one who has just been baptized. John doesn't have to protect Jesus. Jesus will be fine on His own and in the care of His Father. Everything will be attended to. So here with the crowd around and John looking and all of this going on, John's worry that Jesus is going to be baptized and people are going to think He's a sinner, but heaven makes sure that nobody gets that idea. In the text of Scripture, John then protects the perfections of Jesus, the Holy Spirit protects the perfections of Jesus, and so does the Father Himself.

By the way, there's another interesting thing in Luke 3 that only Luke mentions in verse 21. In the four accounts of the baptism, only Luke says, "While He was praying," while He was praying. The Messiah in the midst of this baptism while John is, you know, putting Him down and bringing Him out, is in perfect, holy conversation with God. There is no alienation. This is not a sinner. There is no breach in that relationship. There is no separation. From eternity to eternity, through time in the middle, when Jesus was incarnate, there never was a break in communication with the Father except for that moment on the cross when Jesus said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" when God was executing Jesus for all our sins. But apart from that moment, no alienation existed. And I think Luke is just saying, don't be concerned about whether you might think Jesus would be a sinner at this point, because He — unlike the publican beating on his breast, he won't even look to God, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" — Jesus is in perfect communion with the Father. No separation, no alienation, no break, no breach and I think that's what Luke is telling us.

So you have the testimony of John to the perfection of Jesus, He's so perfect he doesn't even want to baptize Him. You have the testimony of Luke to His perfection as in the midst of what would for many be a baptism of repentance when they would feel the alienation, Jesus is in perfect communion with God. And prayer, of course, becomes a critical and a constant part of the life of Jesus. As you go through Luke you see him numerous times emphasizing the prayer life of Jesus, chapter 5, 6, 9, 11, 22, 23.

And even in the gospels, you go through and you see Jesus praying before He chooses the twelve and praying in connection with and after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 and praying when He was about to ask His disciples a very important question in Luke 9. Praying on the mountain where He was transfigured. Praying just before that tender invitation in Matthew 11, "Come unto Me, all you who are weary," and so forth. Praying before He taught the disciples how to pray. Praying at Lazarus' tomb, praying when He started the Lord's Supper. Praying, of course, in Gethsemane, praying on the cross, praying after the resurrection, Luke 24.

Prayer is a critical part of the life of the Son because this is constant communion, inter-trinitarian communion between the Son and the Father. And here it is, this unbroken eternal communion and the... Mark adds in Mark 1:10 in his account of the baptism that immediately as Jesus was coming up out of the water, so we could combine immediately as He was coming up out of the water, while He was praying, He had been praying, probably, since the thing started and He comes up out of the water, immediately, it says, heaven was opened. Now things begin to become transcendent. Up until this point there's nothing particularly unusual. He appears like anybody else appears. John by now knows who He is, but John hasn't had the confirmation. There's been a discussion, obviously, in which Jesus said, "Go ahead and baptize Me. Yes, I'm the Messiah." If you are, I'm reluctant to do it, and that little dialogue. John finally says, OK, I'll do it if You're going to fulfill all righteousness. John hasn't yet seen the confirmation but God told him if He was the Messiah, remember, the Spirit would come down and rest on Him. And exactly that happened, but it all begins when heaven was opened.

Coming up out of the water, Matthew puts it, He went immediately from the water and at that moment heaven was opened. By the way, it indicates that John baptized by immersion. That's what baptized means, to immerse or to dip. Jesus coming up out of the water and heaven opens up. Now when heaven opens in the Bible, we won't get into this in detail, when heaven opens up, two things happen. God appears in some way. There's a manifest appearance of heavenly beings. Secondly, God speaks. God speaks. And that is precisely what occurred on this occasion. Heaven opened up to let heaven come down and to let heaven be heard.

In Ezekiel 1:1, Ezekiel was by the river Chebar among the exiles, heaven was opened: “I saw visions of God.” Jesus in John 1:51 talked about the heaven being opened up and angels of God ascending and descending. Acts 7, Stephen at his execution saw heaven open and there he saw his Lord. Revelation 19 talks about heaven being opened, verse 11, out of heaven comes the Lord Jesus Christ riding on a white horse, coming to conquer and destroy sinners.

Listen to Isaiah 64:1: "Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down." Well that happened at the baptism. The heavens were rent. Heaven was opened and down comes the Holy Spirit and out comes the voice of God. This is critical because this is divine confirmation. This is the other two members of the Trinity confirming the messiahship of Jesus, descending on the right man, the right person. This was not missed by John because remember, in the gospel of John, John had said he had been told by God that the One whom he saw the Spirit descending and remaining on was the Messiah. So this is to make that known to John who will then make it known to all and there were others who had certainly gathered there would have seen it and the voice from heaven would have been unmistakable to all. So this is public confirmation by God that this is the Messiah. This is the launch point of the ministry of Jesus.

Now let's just briefly look at verse 22, a comment or two and we'll really get into it next time. We come to the second member of the Trinity who is in this event, the Holy Spirit. "And the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove." Remember now, John 1 said John the Baptist gave testimony that God said to me that the words of Jesus that He was the Messiah, the claim of Jesus that He was the Messiah would be confirmed to me by the Spirit of God coming down out of heaven and descending and staying, remaining on Him. And that is exactly what happened. Here is the Holy Spirit descending on Him in the form, it says, that is visible, in a visible form and descending on Him like a dove.

Now let me just make a comment or two. This doesn't mean that the Lord didn't know the Holy Spirit up until this point. Of course He did. He was a member of the Trinity, they were in eternal communion. He was in full communion with the Holy Spirit all the time. This is not Christ without the Holy Spirit getting the Holy Spirit. This is not like a non-believer becoming converted and receiving the Holy Spirit. This is an anointing for special service. OK? This is an anointing for special power. This is to demonstrate that God has put His power on this individual in a way that all can see. Jesus, of course, as God, had limitless power. Jesus was in perfect concert with the Father because He was doing the Father's will and He was in perfect harmony with the Holy Spirit because He had in His humanness yielded Himself up to the operation of the power of the Holy Spirit. This is simply heaven

saying, "Here is the official anointing of power on Him as the true Messiah and Savior."

The Spirit descends and remains on Him. It says that twice in John chapter 1 verses 32 and 33. Now when you go to the Old Testament, all believers had the Holy Spirit living in them, all believers because they were all converted under New Covenant terms and the New Covenant means, "I'll put My Spirit within you." Everybody who was a true believer — belonged to God — had the Spirit. But there was another kind of anointing of the Spirit that you read about a lot in the Old Testament, "The Spirit of God came upon so-and-so and he prophesied." “The Spirit of God came on so-and-so and he went over here and did this." And so forth. That was that special empowerment of the Holy Spirit for unique task and service. The... The Holy Spirit had been certainly in perfect communion with Jesus for all the thirty years of His life. There was never any time when He wasn't in perfect harmony and communion with the Holy Spirit, but now there was an official anointing, an official empowering for the duties that were His as Messiah.

You see parallels of this in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit came on Moses for that duty God had for him. The Holy Spirit came on Joshua in Numbers chapter 27. The Holy Spirit descended in Numbers 11 on the seventy elders. You come into the book of Judges and it says the Holy Spirit came upon Othniel. The Holy Spirit came upon Gideon, in Judges 6:34. The Holy Spirit came on Jephthah. The Holy Spirit came on Samson, Judges 13. And then you come into kings and the Holy Spirit came upon Saul, 1 Samuel chapter 10. The Holy Spirit then came upon David, 1 Samuel 16. And then you come to the prophets and the Holy Spirit, according to 1 Kings 18, also 2 Kings, came on Elijah. And the Holy Spirit came on Azariah and Micah and Zechariah. And the Holy Spirit, according to Ezekiel 2, came upon Ezekiel for prophetic ministry. Daniel 4, came upon Daniel for prophetic ministry.

So this is a special anointing of power from the Holy Spirit connected to ministry. And, of course, this takes us back to two familiar passages in Isaiah. Isaiah 61, where you have a messianic statement, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me." And by the way, that is referring to Messiah and the Messiah, Jesus, quoted that, as we'll see in Luke 4:21. He said, "Today this has been fulfilled in your ears." So it just says right there the Spirit of the Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news, to preach the gospel. So there was a special anointing on Jesus, a special sort of official authentication and empowerment in a unique way for His messianic ministry of proclaiming salvation.

Also Isaiah 42:1; and this is a scripture you ought to write down because I think Luke has this in mind even as he writes. Isaiah 42:1, "Behold My servant," that's the Messiah, "whom I lift up, My chosen

One in whom My soul delights, I have put My Spirit upon Him." And this is again Psalm...or Isaiah 42, it's messianic, it's talking about the coming Christ, the Messiah and it says, "The Spirit will come upon Him and He will bring forth justice and He will not cry out or raise His voice, a bruised reed He will not break, a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish," and that all is quoted in the New Testament in reference to Jesus.

So it was part and parcel that the Messiah be anointed by the Holy Spirit. That was just the launch, the divine affirmation of His being launched into messianic ministry. In the book of Acts it affirms that. Acts tells us, chapter 4 verse 27, where it says, "For truly in this city they were gathered... They were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus whom Thou didst anoint." Well He was anointed by the Holy Spirit and everybody recognized that. In Acts 10, also, verse 37, "You yourselves know the thing that took place throughout all Judea starting from Galilee after the baptism with which John proclaimed. You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit," here's the key, "and with power and He went about doing good and He went about healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." The anointing then was the anointing that occurred at the baptism of John with the Holy Spirit and it was an anointing to empower Him.

One of the amazing elements of the life of Christ was that when He became incarnate and came into the world and started His ministry, He set aside, listen carefully, the independent use of His divine attributes. He didn't cease to be God, He didn't stop being what He was, He just set aside any independent use of His own attributes and He yielded Himself to the power of the Holy Spirit. We'll see a lot about that in our next study.

And so we find then that the Spirit comes down in a visible manner. Now most people think that the Spirit came down looking like a dove, sort of like the old Groucho Marx where the duck came down out of heaven. Well look, I just want to tell you something and I'll tell you. I'll get into this a little bit next time. I'll answer the thing. I want you to know this. The Bible does not say that the Holy Spirit came down looking like a dove. Now I know you've got a lot of stuff with doves on it that are supposed to symbolize the Holy Spirit. Well this week in preparation for next Sunday, you can collect all that stuff and I'll comment on that next week.

What we know up to now is that this is indeed the Messiah, this is the Christ. John has affirmed it by affirming His sinlessness. Jesus has affirmed it by demanding that He be baptized because He must do whatever is right. And the Holy Spirit has confirmed it by coming down out of heaven and descending and remaining on Him. We'll also see more about the Holy Spirit's role in the life of Jesus and what the words of the Father meant to culminate this event. This is the great launching, the

credentials, the confirmation of the Messiah and His ministry.

Father, we do thank You for Your clarity in revealing to us these things. We praise You from the depths of our heart for the glorious gift of Christ, for who He is. Because He is Your Son, the Son of the Most High God, He is able to accomplish our salvation, He is able to triumph over evil, He is able to destroy the devil and death and hell and to take us to glory. We thank You for the majesty of this passage. We with anticipation eagerly wait for the best that is yet to come when we hear the testimony that You gave to Him, "This is My beloved Son. In Him I am well pleased." And we too are pleased, Father, with our Savior, and all that He has done for us and shall do forever. We praise You and thank You in His name. Amen.

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