

## Matthew 3

Before the Savior appears on the stage of history, God chose to send someone to prepare the hearts of the Jews for that Savior (cf. Luke 1:17). John the baptizer preaches in the wilderness and multitudes of Jews go to hear him, be convicted of their sins, and are baptized for their sins to be forgiven (cf. Mark 1:4). Among that number, one day, is the Savior Himself. Once He is baptized, the heavens split apart, the Spirit of God descends on the Son, and the Father voices His approval of the Son.

### TRANSLATION - 3:1-4:

**1** And in those days, John the baptist arrived, preaching in the wilderness of Judah, **2** and saying, “Repent. For the kingdom of heaven has come near.” **3** For this is the saying through Isaiah the prophet, saying, “A voice calling in the wilderness. Make ready the way of the Lord. Straight make His paths.” **4** This John was having his garment from the hair of camel and a belt of leather around his waist. And the food was his, locust and wild honey.

### WORDS:

Preaching (ver. 1) means to “proclaim, announce;” it is used 61 times in the NT. Matthew uses the verb 9 times. “Repent” (ver. 2) means to “change one’s mind, feel remorse, be converted.” The verb is used 34 times (5 times in Matt.), the noun 22 times. “Kingdom” is a word-family used extensively in the Bible. “To rule” is used 21 times, “to rule with,” twice. “Kingdom” is found 162 times (55 times, with “Kingdom of Heaven” used 32 times in Matt.), with “king,” 115 times, and “queen,” 4 times. Two spellings of “royal” are found 2 and 5 times, respectively.

“Make ready” (ver. 3) is used 40 times in the NT (7 times in Matt.); it means to “keep in preparation.” “Garment” (ver. 4) is used 8 times (7 are by Matt.) and is a general term. “Camel” is used 6 times (3 by Matt.); “belt,” 8 times (meaning “belt” or “girdle”; twice used in Matt.); “leather,” only twice and both refer to John (here; Mark 1:6). “Waist” (8 times) can be translated “loins, or genitals.” “Locust” may be “grasshopper,” used 4 times, reference to John (here; Mark 1:6) and in Rev. 9:3, 7; “honey,” 4 times (again, in reference to John; here; Mark 1:6 and Rev. 10:9-10), “wild,” 3 times.

### GRAMMAR:

The verb “has come near” (ver. 2) translates the perfect tense which indicates a *present* condition which depends on a *past* action. Here, we suggest that with the birth of the King of the Jews, the Messiah, God’s plan for instituting His kingdom, the “kingdom of heaven” (Dan. 7:13-14), has entered the phase of consummation. Its establishment is immediate.

### PARALLELS:

Matthew jumps about thirty years (Luke 3:23) from chapter 2 to chapter 3. Luke, alone, records the only event from Jesus’ childhood (Luke 2:41-52). Mark records the preaching of John (1:1-8); Luke records a longer account, including his birth, in Luke 1:5-25, 57-80; 3:1-20. The apostle John’s record is in 1:19-34; 3:22-36.

### OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Isaiah 40:3 (quoted almost exactly from the LXX) was a text which the Qumran community (which gave us the famous “Dead Sea Scrolls”) applied to itself; however, that community did not have Jesus Christ. Isaiah will be mentioned by Matthew in 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; and 15:7. Isaiah preached during the siege of Samaria and northern Israel by Assyria, but at chapter 40 he begins predicting results of the Babylonian siege some 130 years later and the return from that exile. Chapter 40 is extremely significant for our purposes because John foresaw Jehovah God coming. Matthew, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, applies the text to Jesus Christ.

The “way of the Lord” was an early metaphor for obedience to God (cf. Gen. 18:19). Christianity will be identified as that “way” (Acts 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) as it follows the Way (John 14:6).

The phrase “kingdom of God (or heaven)” is not found in the OT, but the prophets spoke often of God’s desire to rule in the hearts of His people. Daniel (2:44; 7:13-14) and Zechariah (14:9) specifically spoke of God’s rule. The concept of “kingdom” suggests the idea of God reigning. The establishment of the kingdom will be an important message of Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:28).

#### ARCHAEOLOGY:

Goat or camel hair is so dense, it is waterproof. It was considered the clothing of poorer people. Grasshoppers, or locusts (a “clean” animal, Lev. 11:20-23), could be dried and ground into a flour. They provide protein and fat. Wild honey, not cultivated honey, was John’s food for something sweet.

#### COMMENTS -

Since the writings of Nehemiah and the preaching of Malachi, the voice from heaven went silent. For four hundred years, the Jews understood that God stopped speaking from heaven (1 Macc. 4:46; 9:27; 14:41). But John the baptist comes in the wilderness, preaching a message that is very similar to the message of the OT prophets: Repent (Isa. 8:6-8; 55:7; 66:24; Jer. 7:16-20; 15:19; Ezek. 33:11; Hosea 14:1-2; Joel 2:12-13; Micah 2:1-3; Zech. 1:3-4; Mal. 3:7)! There are several men named “John” in the NT; after the reign of John Hyrcanus, who died in 106 B. C., “John” became a popular name among the Jews. John is identified as “the baptist” or “the one who baptizes” because of the integral role immersion had in his preaching.

Since Jesus is about 30 years old when He was baptized (Luke 3:23), these events would be dated around AD 27 or 28 (see Luke 3:1 and John 2:20 for other references to dates). We date the length of Jesus’ ministry based on the annual Passovers found in John, which would put His crucifixion and resurrection roughly around AD 30 (John 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 13:1).

“Repent” literally means to change one’s mind. This is brought on by a sorrow for sins (2 Cor. 7:9-10). It also leads to a changed behavior or, in the words of John, “fruit worthy of repentance” (vs 8). Sometimes, the word “repentance” is used not just for the changed mind but for the whole process, which begins with the sorrow and ends with the changed behavior. It combines two thoughts from the OT: “to be sorry or feel remorse” and “to turn or change.”

The time for God’s silence to be broken had arrived. God sent John to prepare the way for the Messiah. The method in which he prepared the way was to preach. He preached “repent” and he preached “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” To say the kingdom is “at hand” is to say that it was near, ready to be instituted. Jesus would also teach the kingdom was near (4:17) and so would His apostles (10:7). Jesus will clarify what He means by “kingdom” as the Gospel message unfolds.

The prophet Malachi predicted Elijah would be the forerunner of Jehovah, the forerunner of the Messiah (4:5-6; see also Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13; see John 1:21 as he denies being Elijah literally reincarnated). Elijah dressed just as John does (2 Kings 1:8). Gabriel told Elizabeth, John’s mom, that John would preach in the “spirit and power” of Elijah (Luke 1:17). His clothing and food were indicative of an austere life.

#### APPLICATION:

Jesus thought highly of John the baptizer (Luke 7:28). On the other hand, the Jewish leaders claimed he was possessed by a demon (Matt. 11:18).

The kingdom is identified by Jesus, in Matthew 16:18-19, as the church on earth. The apostle Paul writes that Christians have been transferred from the realm of Satan to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col. 1:13-14). The establishment of this spiritual kingdom has shaken the earth (Heb. 12:27-28). The Christians who received the book of Revelation were already in that kingdom (1:6; cf. 1 Peter 2:9).

Repentance is still a command for Christians (2 Cor. 12:21), although the verb is primarily used of non-Christians on the path toward becoming a Christian (the verb is used 5 times in Acts: 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20). First, there is sorrow for sins (2 Cor. 7:9-10). Then comes a change of the mind (the strict definition of “repentance”), followed by a change of behavior, “fruit worthy of repentance” (Matt. 3:8).

#### TRANSLATION - 3:5-12:

**5** At that time, there were going out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the surrounding country of the Jordan, **6** and they were being baptized in the Jordan river by him, confessing their sins.

**7** And, seeing many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Generation of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **8** Therefore, make fruit worthy of repentance. **9** And do not think to say among yourselves, ‘A father we have - Abraham.’ For I say to you that God is able out of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. **10** Yet, already the axe to the root of the trees is laid. Therefore every tree not making good fruit is cut down and into the fire is cast. **11** I, indeed, you I baptize in water unto repentance; but the one behind me coming, more powerful than me He is, whose sandals, I am not worthy to pick up. This one, you all He will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire. **12** Whose winnowing shovel [is] in His hand and He will clean out His threshing floor and He will gather His wheat into the storehouse, but the chaff He will consume in unquenchable fire.”

#### WORDS -

“To be baptized” (ver. 6) means to “dip, immerse.” It is used extensively in the NT, 77 times. It comes from the same root as “baptist,” describing John in verse 1 (which is used 12 times). Matthew uses the verb 7 times, mostly in this context (3:6, 11, 13-14, 16) but also in 28:19 where we see it becomes a permanent part of Christian preaching. He uses the noun twice (3:7; 21:25). “Confessing” (used 10 times; only here in Matt.) has a broad range of meanings: “to promise, consent, admit, praise.” “Sins” was first seen in 1:21. It is used 7 times in Matthew. Fundamentally, it means to “miss the mark.”

“Generation” (ver. 7) is used 4 times (three of those are in Matt.), meaning “child, offspring.” “Vipers” is used 5 times (three of those are in Matt.) and means snake, in general, or a species of viper. “To warn” means to “show, give direction, prove;” it is used 6 times (only here in Matt.). “To flee” is used 29 times (7 in Matt.); it means to “escape, avoid, disappear.” “Wrath” is used 36 times (only here by Matt.) and can be translated “anger, indignation, punishment, or judgment.”

“Fruit” (ver. 8) is used 66 times (19 in Matt.), meaning “crop, result, or advantage.” “Repentance,” the noun related to the verb used above, is found 22 times, twice in Matthew, only here (3:8, 11). It means “change of mind, remorse, or conversion.” “Think” (ver. 9) is found 62 times, 10 in Matthew; “to suppose, seem, have a reputation.”

“Axe” (ver. 10) is found here and in the parallel text, Luke 3:9. “Root” can mean “shoot, source, descendant;” it is found 17 times, three times in Matthew (3:10; 13:6, 21). “Trees” is used 25 times, 12 times in Matthew. “To be laid” is found 24 times (three times in Matthew, at 3:10; 5:14; 28:6), meaning “to lie, recline, stand, appointed, exist.” “To be cuff off” (10 times; in Matthew at 3:10; 5:30; 7:19; 18:8) means to “cut down, or remove.” “Fire” is used 71 times, 12 in Matthew.

“Indeed” (ver. 11) is used many times, 179 times. It can mean “surely” or “on the one hand... on the other” (if it is used with “and” in a certain phrase). See comments on verse 8 for “repentance.” For “baptize,” see on verse 6. For “Spirit,” see comments on 1:18, 20. “Winnowing shovel” (ver. 12) is one word, used only twice (3:12; Luke 3:17). “To clean out” is used only here; but its root word is “clean” or “pure.” “Threshing floor” is also only one word, used twice (3:12; Luke 3:17). It can mean the threshing floor or the wheat which has been threshed. “Wheat” (or grain) is used 14 times, 4 times in Matt. “Storehouse” would be transliterated into English as *apothecary* which meant, at one time, a pharmacy or pharmacist.

It is used 6 times (in Matthew, at 3:12; 6:26; 13:30) and can also mean a barn. “Chaff” is only used twice in Scripture (3:12; Luke 3:17). “To consume” means to “burn up, burn down, or consume.” It is used 12 times. “Unquenchable,” transliterated into English, would be “asbestos.” It is used three times: Matt. 3:12; Mark 9:43; Luke 3:17. As this word describes the fires of hell, it argues strongly for hell’s eternal duration.

#### PARALLELS:

Jesus identifies Himself as the True Vine (John 15:1-6) and warns that if His followers do not produce fruit, they will be cut off and cast into the fire.

#### OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The role of the Spirit in the Messianic Kingdom was a subject of OT prophecy: Isaiah 11:2; Ezekiel 36:25-27; 39:29; Joel 2:28-32. For the idea of the axe as a weapon of God’s holy wrath, see Isa. 10:33-34; Jer. 46:22. The threshing floor was also a metaphor in the OT for God’s judgment: Psa. 1:4; Isa. 17:13; 29:5-6; 33:11; 41:15-16; Jer. 15:7; Hosea 13:3; Zeph. 2:2.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY:

The region around Jordan (ver. 5) is the western area of Palestine which slopes steeply into the Dead Sea from the hills of Judea. This was the same area where the Qumran community lived, which leads some to believe John may have been a part of this community. But there is no reason to believe that. John was sent by God, under His guidance. Qumran baptized as a ritual cleansing. John baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). Qumran baptized repeatedly. John did so once. Jews might baptize Gentiles as a part of their proselytism (see Lev. 15), but John preached that the nation of Israel itself should be baptized. From the Lake of Galilee to the Dead Sea, the Jordan River stretches about 65 miles, but it winds for a total of more than 200 miles. East of Jericho, it reaches a width of 90’ and has a depth of 3-12’.

Pharisees (ver. 7) are found in Matthew (29 times), more than any other Gospel writer (Luke has 27 uses). The Pharisees were strict about the Law (Acts 22:3; 26:5; Phil. 3:5) so that they created behaviors forbidden lest they lead someone to violate the law. These behaviors eventually became traditions, a “hedge around the Law,” and eventually became the Law of God, in the minds of the Pharisees. Their Hebrew name comes from *perushim*, which means “separate ones.” The Pharisees seem to be the dominant Jewish sect in the NT, yet during the Herodian era there were only about 6,000 Pharisees among the Jewish people.

The Pharisees were mainly among the middle and lower classes of people. They did not support *hellenization* very strongly. That was the process of spreading the Greek culture among the Jews. They believed that God had given to Moses both the *written* as well as *oral* laws which were passed down from elders to elders to, of course, the Pharisees. The Pharisees first appear named in written sources during the rule of Jonathan Maccabee in 150 BC. As the Hasmoneans became increasingly hellenized, the Pharisees turned against them even more strongly. Because the Pharisees held so strictly to “oral law,” which is easily malleable, after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, it was the Pharisees who survived and evolved into the rabbinic Judaism that stretched into the Middle Ages.

It was around this same time period that the Sadducees became a recognized group and they were primarily from the priestly family. Sadducees are mentioned by Matthew 7 times (out of 14). The Sadducees famously did not believe in life after death or a spiritual world inhabited by angels (Matt. 22:23-33; Acts 23:8). They were a little more political, so a little more hellenistic. In fact, the Sadducees got their name from the Zadokite priestly family. According to Ezek. 44:9-16, God had given the priesthood to the Zadokites. The Sadducees did not accept the oral law; they rejected the prophets and other writings outside of the Pentateuch.

It was the Sadducees in AD 66 who decided to stop the daily sacrifice in Jerusalem for the Roman Emperor, which officially set off the full-scale revolt against Rome that eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. After that date, with the Temple gone and

sacrifices no longer practiced, the Sadducees eventually dwindled into non-existence. Pharisees and Sadducees are listed together again in 16:1-4, 5-12.

Once the farmer had threshed the wheat, he would lift it up with the “winnowing shovel,” which worked like our pitchforks. He would toss the wheat into the air, which would blow away the chaff. The heavier wheat would fall to the floor to be gathered for food.

#### COMMENTS:

Matthew’s comment in verse 5 should be understood as hyperbole, to illustrate the widespread influence of John’s preaching. Many, many Jews were convicted of their sins and came to John to be baptized in preparation for God’s coming kingdom. The Jewish historian named Josephus describes the influence of John’s preaching also (*Ant.* 18.116-119).

Matthew writes that the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees (see above under “Archaeology” for their history and beliefs) came to John’s baptism. Some, perhaps, wanted to be baptized but as a group, they did not. In the context of fire, snakes would certainly flee. John compares these men to such vipers, fleeing from the wrath coming from God. John’s picture is that the wrath is in the process of being unleashed. Jesus would refer to the leaders as vipers in Matt. 12:34; 23:33.

Many of the Jews, too many honestly, believed that their physical descent from Abraham was sufficient to get them to heaven (John 8:33, 39). They saw no need to change their behavior. Some Pharisees, like Nicodemus (see John 3), apparently accepted John and/or Jesus’ teaching. But generally speaking, the Pharisees rejected God’s will for them, refusing to be baptized by John (Luke 7:29-30).

John warns them not to think that their physical relationship with Abraham was sufficient. John, perhaps, makes a play on the words “children” and “stones” in the Aramaic language. God does not *need* the children of Israel; He can create children from stones, but God cannot create obedient hearts out of stones. Man, himself, has to offer his humble heart to the God of heaven. Many of the Jews believed that Abraham had a “treasury of merit” which would cover the behavior of the Jews so that they would have their path into heaven easily laid out. Many today still believe, without any biblical support or evidence, that saints have some type of “treasury of merit” which is accessible through prayer. Their view is similar to that of first-century Jews. Yet, John warns them that their behavior needs to change; motivated by sorrow in their hearts, they needed to change their minds about offending God and obeying His will, and change their behavior.

Verse 10 likely refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and John pictures its destruction, like the coming kingdom, as imminent. The axe is laid at the root of the tree, ready to cut down the unfruitful nation of Israel. Every tree which does not bear fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. While the nation of Israel will be punished as a whole, individual Jews, based on their faithful, obedient response to the Messiah, can be saved.

John baptized where there was much water (see John 3:23; also John 1:28; 10:40) because “baptism” means an immersion and it must be a “burial” (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). John identifies his baptism as “for repentance.” The preposition carries the idea that this baptism was “in association with” repentance. *Because* the Jews were repenting of their sins (vs 6), then John was able to immerse them for the forgiveness of those sins (Mark 1:4) and prepare them for the Messiah’s kingdom (Luke 1:17).

There are seven baptisms identified in the NT:

1. Baptism unto Moses (1 Cor. 10:2);
2. Baptism of suffering (Mark 10:38-39);
3. Baptism for the dead (1 Cor. 15:29);
4. Baptism of the Holy Spirit (here);
5. Baptism of fire (here);
6. Baptism of John the baptist (see Acts 19:3);
7. Baptism of the New Covenant (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 28:18-20).

By the time Paul writes Ephesians, there is only one baptism for Christians (Eph. 4:5). It is not baptism in the Holy Spirit, since that action was performed by God, directly from heaven. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is also not commanded in the Scriptures but occurred only twice, in Acts 2 (with the first Jews to become Christians) and in Acts 10 (with the first Gentiles to become Christians). Acts 11:15-17 shows that baptism in the Holy Spirit was not a common occurrence as baptism for the forgiveness of sins was and should be (see Acts 2:38; 22:16). John's statement about baptism in the Spirit will be referenced several times (Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16). Again, it's fulfillment occurred in Acts 2:1-4 and Acts 10:44-48.

The baptism in fire assuredly refers to judgment; that's how John further describes it in this very text. It does not refer to the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 (ver. 3) since that fire was a simile for the gift of languages and it was not an immersion. Although one preposition governs both "Holy Spirit" and "fire," the context argues that John would see them differently. Immersion in the Holy Spirit was a blessing from God; immersion in fire was a result of the wrath of God. John uses "fire" in verse 10 in reference to God's wrath and in verse 12, "fire" refers to God's wrath. The "fire" in the middle, in verse 11, must also refer to His wrath. We believe John's initial application of immersion in fire, for the Jews, would have been the destruction of their capital, Jerusalem, in AD 70. Yet that event would have pictured the coming wrath of God against all the disobedient, which will result in an immersion in a lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). The "unquenchable" fire is identified in Mark 9:43 as hell, or "gehenna" (in Greek).

While John baptized in water, the One coming who would baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire was more powerful than John, that is He was more significant than John. Just how much John knew about Jesus and His identity as the Messiah, we do not know, but he knew the Messiah was greater than himself.

#### APPLICATION:

The following comment applies more to "Christian" baptism than to John's baptism, but sprinkling water over someone's head is *not* baptism, which by definition means "immersion." Nor is pouring water over an infant's head. Someone who has undergone such a procedure also needs to repent of obeying *man* and needs to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Additionally, neither John's baptism nor Christian baptism applies to babies. Babies do not know sin (Deut. 1:39); they have not committed "lawlessness" (1 John 3:4), therefore they do not need to be immersed.

The NT writers also predict the wrath of God actively enroute to consume the disobedient (1 Thess. 1:10; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:5-6). The wrath of God is His controlled emotions directed against the unholiness of sin. Sin separates man from God (Isa. 59:1-2) and God hates its nature because it repels the sinner from His holy nature (Hab. 1:13). Our works will be integrally related to our judgment (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:45-46). If we wish to be saved, the primary fruit of repentance will be obedience to Christ's commands (Heb. 5:8-9).

#### TRANSLATION - 3:13-17:

**13** At that time, Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. **14** But John was hindering Him, saying, "I the need I have by you to be baptized; and you are coming to me?"

**15** But after answering, Jesus said to him, "Permit [it] now, for thus fitting it is to us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. **16** Then after being baptized, Jesus immediately came up from the water; and behold, there were opened [to Him] the heavens, and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming over him. **17** And behold, a voice out of heaven [was] saying, "This One is My beloved Son, in Whom I am pleased."

#### WORDS:

"To be baptized" (ver. 13) was found first at 3:6. "To hinder" (ver. 14) is found only here. "Permit" (ver. 15) is used 143 times, 47 times in Matthew. It can mean "to let go, give up,

divorce, cancel, forgive, leave, tolerate.” “It is fitting” is a verb, used 7 times, only here in Matthew. “Proper” would be a synonym for “fitting.” “Righteousness” is an eminently biblical word. The Greek word, used here for the first time, is used 92 times (7 times in Matthew) and can mean “righteousness, uprightness, or justice.” Fundamentally, it means a right relationship with God.

“To be opened” (ver. 16) is used frequently, 77 times. “Heavens” (used first in verse 2) is found 273 times in the NT, 82 times in Matthew. It can refer to the dwelling place of God or the sky or, sometimes, as a replacement for “God.” For “Spirit,” see 1:18, 20. “Dove” is found 10 times (in Matthew at: 3:16; 10:16; 21:12) and can be translated “pigeon.” “Voice” (ver. 17) can mean “sound, noise, call, cry, or language;” it is used 139 times, 7 times in Matthew. “Beloved” (61 times; 3 times in Matt.) means “beloved” or “dear.” “To be pleased” is related to the verb “to think,” used in verse 9. This verb has a prefix (*eu*) which means “good,” so that this verb literally means “to think good.” It is used 21 times, 3 times in Matthew (3:17; 12:18; 17:5).

#### GRAMMAR:

The verb “was hindering” (ver. 14) translates an imperfect verb which shows that John *kept* refusing to baptize Jesus while Jesus *kept* insisting.

#### PARALLELS:

Mark presents the baptism of Jesus in 1:9-11; Luke, at 3:21-22; John, in 1:29-34. There is no parallel in the other writers to 3:14-15.

#### OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

We presume the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove because: 1) the Holy Spirit is pictured in the imagery of a bird hovering over the surface of the waters at creation (Gen. 1:2); 2) the dove brought the olive leaf symbolizing God’s gracious provisions so that Noah could leave the ark (Gen. 8:10-11).

An opened heaven brings to mind God’s self-revelations (Isa. 64:1; Ezek. 1:1; Acts 7:56; Rev. 4:1; 19:11). This time, God is going to entrust His communication to His Son (Heb. 1:1-2).

Psalms 2:7 refers to the king as the son of God. That psalm is considered to be a royal psalm, one sang during the coronation of the king. Isaiah 42:1-4 (see Matt. 12:18-21 where Matthew will explicitly tie Jesus to the prophecy from Isaiah 42) foresaw God’s Messiah anointed with the Holy Spirit in order to lead God’s people.

#### COMMENTS:

Jesus walks from His home in Nazareth to the location where John was baptizing. Since we do not know exactly where John was baptizing, it is hard to know just how far Jesus walked. It might have been 65-80 miles!

John did not identify Jesus as the Messiah, at first, according to his own words in John 1:31. It was not until after John saw the Spirit descending on Jesus that he knew who Jesus was (1:33-34), yet before the baptism John knew enough about His relative (Luke 1:36, 56-57) to know he was not worthy to be the slave of the Messiah. Slaves removed the sandals of the Master. John claims he is not worthy to even do that (Matt. 3:11). Perhaps he had heard, through his parents, of the miraculous birth of Mary’s Son (Luke 1:39-45). We are not sure John knew this, but Jesus had no sins which needed forgiveness (2 Cor. 5:21; John 8:29; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:21-22; 1 John 3:5). Only the true Messiah would not need forgiveness.

The question surrounds why Jesus needed to be baptized. He, obviously, had no sins of which to repent. Some suggest it was because God had commanded it. Others think Jesus is simply providing an example for His followers. Each of those, probably, have truth in it. “To fulfill” means to “bring to completion” or “bring to a good end.” In order for God to make man right with Him, to bring man into a right relationship with God, Jesus had to come to earth and die for man’s sins (cf. 1:21). Jesus’ baptism began His ministry for the purpose of bringing man into that right relationship. Thus, Jesus needed to be baptized to bring to a full completion, to

start bringing to a full completion, God's plan for saving man which began with the promise in Genesis 3:15. Just as Israel was "baptized unto Moses" in the Red Sea at the beginning of its national relationship with God (1 Cor. 10:1-4), so Jesus does the same here.

John finally consented to baptize Jesus. Jesus came up out of the water, showing again that baptism was and is an immersion. Immediately, the heavens opened in order for the Holy Spirit to descend and for God, the Father, to speak from heaven. The coming of the Holy Spirit (See "Old Testament References" under 3:5-12 above), as well as the opening of the heavens and the voice of God speaking, announce the coming of the new, Messianic era. This is the first time that all three members of the Godhead (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; 2 Peter 1:4) have acted on the pages of God's Word. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus did not make Him divine; He was divine from birth as we saw in chapter 1. However, His descent, in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22), gave Jesus His miraculous powers (Luke 4:14) and perhaps miraculous foreknowledge (cf. Luke 2:46-47), which Jesus would have had in limited form since He emptied Himself to become man (cf. Phil. 2:5-11). This descent of the Holy Spirit would verify that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied by Isaiah (11:2; 61:1). It would also signal, again, the imminent establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 12:28).

Not only did the Holy Spirit show His approval of Jesus by "anointing" Him (see Acts 10:38) but the Father spoke from heaven, who had been silent for hundreds of years: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." A greater affirmation could not be uttered by heaven or by men.

#### APPLICATION:

God will speak twice more from heaven to verify the nature of His Son (Matt. 17:5; John 12:28). In these first three chapters Matthew has proven that Jesus is: 1) The Messiah, the Son of David; 2) the Son of God; 3) the Servant of Isaiah who would bear the sins of the world (Isa. 53).

Once someone is immersed into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), he or she is united with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). At that point, he or she is also "beloved" by God: Acts 15:25; Rom. 1:7; 11:28; 12:19; 16:5, 8-9, 12; 1 Cor. 4:14, 17; 10:14; 15:58; 2 Cor. 7:1; 12:19; Eph. 5:1; 6:21; Phi. 2:12; 4:1; Col. 1:7; 4:7, 9, 14; 1 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Philemon 1, 16; Heb. 6:9; James 1:16, 19; 2:5; 1 Peter 2:11; 4:12; 2 Peter 1:7; 3:1, 8, 14-15, 17; 1 John 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11; 3 John 1-2, 5, 11; Jude 3, 17, 20.