

- a) The Baptism of Jesus is a significant event from both religious and historical perspectives. This is believed to be the moment when John the Baptist highlighted Jesus as the better person he prophesied about. Thus, it became apparent to believers that Jesus is their leader.

In the Gospel of Mark, this baptism is emphasized.<sup>1</sup> Initially—Jesus leaves Nazareth then arrives at Galilee to get baptised by John. After baptism is complete, the heaven gets torn open and the Holy Spirit descends downwards like a dove. Then God the Father's voice comes from heaven through which he declares his love for Jesus. Followed by this: The Holy Spirit takes Jesus into wilderness where he encounters the devil's temptations for 40 days. During that time angels were attending him and he was surrounded by wild animals. Then Jesus goes into Galilee to announce the kingdom of God.

Hooker asserts that the dove was associated with the Holy Spirit in Judaism of the first century.<sup>2</sup> This passage from Mark also highlights the link between dove and the Holy Spirit. Generally, the dove is conceived as a symbol of peace. In this biblical passage, the meaning of dove, as a symbol of peace, is not visible. There is no explicit message of peace in this passage.

Hence, it's possible that the dove was mentioned by Mark as a representation of the Holy Spirit rather than to symbolize something. Luke showed that the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of a dove. Perhaps this is what Mark also wanted to emphasise.

'Mark may be portraying Jesus as a new Adam...' says Hurtado.<sup>3</sup> They link Adam's interaction with animals at the Garden of Eden with Jesus spending time with wild beasts. Moreover, both Adam and Jesus get tempted by Satan. Adam falls for temptation then commits the Original Sin while Jesus, on the other hand, is attended by angels and successfully resists the temptations. These similarities between Adam of Genesis and Jesus of Mark can't be dismissed as coincidence.

By comparing and contrasting these similarities between Adam & Jesus it can be said that Mark highlighted Jesus as the better Adam. Jesus was alone with animals and got tempted but still he managed to not fall for Satan's manipulation unlike what Adam did.

Moloney concludes that the opening of heavens highlights the beginning of a new age.<sup>4</sup> Possibly meaning that the communication between God and mankind will be more direct from now on. It is believed that God arrived on earth in the form of Jesus through

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments*, Authorised King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Mark 1.9-15 King James Bible Online ebook.

<sup>2</sup> Morna Hooker, *Gospel According to Saint Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1991), p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> Larry Hurtado, *New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), p. 36.

incarnation. Before Jesus' birth, there was a huge distance between God in heaven and humans on earth. However it's said that God took the form of a man through Jesus and interacted with humans directly. The opening of heavens may represent this new type of direct communication between man and God. Thus the start of a new epoch.

This can be further supported by the fact that God's voice directly came from heaven to earth in order to proclaim his love for Jesus. God sending his voice on earth may suggest that he now wants to have a closer relationship with humans.

Another key point to notice is why Jesus got baptised by a mortal human like John. Baptism is for the cleansing of sins, on the other hand Jesus is believed to be sinless. This baptism challenges the commonly held belief of Jesus being a divine being. If Jesus was sinless, divine and God's offspring then why did he ask a mere mortal like John to baptise him? This is the reason why many scholars consider the baptism to be historical as it passes the criterion of embarrassment. It is said that the early Christian church would never want to fabricate a myth where Jesus is positioned to be inferior to John the Baptist.<sup>5</sup> So the most likely scenario is that: Baptism of Jesus really took place and the early Christians had no other option but to accept it.

Morna Hooker highlights that Mark is not embarrassed by the issues of this baptism story. Unlike 'Matthew' and 'The Gospel according to the Hebrew'—Mark does not emphasise any difficulties for the baptism of infallible Jesus by an inferior human. These difficulties could be the reason why the gospels of Luke and John do not properly highlight this baptism. Further to this, there is no mention of this baptism in John's gospel.<sup>6</sup>

This demonstrated that baptism of Jesus by John, although not problematic for Mark, was seen as a challenge by many Christians of that time and even today. The fact that one canonical gospel, John, does not mention this key event at all is very concerning. All three synoptic gospels mention the baptism while John just ignored it. Was it because John was not aware of this event or did he intentionally censor it?

Hurtado asserts that Mark's narrative portrayed Jesus as someone who accepted John's prophethood and 'obeyed his call to be baptised'. He also shows that instead of baptism, the fourth gospel highlights a long passage in which John the Baptist describes Jesus' superiority.<sup>7</sup>

It is therefore a possibility that the author of the fourth gospel was heavily embarrassed by this event of inferior John baptising the sinless Jesus so he ignored/censored this

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<sup>5</sup> John Dominic Crossan and Ricard G. Watts, *Who Is Jesus?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 31-32.

<sup>6</sup> Morna Hooker, *Gospel According to Saint Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1991), p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Larry Hurtado, *New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), p. 19.

event and instead emphasized a passage about Jesus' superiority being described by the Baptist.

Hence its clear that sinless Jesus' baptism by a flesh & blood mortal like John can be problematic for many Christians as it challenges the core beliefs about Jesus being sinless, incarnation of God, divine, offspring of God etc...

It makes one question how can Jesus be the God if he goes to a human for cleansing of his sins. Thus it could likely be the reason why the gospel of John ignores the baptism while Luke does not give much emphasis to it.

The canonical gospel believed to be the oldest—Mark—does not show any embarrassment directed towards this event. Verse 9 of Mark 1 just shows Jesus being baptised and after that we don't find any statement describing Jesus' superiority over John. Matthew, on the other hand, shows a small conversation where John tells Jesus that he needs to be baptised by Jesus instead and John questions why Jesus came to him. Implying that John expected to go to Jesus to get baptized by him, in verse 14 of Matthew 3.

This conversation can not be seen in Mark at all. Perhaps it can be argued that Mark was fully satisfied with the fact that Jesus travelled to a mortal man in order to get baptised; which is for cleansing of sins. The real reason for Mark's unembarrassment towards Jesus' baptism is a mystery.

It can be speculated that the belief in Jesus' divinity was not developed or standardised at the time of Mark so he did not have any problems with baptism. This belief was perhaps developed or standardised later on: maybe this is why the later gospels (Matthew, Luke, John) highlighted embarrassment regarding baptism.

But this makes it apparent that baptism indeed took place as the early church would never forge a tale that portrays John as being superior to Jesus & implies that Jesus could be sinful.

## **Bibliography**

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