



## **January 13, 2019 Baptized in Jesus Given by Rev. Mattei**

According to the gospel of Luke ([Lk. 3](#)) John the Baptist is a dynamic preacher and fiery prophet who calls people to get their house in order for the coming of the kingdom. Although he is a man of God and attracting large crowds, he is an honest and humble man, very much aware of people's shortcomings but also very much in integrity with his mission. He does not mean to embarrass and demean people when he calls them out, nor is he absorbed with himself and interested in promoting his moral and spiritual superiority. What he is concerned about is the gap that people's sinful behavior has created between them and the rest of the community, an unjust behavior, very much out of step with God's plan for humanity.

John is also a humble person who does not want to usurp the spot light and abuse the popularity he has achieved by speaking God's Truth. In front of the hundreds of people who have come to him for guidance and salvation, he makes a startlingly humble statement. "One who is more powerful than I is coming, I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals."

Rather than use his position as a public figure to raise his status, John humbled himself. During the height of his prophetic career, John keeps his focus to prepare the crowd for the coming of God in the person of Jesus. This servant of Yahweh steps aside and is not interested in self-promotion but is very much concerned about the people and is willing to give God the glory.

In John's mind, the apocalypse is about to occur. The present evil age would end and God's rule would begin, a new world in which all created beings would live forever in love, peace, justice, mutual support, freedom, and dignity. His baptism would bring about the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of the world. Baptism carries the

promise that people's final destiny is no longer determined by the brokenness of the old age (whether by capricious deities or by oppressive and selfish rulers) but would be the realm of God. Repenting or turning from sin is not about expressing remorse for individual flaws but it's about assuming collective responsibility for abusive behavior, habits, and practices that the whole community is engaged in, willingly or unwillingly, systemic behaviors that the whole community has adopted or condoned with impunity (sexism, ageism, racism, able-ism, economic inequity and so on.) The Day of God's Wrath exposes the evil of the world. Facing God's Wrath with repentance and the holy fear of the Lord purifies one for righteous living.

John's baptism sets the record straight. Jesus' baptism, on the other hand, ushers in the age of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been in the world since creation. The difference for Luke is that the Spirit now adds eschatological manifestation. For Luke, Jesus is the model for the apostles who are the models for the church. The apostles and the church do everything Jesus does because they have the same Spirit. People baptized in the Holy Spirit are empowered for prophetic action putting flesh on the Word of God. The grafting of the newly baptized into Jesus prepares one for faithful living in a deceitful world ([Phil 2:15](#)), perseverance in building a just community even in the face of persecution ([1 Pt 4:11-13](#)), courageous insistence on reconciliation ([Mt 5:22-25](#); [Mt 5:43-44](#); [Rom 5:9-11](#)) and inclusivity ([Jn 10:16](#); [Eph 2:13-15](#)), a joyous and steadfast confession of our hope ([1 Pt 3:14-16](#)) and unweavering work for justice and peace ([1 Tim 6:11-16](#); [2 Tim 2](#)).

Jesus also gives us a lesson in humility. If sin is separation from God and even opposition to God's plan by favoring other "gods," Jesus does not sin and is not in need of purification. Yet, he humbles himself and undergoes John's baptism. He, who is totally one with God, is not afraid to relate to those who are disconnected from God and alienated from one another ([Phil. 2](#)). Jesus associates with sinners ([Lk 15](#)). He becomes a point of inclusion and unity for those who are scattered ([John 10](#)) and reconciles people in his flesh ([Rom. 5:9-11](#); [2 Cor. 5:18](#); [Col. 1:19-20](#)).

The voice from heaven (God's voice) identifies Jesus as God's son, in whom God is well pleased. In a first century context, these words have less to do with the nature of Jesus and more with his purpose. Luke turns to two texts from the ancient Scriptures: Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. The Jewish people used [Psalm 2](#) at the coronation of a new king. In 2:7, God adopts the monarch as God's son. Thus, Jesus becomes the divine representative in the final transition from the old age to the new. [Isaiah 42:1-4](#) is the first of Isaiah's servant songs that describe the vocation of Israel as a community to serve God's purpose, which is to bring justice to the nations. A community based on justice reveals the qualities of life God desires for all. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus will suffer because other people oppose the realm in the way that Isaiah saw Israel suffer for standing up for God's justice. It was the power of his hope and trust in divine justice that held Jesus during trying times, torture and shameful death. The Holy Spirit and fire sustained him throughout his life.

The Holy Spirit and fire sustain also all those who live by their baptismal promises. May the project of a new world wanted by God become our project. May we find hope and joy in participating in Jesus' baptism and mission. Amen.