

## **Jesus' Baptism - The Ultimate Epiphany** **Mark 1:4-11**

Dear Friends in Christ,

One of the greatest mysteries of our faith is the Holy Trinity. God has declared that there is but one God. And yet he has revealed himself in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How can something that is ONE also be THREE? It is incomprehensible. And yet, at the baptism of Jesus, all three persons of the Trinity were revealed at one time, the Father in a voice from heaven, the Son in the person of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.

Within the mystery of the Trinity, there is yet another mystery, the dual nature of Christ - True God and yet at the same time True Man...not half God and half Man, but True God and True Man. The Bible puts it this way, "*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form*" Colossians 2:9. That is, everything that had anything to do with God was contained in Christ Jesus. Jesus himself taught this, that he is True God and True Man. On a number of occasions he proved it, he demonstrated it with amazing miracles.

But when Jesus was a young boy, did he know all this? Did he fully understand this? Well, "yes" we say, and point to the account of the twelve year old Jesus in the temple. He gently chides his worried mother and says in the King James version (Luke 2:49), "*wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" Sounds pretty convincing until you look at the original language and see that the New International Version has translated this passage more accurately. "*Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?*" That's not quite so definitive, you and I could say the same thing about coming to church.

And then there's that curious passage, Matthew 24:36. Speaking about the Last Day, Judgment Day, we read, "*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*" Our theologians explain, "As to his human nature, the man Christ Jesus does not know when Judgment Day is coming. As to his divine nature, Jesus Christ, True God knows this and all things." So did the boy Jesus understand all this completely, or was some of this kept from his human nature at first? Did the young man Jesus, before he was 30 years old, did he have any question who he was and why he was here? If so, the baptism of Jesus was an especially important event not only for you and me, not only for John the Baptist, but also for Jesus.

When did you first begin to realize that you were a Christian? When was your Christianity something that you became aware of? Was it Kindergarten? Was it 1<sup>st</sup> grade? Was it earlier? Was it later? I think that this is an intriguing question because it carries with it the obvious implication that there may have been a time when you were a Christian, a believer, and you were unaware of it...you didn't know it.

Is this possible? Is it possible to have saving faith in Jesus and not know it? Is it possible to have saving faith in Jesus and not be aware of it? Well, what happens when you go to sleep at night? Are you aware of your faith when you're asleep? Probably not. Well, do you become

an unbeliever every night, every time you fall asleep? No, of course not, you don't lose your faith when you fall asleep. So you can have saving faith and not be aware of it...it happens to you every night.

If, God forbid, you are in a car accident and have a head injury and go into a coma, you don't lose your faith just because you're in a coma and unaware of it. It is possible to have saving faith and not be aware of it. It happens all the time when believers lose consciousness, when believers are delirious because of fever, when believers are sedated with medicine or anaesthetized for surgery. They have faith but they may be unaware of it.

I don't think an infant, a baptized infant is consciously aware of the fact that it has saving faith. Infants are consciously aware of very little. They realize when they are hungry. They realize when they are tired. They realize when they are wet and uncomfortable. They realize when they are afraid. They realize when they are alone. But do they realize that they possess saving faith? Probably not!

But the Bible makes it very clear that the Holy Spirit works in and through baptism to create faith, to strengthen faith. Our Second Lesson for today says it so beautifully in v. 5 of Titus 3, "*He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*" And in 1 Peter 3:21 we read, "*...baptism...now saves you also...*" It is faith in Jesus that saves and the Holy Spirit works saving faith, (creates faith, strengthens faith) Ephesians 5:26 "*by the washing with water through the Word,*" that is, baptism. So a baptized infant has saving faith but doesn't realize it - YET...isn't aware of it - YET.

Since your faith doesn't depend on how you feel, or how enthused you are at the moment...since it depends entirely on the Holy Spirit working faith in your heart, there are some in whom the Holy Spirit has worked faith but they don't know it YET, they are unaware of it.

Jesus compared faith to a mustard seed. Have you ever seen a mustard seed? If someone wants to show you a mustard seed get out your glasses. It is very small, hard to see AT FIRST. It's not until the mustard seed starts to grow, starts to sprout and bear leaves, that you are even aware it exists. Faith, just like a mustard seed, may be difficult to see AT FIRST. It isn't until it grows and sprouts and bears fruit that you begin to be aware of it, to be conscious of it, to realize, "Why yes, I have saving faith."

The Epiphany Season is a time of revelation, of manifestation. It is a time when we recount the evidence in Jesus' life which revealed him, which manifested him to be the Son of God and Savior from sin. The baptism of Jesus is one of those pivotal events. Jesus' Baptism is the Ultimate Epiphany...for John the Baptist, for Jesus, and for you.

Our text tells of a time when the people were confused. They were wondering. They watched John the Baptist. They listened to his preaching. They saw his baptisms, and they wondered, "Maybe this is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. When John catches wind of this he says, "Wait a minute! You've got the wrong man. I am not the Christ, the Messiah. You've got the wrong man!"

I wonder how many people today have the wrong man? In the last fifty years over 1,100 religious leaders, everybody from Charles Manson to David Koresh, over 1,100 religious leaders have claimed to be the Christ. John the Baptist would say to their followers, "You've got the wrong man!" Not only are there those who say, "I am the Christ," there are those who

say, "I am in Christ's place." "I am his substitute, his vicar." "I am the dispenser, the only one who is the dispenser, of His blessings." John the Baptist would say, "You've got the wrong man!" There are more subtle cases...people who say, "My parents" or "my pastor" or "my best friend brought me to faith, to the spiritual life I enjoy." The most subtle case of all - people say, "I brought myself to faith." "I made a decision for Christ." "I brought myself to Christ." John the Baptist would look all these people in the eye and say, "You've got the wrong man!"

If anybody in history could've said, "I am the Christ...I stand in Christ's place...I am the dispenser of his blessings...I brought myself to faith," it would've been John the Baptist. His conception was miraculous. His birth was prophesied in the Old Testament. He was a contemporary of Christ Jesus. He was related to Christ Jesus. But John said, "I am NOT the Christ." "You've got the wrong man." Verse 7, ...*"After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie."* <sup>8</sup> *I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."* John pointed people to Christ Jesus.

No one can compare to Christ Jesus, not in honor, not in authority, not in power, not in spiritual blessings. Yes, John baptized with water, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, but John the Baptist was not the dispenser of the forgiveness of sins. John did not personally send the Holy Spirit on those who were baptized. All John did was pour on the water. (That's all we do today.) But Christ Jesus, in view of his redemptive work, Christ Jesus became and is today the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

The forgiveness of sins which became yours through baptism...you have Christ to thank for it. The faith which was created in your heart by the Holy Spirit...you have Christ to thank for it. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in your heart right now giving you comfort and aid and guidance...you have Christ to thank for it. Thank Christ for it because he's the one who sent the Holy Spirit. You are a child of the Living God because the Living Christ, himself made you God's child in baptism through the working of the Holy Spirit, whether you knew it or not...whether you are sure of it or not. It is important that you understand this completely, because then you can realize for your own spiritual comfort that your salvation, too, is directly and entirely in his hands. You are saved from the torments of hell. You are given the free gift of eternal life, and you have Christ to thank for it. Christ Jesus is the Salvation Giver. He is not just the Faith Provider. He is not just the Spirit Sender. He is the Salvation Giver.

How do you know in this life whether you are among the family of believers or not? Do you ever wonder? Do you ever doubt? If you do, then ask yourself, "Have I been baptized?" If you have been, then you know...THEN YOU **KNOW** that Christ Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit and has given you that gift of faith. Your baptism is based on the redemptive work of Christ Jesus. Romans 6:3, *"...all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death."* His death counts as payment for your sins. Galatians 3:27, *"for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ."* You are clothed in his righteousness, his perfection. 1 Peter 3:21, *"...It (that is, baptism) saves you by the resurrection (the life and death and resurrection) of Jesus Christ."* When you are baptized you get the full benefit of Jesus' life and death and resurrection.

As for Jesus, it would be difficult work, the work of salvation, and Jesus knew it. That's why he came to John the Baptist, to be baptized, to be equipped to do the work of salvation.

And this equipping took the form of an anointing by God with the Holy Spirit and with power at the time of his baptism. The title Messiah (Hebrew) or Christ (Greek) means 'The Anointed One,' and that's how he was anointed, not with oil, not just with water, but with the Holy Spirit and with power (Acts 10:38).

Did the Man Jesus (his human nature) harbor any doubts that he was indeed the Messiah, the Christ? After his baptism he knew for sure. Just look at what happened! The heavens were opened. The Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. (This was a divinely appointed sign to John indicating that this person was the Messiah.) The full power of the Holy Spirit now came upon Jesus. A voice - THE VOICE of the Father said, "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*"

If there was any question in John's mind...if there was any question in Jesus' mind...if there is any question in your mind as to who he was, it is completely dismissed...dismissed by the baptism of Jesus...the ultimate manifestation, the ultimate Epiphany that Jesus is God's own Son, that he is your savior from sin.

Let us pray:

Gracious Lord, Christ Jesus,

In your baptism you were anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power to do the work of our salvation. For this we give you honor and praise. We also give you thanks that in baptism today you send your Holy Spirit to create faith and to strengthen faith, even in those who are unaware that they have faith. Keep us in that saving faith and strengthen our faith through your word and sacraments, until that time when you gather us into heaven to be with you forever. Amen.