



**SECOND
SUNDAY**

STUDY GUIDE FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 13, 2019

“The Baptism of Jesus” Mark 1:1-11

t Jesus Christ, God’s Son,² happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah: *Look, I am sending my messenger before you.*

He will prepare your way,³ a voice shouting in the wilderness: “Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight.”

⁴ John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. ⁵ Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. ⁶ John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He announced, “One stronger than I am is coming after me. I’m not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

⁹ About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰ While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. ¹¹ And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.”

BACKGROUND

BAPTISM - In first century Judaism, adherents were sometimes baptized as a sign of repentance and becoming a member of the faith. Routinely, worshippers would wash their hands before entering the synagogue for worship as a sign of cleansing similar to how we Presbyterians join in a “Prayer of Confession” at the beginning of worship as we prepare to encounter the holy God.

John the Baptist, son of the elderly couple Elizabeth and Zechariah (see Luke 1), came onto the scene, Christians today believe, to fulfill the Old Testament promises that the Lord would send a messenger to prepare the way of Messiah (Isaiah 40). In fact, John’s role is authenticated by John himself. [*Today at Jewish Seder meals at Passover an empty chair is left for the prophet Elijah who is supposed to return before the messiah comes; Jesus himself spoke of this and called John the Baptist, “Elijah.”*]

We understand John administered a baptism “for repentance” at the Jordan River but that Jesus’ coming would involve forgiveness and repentance on a much grander scale.

One of the important results of Jesus’ baptism is that baptism has become just one of two “sacraments” of the Protestant church which includes Presbyterians. A sacrament is classically described as “an outward sign of an inward grace,” a tangible act pointing to a kind of power which is both invisible and spiritual. To become a member of a church one must be baptized. While many books have been written about the higher meaning of baptism, today’s discussion asks the personal question, “What does baptism mean to you?” and “What does our baptism have to do with Jesus’ baptism?”

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What **surprises** you or is of special interest for you about this passage? What **questions** might you ask about it?
- **When** were you baptized? **By “dunking” or “sprinkling?”** Were you baptized as an **infant** or later? If you were baptized as a child or an adult how was baptized **explained** to you? If you were baptized as an infant how was baptized later explained to you... of it was? What does baptism **mean to you** now?

- *John the Baptist baptized those who came to him a “baptism of repentance.” What does “**repentance**” mean? Why do you think it was important for people to come forward and be baptized **by John**? Why do you think **Jesus** came forward to be baptized? What difference do you think it would have made if Jesus didn’t choose to be baptized?*
- *Each of the “Synoptic” Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) dedicates verses of the gospel to describing Jesus’ baptism. While in each Gospel the circumstances described as slightly different, each portrays **heaven** opening, the **Holy Spirit** descending and Jesus hearing words of affirmation from his **Heavenly Father**. How do you think **Jesus** might have interpreted this episode?*
- *The next event described in the Synoptic Gospels is **Jesus’ temptation by Satan** in the wilderness. Do you think this sequence of events is important? Why?*
- *Jesus’ last words to his disciples in the Gospel of Matthew (the “Great Commission,” Chapter 28) include the command to “make disciples” and to “**baptize them** in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Why do you think baptism was **so important** to Jesus that he included the ritual in his command to the church?*
- *Some believe the **use of water** of baptism signifies the washing away of sin. What other perhaps **deeper meanings** can be associated with baptism and water?*
- *There seem to be examples of baptism done both by immersion in a pool or river and perhaps by the symbolic sprinkling of water. Also, there seem to be examples of the baptism of both adults and children, although baptism for children is not as explicit. In the **Presbyterian Church USA**, both adults and infants may be baptized, and baptism may be done by immersion or by “sprinkling.” Other denominations specify baptism only by older “believers” and by immersion? Do you **feel strongly** one way or the other about this issue?*
- *For most of us, it has been a long time since our baptism, whether as an adult or as an infant. Do you draw **any comfort** from your baptism at this point in life other than it was the sacramental portal through which you came into the Christian church? How do you think **Jesus** might have answered this question?*