

THE SAVIOR IS BAPTIZED

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The herald prepares for the Son (Mark 1:1-6).
2. The herald points to the Son (Mark 1:7-8).
3. The herald baptizes the Son (Mark 1:9-11).

Background Passage: Mark 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

John the Baptist was the herald who prepared the way for the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus obeyed God and identified with sinners by being baptized like sinners are baptized. His baptism points to His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. For those of us in Christ, the words spoken over Jesus at His baptism are also true of us: we are the Father's beloved children with whom He is pleased.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have died with Christ and have been raised to new life through Him, we call on others to repent of their sin, trust in Christ, and be baptized.

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: In his Gospel, Mark first introduced Jesus to the world through the eyes of John the Baptist. The pacing of Mark's Gospel is fast—it's the shortest of all the Gospel accounts and the oft-used term "immediately" demonstrates that Mark was intent on progressing the stories quickly so that his readers could focus their attention on Jesus's work on the cross. Therefore, it is worth noting that Mark slowed down to consider how John paved the way for Jesus—both through his declaration of Jesus's identity and by baptizing Him in the Jordan River.

EXPLAIN: When people write memoirs or biographies, it is impossible to tell every story with every detail involved. Writers need to pick and choose what is important to convey for the focused message they want readers or listeners to hear.

DISCUSS: If someone were telling the story of your life, what highlights might need to be focused on? (birth; family; major turning points or milestones; something that provoked suffering and produced change; key decisions made that shaped your life)

TRANSITION: None of the Gospel writers intended to tell everything they knew about Jesus. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they wanted to hit the high points and specific points so that their readers understood who Jesus is and what He came to do. Therefore, we can have confidence that the stories and teaching that are included in each Gospel are important and necessary. The story we will consider in this session, as told through Mark's Gospel, launched Jesus into His public ministry.

POINT 1

THE HERALD PREPARES FOR THE SON (MARK 1:1-6).

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **2** As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, **3** the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’” **4** John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **6** Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 1:1-6** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 1-3** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]):

God had prepared for all the details of Jesus’s coming, including using John to prepare the world for Jesus’s **arrival**.

DISCUSS: How should the steady use of Old Testament prophecy in the story of Jesus’s birth encourage us? (it reminds us that God was doing exactly what He said He would do; God can be trusted because He was in charge of events that spanned hundreds of years; God isn’t merely interested in the big aspects of a story, He’s concerned with the details; God made promises about small things so when they came to pass, it was even greater evidence of His control over all)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-6** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

John’s practice of baptism, connected with confession and **repentance**, was a precursor to the work that Jesus would do to make a way for the **forgiveness** of sins.

DISCUSS: How would John’s practice of baptism help people understand Jesus’s message? (he proclaimed that sins needed to be confessed and repented of before being forgiven; people needed to humble themselves to be baptized; people had to acknowledge sin and their need for cleansing)

TRANSITION: Like the prophets of old, John the Baptist came to prepare the people’s heart for God’s message and mission. He also was preparing them for God Himself come to earth as the Christ—Jesus—who would be ready and willing to sacrifice Himself to save the world.

NOTES

THE WILDERNESS

The wilderness is an ambivalent term, having both negative and positive connotations, depending on the context. It is a place of refuge (1 Sam. 23:14) and prayer (Luke 5:16), as well as a place of temptation (Luke 4:1-2) and wandering (Deut. 8:15). Sometimes it is green (Joel 2:22) and sometimes it is dried up (Jer. 23:10). Evil and rebellion lurks in the wilderness, but so does delivery and revelation.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-3 / Mark opened his Gospel by connecting Jesus's arrival to the fulfillment of prophecy, specifically Isaiah 40:3. God had prepared for this day. He used prophets like Elijah and Elisha and now John the Baptist to help prepare people's hearts for God to move.

Mark called John a **"messenger,"** which highlighted the most important thing about John's role—the message he proclaimed. He was God's messenger for this time and place. John's role was to be a herald for the Christ and to point attention to Jesus. In so doing, he would prepare the way for the Messiah's arrival. Imagine a path through the woods poorly marked and overgrown. Someone goes ahead and clears the way to make it easier for people to walk. This is a metaphor for John's work. He lived to make it easier for people to find their way to Jesus.

Mark noted that John's voice was as **"one crying in the wilderness"** (see Isa. 40:3). This quotation pointed to the magnitude of the message: he was not whispering or gently nudging the people around him—he was shouting! But he also was doing this in the wilderness, a desolate place with few people around. You can't hear a voice shouting in the wilderness if you are busy in the city. While John was intent on fulfilling his role as a messenger, Mark alluded to the fact that his voice would be largely missed or ignored.

VERSES 4-6 / If we start in verse 6, we get a glimpse of who John the Baptist was. He wasn't looking for popularity or power. He humbled himself, wearing camel garments and eating locusts and honey. Even though people were coming to him for baptism, John understood his baptism was different from what was to come. He performed a baptism of repentance that itself would prepare for a coming baptism for the forgiveness of sins. In the following verses, John would describe his baptism as happening with "water," but Jesus's baptism would be with "the Holy Spirit" (v. 8). John

practiced his baptism and also pointed his followers forward to a coming baptism that would be greater.

So John was a singular voice crying out in the inhospitable wilderness where many were coming out to be baptized. They came to the Jordan River and presumably were immersed in the water there, since the word **"baptism"** literally means "immersed." Notice the connection made in verses 4-5 between John's baptism of repentance and the confession of sins. It is clear that baptism was meant to be connected with the act of repentance, a pattern well established in the various Old Testament purification practices (see Lev. 15:5; Ezek. 36:25).

The analogy of baptism is this: We bathe in an effort to remove physical dirt. Symbolic washing is a picture of the need for spiritual cleansing of the contamination in our lives. We know instinctively that we are impure—dirty—due to our sin. So people throughout history, even among many religious traditions today, washed themselves before they entered their deity's presence. This act was meant to provide the spiritual cleaning people knew they needed from their sin and inherent guilt. But something was always missing from such rituals in the religions of the world.

The issue is that none of these practices actually make us spiritually clean or take away sin. Neither could the baptism of John, which is why his baptism pointed to a greater one. While his baptism was more in line with Jesus's in that he immersed people under water and proclaimed the need for repentance, his baptism could merely point his followers forward to the coming baptism that Jesus would bring. In contrast to ritual washing in the Old Testament or John's baptism, Jesus's would do something lasting to address the problem of sin. He Himself would lay down His life to defeat sin and death and then rise again victorious, never to die again, that those who trust in Him may be washed in His blood, forgiven, and brought into new life.

POINT 2

THE HERALD POINTS TO THE SON (MARK 1:7-8).

7 And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. **8** I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 1:7-8** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 7-8** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

John knew that Jesus’s baptism would be greater because it would symbolize the work of God’s **Spirit** to transform the **heart**.

DISCUSS: What does baptism do? (the act of baptism doesn’t actually do anything in regard to our salvation; people are saved prior to being baptized, but baptism does do something in the sense that it communicates our salvation publicly; baptism proclaims the work of God in our life; baptism serves as a standing reminder in our lives of what God has done to change us; baptism unites us to God’s people in the church; baptism visually pictures the gospel; baptism unites us to Christians throughout the history of the church)

EXPLAIN: Use the **BAPTISM** commentary to emphasize the following key doctrine (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #91: Baptism: Christian baptism is the immersion of a **believer** in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of **obedience** symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a **testimony** to the believer’s faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper.

TRANSITION: Not only did John practice baptism and not only did he point forward to Jesus’s baptism, a baptism of the Spirit, but curiously, he also had the privilege of baptizing Jesus Christ.

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“The baptizing work of the Spirit is the means of associating us with the crucifixion of Christ (Colossians 2:12 and especially Romans 6:1-10) in our dying to the old life. Being associated by baptism unto His death, burial, and resurrection is the basis for the crucifixion of the believer’s sin nature and his victory over sin.”¹

—Charles C. Ryrie
(1925-2016)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 7-8 / John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus's power and His worth. He did that by way of comparison. The One who was to come was more powerful, and by comparison, John was unworthy. How did John know this?

The answer is found in the pattern that John modeled for us. He was a person who believed God's promises. He knew that the Messiah would be powerful and worthy because God said this is who the Messiah will be. He knew that the Messiah would bring the Holy Spirit because God promised it would be so. John surely didn't understand all that would happen or how it would happen or how Jesus would step into these roles, but he determined that he didn't have to have all of the answers. Like Simeon (Luke 2:27-32), John believed God's promises and acted accordingly. Christians today would be wise to follow John's example and listen to the promises of God made in His Word and believe and act on them, even if we do not fully understand the whats, the whys, or the hows of God's plan to keep His promises.

The distinguishing aspect between John's baptism and Jesus's baptism is the focal point of the work. Water is an outward symbol. It cleans the physical, or external. In contrast, the Holy Spirit addresses the heart. Ezekiel, an Old Testament prophet, pointed forward to a day when God would give His people a new heart and put a new Spirit within them (Ezek. 36:26). When we trust in Jesus, He puts His Spirit in us, and baptism displays that reality.

BAPTISM / Various denominational traditions differ on their understanding of baptism, as they do over their understanding of the Lord's Supper. In fact, differing views on these two practices have led to the formation of many denominations. Baptists, for example, relegate baptism only to believers, those who are indwelt by the Spirit, and thus, they do not baptize children before they are converted. These groups suggest that baptism is a practice

for Christians after conversion. They believe that baptism should be closely connected in time to when one comes to faith in Jesus, but the act of baptism itself doesn't save. Baptism conveys the change of heart accomplished by the Spirit in those whom God has saved (Rom. 8).

Baptism also serves as a spiritual picture of new life that submits to God's Spirit. Paul argued in Romans 6 that God's people have died to sin and been raised to new life in Christ. Christians are immersed under the water, symbolic of their union with Christ in His atoning death and their death to sin, and they are brought up out of the water as a symbol of their new life of obedience to God's Spirit.

Finally, baptism proclaims something to the watching world. Note that many went out to the wilderness to be baptized by John. They participated in a public symbol that told the world that they understood that their sins needed to be forgiven. This was not a private act. It was public. It required someone to administer the baptism, and it implied that many were around to witness the baptism. In so doing, the person being baptized was publicly uniting with a community looking for forgiveness of sins. Baptism in Jesus's name means aligning oneself with the community grounded on His sacrifice and salvation for that forgiveness. Often such a union came with great social cost, as the one being baptized was breaking with his or her former way of life and community in order to unite themselves with Jesus and with His people. Baptism continues to play this role in the church.

Like the Lord's Supper, baptism proclaims the gospel to those watching as those who are baptized know themselves to be sinners in need of salvation. It also unites the one being baptized with others who have done the same in the local church. In so doing, they are joining the community of the people of God, centered around Jesus Christ.

POINT 3

THE HERALD BAPTIZES THE SON (MARK 1:9-11).

NOTES

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. **11** And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 1:9-11** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 9** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus was baptized, in part, as an **example** for us to follow in His steps.

DISCUSS: Why did Jesus get baptized even though He had nothing to repent of or confess? (Jesus wanted to validate John's ministry; to be an example for us; to show baptism doesn't save but is an act of obedience; to publicly proclaim the work of the Father and the coming of the kingdom)

EXPLAIN: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 7: THE TRINITY**, and use the handout and the **VERSES 10-11** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

God the **Father** validated the identity of God the **Son**, Jesus Christ, and sent His **Spirit** to dwell on Him.

DISCUSS: How can growing in our understanding of the triune God help us worship Him more? (helps us have a fuller picture of who God is; helps us grow in faith even when we don't completely understand the Trinity; helps us realize how relational God is, one God in three Persons; helps us see the ways God has worked from the beginning of time until now)



THE JORDAN RIVER

The Jordan River flows north to south and has significance in the history of Israel. God parted it to let Joshua and the Israelites pass (Josh. 3:15-17), as well as letting Elijah and Elisha pass (2 Kings 2:8,14). Naaman was healed of leprosy there after dipping himself (2 Kings 5:8-14). And here we find John baptizing Jesus there. In all these stories, we see God's power and fulfilled promises at the Jordan.

COMMENTARY

VERSE 9 / Mark opened this section of his Gospel by telling us that Jesus went out to be baptized by John. Other Gospel writers made the point that Jesus participated in practices that would have been common for faithful Israelites of His day. He was taken to the temple to be dedicated, His family offered the appropriate sacrifices, they had Jesus circumcised, and the family committed to celebrate the feasts that God prescribed (see Luke 1–2). Jesus’s baptism was a continuation of this trend. Jesus was careful to obey the Mosaic Law. He humbly submitted Himself to the law that He knew He would soon fulfill.

Likely a primary basis for His willingness to be baptized was the link between His ministry and John’s. By being baptized by John, Jesus functionally aligned Himself with John’s message—the message of repentance in pointing to the coming Messiah. Jesus clearly wanted His followers to see that He willingly accepted John’s claims that He is the Messiah. And He would intentionally amplify this baptism practice in His Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). John’s manner and message connected him with the prophets of old, and Jesus’s baptism allowed others to trace that line of association through John and ultimately to Jesus as the Prophet (see Deut. 18:15-19).

VERSES 10-11 / This baptism event in Jesus’s life is one of the clearest places in all of Scripture where readers get a glimpse of each Person of the Trinity working together in the same passage. Jesus, the Son, was clearly the One who went out to John for baptism. God the Father tore the heavens and spoke from His eternal throne. And God the Spirit descended like a dove to rest upon Jesus. While the word “Trinity”—meaning one God in three Persons—is not used here or anywhere in the Bible, it’s clear that Mark ascribed divinity to each of these Persons in this passage.

There are many biblical allusions present in verse 10. God the Father tore the heavens open like He would soon tear the veil of the

temple following Jesus’s atoning death on the cross. It’s clear that through Jesus, God was coming to save His people. And the Spirit of God came down like a dove. Soon the Spirit of God would come down and rest on all God’s people at Pentecost through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2). It’s possible the shift of the Holy Spirit’s appearance in the form of a dove landing on Jesus and the form of fire landing on the people at Pentecost is attributable to the fact that Jesus had no sin that needed purification.

The voice from heaven mentioned in verse 11 accomplished a number of vital roles. First, it validated Jesus’s identity. He heard the voice from heaven declaring Him to be the Son of God. In the same way that an earthly father’s voice of love can strengthen the countenance of a child, this word of confidence and validation from God was the launching pad from which Jesus would set out on His earthly mission.

The voice also validated the ministry of John the Baptist. John’s looks and dietary habits were odd, and his message was unexpected. God had been silent for so long. Why would anyone believe that the Messiah had now come, especially when John was saying that the Messiah was Jesus? Jesus did not fit the profile that most expected. So when the Father spoke from heaven, His voice was an echo of John’s message. Those who were attentive would be forced to consider the truth of John’s claims as they heard the Father validate those claims. Later, Jesus would also make those claims about Himself.

Finally, the voice was a message to the watching world. Baptism, being a public act, was witnessed by others. Those who were there witnessed the voice speaking from heaven the moment Jesus came up out of the water. The authority of Jesus was validated. Now those who were witnesses could either choose to follow Jesus or not, choose to submit to Him or not. But one thing was clear—the Messiah had come in Jesus and the Spirit of God was on Him.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have died with Christ and have been raised to new life through Him, we call on others to repent of their sin, trust in Christ, and be baptized.

NOTES

HEAD:

Jesus is God's Son. The Father's voice at Jesus's baptism confirmed His identity to the world for those who heard and those who read this true story with faith. Since Jesus is God's Son, He can be trusted and worshiped as God. The act of Christian baptism is a public proclamation of this reality of faith. Those who are baptized are saying to the world that they are united with Jesus, believe Him to be the true and living Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, and are submitting their lives to follow Him. God's people by faith in God's Son are then given God's Spirit to validate their identity as God's children.

What are some ways Christian baptism should impact believers in Christ and even unbelievers who witness a believer's baptism?

HEART:

Christians can find hope in the way God validated Jesus's identity because it provides a picture of the way God establishes our identity as well. Those who are God's children belong to Him. Therefore, they don't have to grapple for identity in secondary sources. There is no reason to look for worth and value in what we do or how others think of us or how we stack up to those around us. All we need to do is look to God and trust that what He says about us is true. From that place of worth, we, like Jesus, are then sent out into our earthly mission as believers with meaning and purpose.

In your life, what sources of identity compete with a secure identity in Christ as God's beloved child? How do you need to repent in this regard?

HANDS:

Christians should know their role in comparison to Jesus's. We are not powerful like Him, nor are we worthy of worship. Like John, we should live to point attention to Jesus as the One who is all-powerful and worthy of all worship. God gives us our lives for that very reason. We exist to point to God, the hope for salvation for the world. In our service to others, love for the church, and evangelism of the lost, we should humbly point to Jesus. We can trust that He is the One who can save, heal, and forgive, so all we need to do is use our lives to show off how great Jesus is.

How will you leverage your life this week to point others to Jesus?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"He told them he had drenched them with water which was only external, but One would come who would drench them in the Holy Spirit, which was intrinsically internal. What a beautiful metaphor for the work of the Holy Spirit! When we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, he permeates every part of us."²

—R. Kent Hughes

POINT 1: THE HERALD PREPARES FOR THE SON (MARK 1:1-6).

+ COMMENTARY

“The very first sentence therefore evidences that Mark’s Gospel is more than a narrative of events. It is also a theology, primarily a Christology. Although the characters in the story struggle with Jesus’ identity, the readers/hearers know from the beginning that he is the promised Messiah and the very Son of God . . . ‘Isaiah the prophet’ (40:3) supplies only that part of the quotation in v. 3. The part in v. 2 is from Mal 3:1, perhaps with an allusion to Exod 23:20 as well (the same word means angel and messenger). As a result many medieval scribes substituted ‘in the prophets.’ This reading is found in the KJV and NKJV, which are based on the medieval Greek text rather than on the earliest and now regarded best manuscripts as is the NIV. Mark and other biblical writers simply did not employ the technical precision of modern research. It was not necessary for their purpose. Furthermore, both quotations are adapted in order to apply them to John. In Isaiah, ‘the Lord’ was God, but in Mark’s quotation it is Jesus; Isaiah has ‘for our God,’ but Mark substitutes ‘for him’, i.e., Jesus. Jesus and the New Testament writers often reinterpreted the Old Testament text in order to apply it to their own situation, in addition to quoting it loosely from memory. Malachi 4:5 probably identifies John as the Elijah-like person who precedes Christ in his suffering. Also John’s preaching of repentance in v. 4 (cf. 1 Kgs 18:37; Mal 4:6) and the description of him in v. 6 (cf. 2 Kgs 1:8) recall Elijah. The significance of the quotation is that both John and Jesus appeared as a result of divine providence. Mark quotes from the Old Testament infrequently, and elsewhere his citations are part of a quotation of one of his characters, usually Jesus.”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

Any time a dignitary comes to town, much effort must be made to prepare for his or her arrival. For example, in the United States, if the president were coming to town, then you better believe there will be extensive work needed to prepare even a grand city for his arrival. Even if the President were only visiting for a few hours, the city’s rhythms would change. Days and weeks before the arrival, those who control the movement and flow of traffic would be notified. The route the President would take would be mapped out. Secret Service would show up ahead of time to make the space safe and secure. The police would guard every detail and be aware of even minor changes. Food would be prepared and lodging secured. The President would do none of this work himself, but many people would go ahead of him to make his arrival easier.

EXTRA

This was the work of John the Baptist. His effort to prepare the way should not imply that Jesus could not have done what He did without John, but it was God's intention that He would employ one who would step into the line of the great prophets of old and prepare the world for Jesus to come. John's message and his baptism were done in an effort to make way for Jesus to enter and build upon the work that John had already done.

POINT 2: THE HERALD POINTS TO THE SON (MARK 1:7-8).

+ **COMMENTARY**

"All of the Gospels begin their accounts of Jesus's ministry with his baptism by John. It was also a key point in the apostolic preaching about Jesus among Jews in the book of Acts. Scholars who have researched the aims of Jesus regard this as a vital piece of evidence. The fact that Jesus accepted and endorsed the ministry of John the Baptist and launched his own ministry from it (there were differences, of course, as observers noted at that time, but there was considerable overlap and continuity) shows that Jesus also saw his own mission in terms of the fulfillment of the great expectations of the restoration of Israel. If John was the one who had been sent to prepare Israel for its eschatological restoration by God himself, then Jesus was the one who had been sent to accomplish it."⁴

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

There aren't many activities more humbling than having to tie someone's shoes. We do this for kids. They don't have the fine motor skills in place to make the bow and the knot secure, so we bend down and tie them for the child, often in a double knot to avoid having to do it again soon.

It's humbling to tie someone's shoes; it's even more humbling to be told to tie someone's shoes. Imagine a superior, say an ancient king or current president, commanded someone his own age, or even older, to do this menial task. It would be the height of embarrassment to have to humble yourself in this way. Regardless of your sense of the superiority of the one commanding the act, to bend in submission to such a request would bring shame.

In our passage, John voluntarily submitted to this task. Though Jesus was younger, unproven, and at the point had done virtually nothing to substantiate Himself as superior, John knew that Jesus is powerful and mighty. While he didn't actually untie Jesus's sandal, he said that he was not only willing to do this act but that he was not even worthy to do it. Imagine that—someone who says they aren't even worthy enough to stoop to tie a sandal. This wasn't an act of worth. It was an act of humility. But John knew the greatness of Jesus, so He saw the act of humility as an honor.

POINT 3: THE HERALD BAPTIZES THE SON (MARK 1:9-11).

+ COMMENTARY

“The instant Jesus came up out of the water, a physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit descended from the sky. Mark describes the visible form as ‘like a dove’ and notes that ‘a voice came out of the heavens’ addressing Jesus as ‘My beloved Son.’ These two verses and their parallels (Matt. 3:16–17; Luke 3:22) feature all three persons of the Trinity. All three persons are God—the Father speaking from heaven, the Spirit descending like a dove, and the Son seeing the Spirit and hearing the voice. Without ceasing to be fully God, the three persons are distinct in that they interact with one another. In other words, God doesn’t emerge from the water as the Son, race to heaven from the body of Jesus to utter His affirmation as the Father, and then fly down again as the Holy Spirit to become the Son again. On the contrary, God is shown in this passage to be three and one simultaneously. While we see this interchange for a mere instant, the Trinity has always existed this way. As Wayne Grudem so expertly describes the ‘tri-unity,’

God eternally exists as three persons,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
and each person is fully God,
and there is one God.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

We all have stories of a time when someone or something validated our identity in a significant way. Many times these identity-formation moments come on the heels of a painful moment. You might imagine the teenage athlete who missed a key free throw that cost the team a game or a student who received a rejection letter from the most desired university. In the space following such an experience, a parent or authority figure can step into the experience and have a key conversation that goes something like this: “You know that this painful event isn’t the end. You are not what you do. You matter to me whether you make or miss the free throw or get into the school. Your worth is not found in those things. You are my child and I love you because God gave you to me.” These identity-forming conversations shape our lives in critical ways. Many adults look back on an event like this as validating them and propelling them into adulthood. Sadly, many others never had the joy of knowing a parent who could anchor their identity.

In our passage, we see God the Father do this for Jesus. This identity-formation scene defined Jesus’s ministry. One wonders how and when Jesus reflected back on this scene in places of loneliness, pain, or rejection. How many times did He call to mind the Father’s love when He was weary or oppressed? Jesus’s identity as the Father’s Son drove His activity, and so should ours as God’s children through faith in Jesus Christ.

References

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4. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 147-48.
5. Charles R. Swindoll, *Mark*, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2018), 21.