



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giotto_-_Scrovegni_-_23_-_Baptism_of_Christ.jpg#file

The Baptism of Jesus in Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John

Robert M. Fowler — robert.fowler@bw.edu

July 1, 2022

Mark 1:4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

- Note: John is offering "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Why do you suppose that Jesus, of all people, would submit to that? Does the storyteller answer that question for us? If not, how would you answer the question on your own?
- Why does the storyteller have John proclaim so strongly that the one who "follows" him (that's the literal meaning of the Greek) is in fact John's superior, and not his inferior? (Hint: What is the usual status relationship between someone performing a baptism and the person being baptized?)
- Note: Mk 1:11 echoes Psalm 2:7, which is a script for the ceremonial anointing of an Israelite king. Yahweh declares the newly anointed king to be his "son." "The king is God's son, by adoption, on the day of his designation as king." (*New Interpreter's Study Bible*). Does it challenge your understanding of Jesus as "Son of God" to encounter Mark's suggestion that Jesus *becomes* "Son of God," *by adoption, by the decree of God, on the occasion of his baptism*?
- If time and opportunity allow, recall when, where, and how we learn that Jesus is "Son of God" in the other gospels.

The Baptism of Jesus in Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John

<p>Mark 1:4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 1:5 ...baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.</p> <p>1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.</p> <p>10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on¹ him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”</p> <p>[In Mark, why is Jesus baptized? What might we conclude?]</p>	<p>Matthew 3:2 “Repent...” 3:6 ...they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins... 3:8 "Bear fruit worthy of repentance." 3:11 "I baptize you with water for repentance..."</p> <p>3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him 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, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”</p> <p>[In Matthew, why is Jesus baptized? Does the justification make sense?]</p>	<p>Luke 3:3 ...proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...” 3:8 "Bear fruits worthy of repentance."</p> <p>3:19 But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, 20 added to them all by shutting up John in prison.</p> <p>21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”</p> <p>[Who baptizes Jesus in Luke? Be careful!]</p>	<p>John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ 31 I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.”</p> <p>32 And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”</p> <p>[In John, where is the baptism? Be careful!]</p>
---	--	---	---

Pay special attention to the places highlighted in **red**. Questions: Who baptizes Jesus? (Be careful! Go with what the texts say, not with what you think they ought to say!) What conversation, if any, happens before the baptism? Who sees what happens? Who hears what is said? To whom are words addressed?

¹ "On" is not the best translation here. Literally, in Mark the spirit descends "into" Jesus (*eis* in Greek). The other gospels all use "on" (*epi* in Greek). In other words, in Mark, the spirit from the heavens enters Jesus' body. He becomes spirit possessed, but divinely so! Was that too radical, too shocking for Matthew, Luke, and John?