

Baptism of Jesus is a well known historical & religious event which according to Christians was the moment when Jesus became the leader and was purified. In Gospel of Matthew this baptism is highlighted like this:

“13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. **14** But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

15 Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”” ¹

Verse 14 shows Jesus’s superiority over John the Baptist as John said that he needed to be baptised/purified by Jesus. Jesus is therefore the greater person that John kept informing people about. After the baptism is done, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus. Then the voice of Father came from heaven to earth which showed his admiration for Jesus, the Son.

This passage from Matthew is short but it has very deep meanings. A key point to notice is that all 3 members of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—are included in this passage. Jesus the Son got baptised, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and God the Father sent a voice from heaven to reflect his love for Jesus.

Generally, doves are considered a symbol of peace. The text portrays that heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came down like a dove. It could mean that God wants peace on earth so he sent the Holy Spirit in the form similar to a dove from heaven to the earth.

This passage reflects the relationship of members of the Trinity with each other and with the believers. In ‘Baptism with the Holy Spirit’ it is said that:

“The result of being born into the Kingdom, of beginning the process of sanctification, and being empowered to witness to Jesus Christ, is that dynamic fellowship being established between the persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) with the people of God, and in the human relationships between those persons born again.” ²

This shows that 3 members of the Trinity developed a relationship with believers as shown in the passage of Matthew, all three of them got involved during Jesus’ baptism. God the Father sent a voice to praise Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove to present a message of

¹ *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments*, Authorised King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Matthew 3.13-17 King James Bible Online ebook.

² *Baptism with the Holy Spirit* (Black Mountain: Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International, 2020), p. 10.

peace and Jesus got baptised in front of the community. Therefore this biblical passage emphasises the close relationship of Trinity's members with each other and their authority over others. Because the leader of believers at that time was John the Baptist, but he expected to get purified by Jesus as shown in this passage... So it proves that Jesus was the most superior human of that time and establishes his authority over others.

It is believed that Jesus was sinless however he still wanted to get baptised. Baptism is normally done to purify an individual; this means to cleanse their sins. One might wonder why Jesus still wanted to get baptised despite being sinless.

An influential Catholic scholar, Thomas Aquinas, asserts that Jesus was an incarnation of God and his role was save us from sins

"Forasmuch as our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to "save His people from their sins" (Mat. 1:21), as the angel announced, showed unto us in His own Person the way of truth, whereby we may attain to the bliss of eternal life by rising again, it is necessary, in order to complete the work of theology, that after considering the last end of human life... " ³

Perhaps Aquinas would argue that since Jesus came to save men from sins, his baptism cleansed the sins of humans. He might conclude that Jesus' baptism cleansed humanity's sins. This is called salvation. A common Christian belief is that Jesus was an incarnation of God and was sent to earth in order to cleanse our sins.

But when one reads the biblical passage in Matthew regarding baptism, it becomes apparent that Jesus, Holy Spirit and God the Father are separate beings. Indeed, it's shown that Jesus had authority over all other humans but it does not show his status as a god or divine figure. Maybe Jesus was a flesh and blood mortal like other prophets, Moses, John, David etc, however he was more pious than them so had a closer relationship with the Holy Spirit and God the Father. The use of the word 'Son' by God the Father, could mean that he loves Jesus a lot rather than the commonly interpreted meaning that God the Father gave birth to Jesus.

Maybe the passage in Matthew regarding the baptism highlights that Jesus was a pious prophet who has a very close relationship with God the Father and Holy Spirit... However this passage does not clearly show Jesus' divinity or godhood as claimed by many. In contrast, the baptism might mean that Jesus could commit sins and wanted purification. If Jesus was a sinless, divine creature then there would be no need for him to get baptised.

The passage emphasises that while the 3 members of Trinity are close to each other, they are also separate beings. God the Father is in heaven, Son and Holy Spirit are on earth. This challenges the commonly held belief that God is made up of Father, Son and Spirit instead it is shown that Father, Son and Spirit are separate beings in different locations.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, [n.d.]), p. 4571.

Ultimately—the baptism of Jesus as shown in Matthew reflects the authority of Jesus over people of God, especially John the Baptist, and also the close relationship of the members of Trinity is highlighted. But the fact that Jesus got baptised can challenge the commonly held belief that he was sinless, divine and an offspring of God. Further to this, it is emphasized in the passage that Jesus, Holy Spirit and Father are distinct beings in different locations and are doing different actions. Again this can challenge the belief that all three of them form the one God.

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