

WHY WAS CHRIST BAPTIZED?

John the Baptist, in fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah 40:3, came preaching repentance in the wilderness of Judea. He prepared the way for the ministry of Christ, and part of this involved the baptism of Jesus. All four gospels record this event, showing the importance of it (cf. Matt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:31-34).

Matthew 3:13 (NKJV)

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

At the end of chapter 2, we saw Jesus as a child with His family, who went and lived in Nazareth of Galilee. Fast-forward about 30 years, in chapter 3, we have Jesus coming from there to John the Baptist at the Jordan to be baptized by him. This event would mark the beginning of Christ's ministry, and in Luke 3:23, it says that at that time He was "about thirty years of age".

The distance from Nazareth to the Jordan River in Judea, where John was baptizing, was about a 60-mile journey.

Matthew 3:14 (NKJV)

14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

In John 1:29, we read that as John saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, ***"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*** In conjunction with what was happening, God at this time made known to John that Jesus was indeed the Messiah he had been preparing the way before.

John 1:30 (NKJV)

30 This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'

John the Baptist went on to say in John 1 that prior to this occasion he did not know WHO the Messiah was but that the Spirit descending on Him at the time of His baptism became the confirming SIGN that He was indeed the exalted Messiah.

John 1:33–34 (NKJV)

33 I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘**Upon whom you see the Spirit descending**, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’

34 And **I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.**”

With this new insight coming into view, John tried to prevent Christ from undergoing his baptism, saying, “***I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?***”

In this statement, John recognized both the superiority and the sinlessness of Christ in contrast to himself (cf. Jn. 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Jn. 3:5). John saw himself as a sinner, but NOT Jesus. John recognized that his baptism signified repentance (v. 11), but that was totally inappropriate for Christ because He was not a sinner – He needed no repentance. And in this, John was right.

John recognized that Jesus was the superior One coming after him whose sandals he was not worthy to carry. This was the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire – something only God can do (v. 11). So, what was this all about? Why was Christ requesting John to baptize Him?

In context, John has just said the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, this is what John meant when he said, “***I need to be baptized by You***”. However, since the issue is John’s baptism at this point, John may have simply been indicating that, in terms of water baptism signifying repentance, this more aptly applied to himself rather than to Jesus.

Whatever the case, he had some serious reservations about baptizing Christ, since, as he has just said in verse 11, his baptism signified repentance, and we saw in verse 6 that the people being baptized by John were “***confessing their sins***”. You can see why John thought this baptism was not appropriate for Jesus.

There has been no end of commentary on what Christ’s baptism means. And frankly, MANY commentators spin a lot of yarn here, saying things the text does not actually say. In order to properly understand, there are four things to note: 1) The meaning of baptism; 2) The two-pronged IDENTIFICATION ministry of John the Baptist; 3) Christ’s explanation of what was happening, and 4) the Father’s confirming testimony on this occasion. When you put that altogether, it becomes clear what the purpose was of Christ being baptized by John.

Many people have a very shallow understanding of BAPTISM. For many, they see no deeper than an outward physical ritual, which misses the MAJOR POINT. The word baptize in Greek has 2 meanings. Its primary meaning is **“to dip under” or “to immerse”**. The secondary meaning **“is to dip into dye”** with the idea of PERMANENT IDENTIFICATION. To dip a piece of cloth into dye resulted in it being permanently identified with the dye; hence the idea of IDENTIFICATION.

The essential MEANING of baptism is consistently IDENTIFICATION. There are various kinds of “baptism” in the Bible, but the idea is consistently that of IDENTIFICATION.

1 Corinthians 10:1–2 (NKJV)

1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,

2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

Nobody even got wet in this baptism. The idea is that they were all IDENTIFIED with Moses in this experience of going through the sea.

In 1 Cor. 12:13, when Paul says all believers are by one Spirit baptized into one body and made to drink into one Spirit, he is emphasizing all true believers are IDENTIFIED in spiritual union together.

Different Baptisms found in the N.T.

Dry: 1. Moses and the cloud. (1 Cor. 10:1-2)
2. Christ’s cup. (Matt. 20:22; Lk. 12:50)
3. Spirit baptism. (1 Cor. 12:13)
4. Fire (Matt. 3:11)

Wet 1. John the Baptist’s baptism. (Matt. 3:6)
2. **Jesus’ own baptism**. (Matt. 3:15-16)
3. Jesus’ disciples’ baptism while He was here on earth. (Jn. 3:22-4:2)
4. Believers’ water baptism. (Matt. 28:19; Acts)

“If the meaning of baptism could be boiled down to one word, that word would be identification.” - **Dr. Ray Pritchard**

“Actually, baptism means identification, and I believe identification was the primary purpose for the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

– **J. Vernon McGee**

So, first and foremost, we need to understand that the essential idea of BAPTISM is consistently IDENTIFICATION. Now the question is this: What was Christ identifying with? He had no sin! There was no need for Him to repent! So why was He baptized by John the Baptist? Our answer is seen in the verses that follow. Stay tuned!