

February 17-21, 2022 Edition

Following The Year Of ^ Jesus Part 7

Jesus Got Baptized- But Why?

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: We've spent the last couple of weeks looking at John The Baptizer (Jesus' cousin) and I hope that's been as helpful to you all as it was to me. This week we're going to look at the time Jesus came to John to be baptized:

Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. Matthew 3:13 (NLT)

Then? Then when? What is Matthew trying to say? I'm not sure. I mean, Matthew is telling a story and he's shaping it slightly differently than the other 3 gospel writers- Matthew is showing the Jews how Jesus is the new Moses (and we'll keep seeing Jesus doing all the things Moses only Jesus does them better). All of that's cool and all but what set all this in motion? Why now? It's been 30 years since all the activity surrounding John's and Jesus' miraculous births (it's kind of hard to mention them in the same breath- I mean John's conception was miraculous but there's miraculous and then there's MIRACULOUS [which is what Jesus' conception was, am I right?]) and now John has grown up and become a powerful prophet of God and a great preacher. But why 30 years? Was that the plan all along? Or did something happen? My guess is this has been the plan but there's no way to know and this is just one more of those things that makes Pastor Ed say, hmmmmmm.

Whatever the series of events that set this moment in motion I wish we had more info. Did Mary and Jesus always know it would begin when He was 30? Or did Jesus just get up from the breakfast table one day and say, "see you later, mom. Gotta go start the mission!"? Nobody knows. We don't even really know much about what Jesus is doing during those 30 years. Almost assuredly He was taught Joseph's trade (I know we always think of Joseph being a carpenter but that's a mistranslation from the 16th century that has stuck throughout the centuries in the western church) and became a stone mason. Why a stone mason rather than a carpenter? If you ever go to Nazareth you'll notice there aren't many trees. But there are tons of stones. Everywhere. Just laying on top of the ground. Some of that is because when Rome came through in 66 AD to put down the final Jewish rebellion they leveled almost every building in the country. So some of those stones you'd see now 2,000 years later used to be part of a home or shop or some other first century building. But even so, most of the rocks you'll see laying all over the ground were never part of any structure- it's just the way the geology/geography of northern Israel is/was.

Because of that there wasn't much made out of wood in Israel. Just about everything in an average town was made of stone (mainly basalt and I don't want you take any of that for granite ;o) because a tradesman didn't have to do any work other than picking up a likely stone and cutting it/shaping it for his purpose. We don't know for sure Jesus was working with Joseph (there are lots of wild theories about Jesus' first 30 years but none of them really make much difference. I wish I knew more details but not knowing them isn't going to change what my every day life following after Him will entail.

All we know is that when He was 30 Jesus went to the Jordan River where John was baptizing people to submit Himself for baptism. We talked about his last weekend during the lesson- this was revolutionary. Before John when an Israelite wanted to ritually purify himself or herself it was a self service kind of deal. Jews washed/purified/baptized themselves. Now John says that's not good enough. He had to baptize the repentant. Why? I think mainly because this was God telling us that we cannot save ourselves. Even baptism has to be administered now. Why?

Because if we're not careful we'll start thinking we had something to do with our salvation. But as I heard a preacher say once, the only part of your salvation that you contributed was the sin that required you be saved.

So why was Jesus baptized? I'm so glad you asked that question- it's what this week's reflections will be digging into and when we're done I hope we will understand Jesus, His baptism and our own baptism better than we do today. So for the rest of today maybe spend some time thinking about your own baptism and what it meant (and what it didn't mean). Never been baptized? That's ok- read on and see what God has to say about baptism among His children.

Tuesday Reflection: So this week we're talking about the baptism of Jesus and asking the question, why did Jesus need to be baptized? I guess the first place to start with that question is by talking about how His baptism signaled the beginning of His public ministry on this earth. As we discussed yesterday we have very little idea what Jesus did during the first 30 years of His life or what it was that signaled to Him and John the Baptizer that the time had come but we do know this- the baptism of Jesus by John is the beginning of a 3 1/2 year period of time when He would gather disciples and teach them what the Jesus-Way looked like. Did He know His time with them would be so short? Nobody knows for sure. Jesus Himself admitted to His disciples once that there was at least one thing He didn't know the answer to:

However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. Matthew 24:36 (NLT)

How could Jesus not know when the end would come? All we can do is guess. A lot of really smart people who have studied this stuff for their entire lives would say this is the human side of Jesus. That if He was going to live a truly human existence then He couldn't know everything. How did that work, you might ask? Well according to the apostle Paul when Jesus came to this earth He "emptied Himself" of what it means to be God:

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he emptied himself; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT)

That beautiful refrain is part of one of the oldest hymns in Christianity. Paul probably didn't write it but he included a song that was already being sung in churches by as early as 50 AD (about 17 years after Jesus' death/burial/resurrection/ascension). It tells us who we are to be and the kind of attitude Jesus wants from us but it also tells us who Jesus was when He was on this earth and who He was before He "appeared" among us. Before He came to earth He was God. Period. End of statement. We could spend all week trying to unravel the Trinity and not scratch the surface of the relationship between Father, Son & Holy Spirit. For today let's just recognize that's who Jesus is-

He. Is. God.

So why didn't He know everything God knew when He came to this earth? Because according to Philippians 2, He emptied Himself of His God-ness. What does that mean? I don't know exactly but how strange it must have seemed to go from the infinite to the finite. From the beauty of

heaven to a stinky barn. From the praises of angels to the petty accusations of sinful men who accused Him of being out for only Himself.

So why did He do it? For me. For you. For every human who would and who had ever lived. He died for the petty humans who accused him of selfish ambitions. He died for the soldier who would nail His human body to a cross. He died for the people that you and I disagree so strongly with about things we consider to be of utmost importance (so maybe consider how you treat you "enemies" because according to Philippians 2 we are being asked to adopt the same attitude that Jesus had in our own lives).

I have no idea how I got here. I started this reflection intending to talk about how Jesus' baptism signaled the beginning of His earthly ministry but somehow ended up chasing rabbits down the trail of what Jesus did/didn't know and what His attitude is towards those who made it their life's ambition to make His life harder. So I guess we'll talk about the beginning of His ministry tomorrow- for today maybe spend some time asking yourself, how am I doing at having the same attitude as Jesus- you remember Him right? The One Who didn't cling to His rights but instead emptied Himself so that you and I could one day find the life that is found only in Him. I don't know about you but just thinking about it right now I can see I've got LOTS of work to do.

Wednesday Reflection: So this week we're talking about the baptism of Jesus and asking the question, why did Jesus need to be baptized? I guess the first place to start with that question is by talking about how His baptism signaled the beginning of His public ministry on this earth. Are you having a bout of déjà vu? You are if you read yesterday's reflection because that is exactly how I started yesterday. Why am I doing a repeat? Because I got off track chasing rabbit trails yesterday and so today we're going to do what I intended to do yesterday- reflect on why Jesus was baptized. And the first reason was to signal the beginning of His public ministry.

And how did He do that? By making the journey from Galilee to the Judean wilderness where he was baptized by His cousin, John The Baptizer. John was shocked when he saw that his cousin was coming to be baptized. Why? Because John knew who Jesus was? Kind of. I mean, sure, John almost assuredly knew the story of both his birth and his cousin's birth with the angels and the prophecies. Here's what John would have known about Jesus:

"Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. Luke 1:30-35 (NLT)

John's conception was pretty miraculous itself but the angel was very clear about the relative importance of both boys. John was important. Jesus would be IMPORTANT!!!!!! So yeah, John knew Jesus was special but the Messiah? John didn't know that. Yet:

Then John testified, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God." John 1:32-34 (NLT)

So John knew Jesus was a big deal before he baptized Him. But after? Now John KNEW JESUS WAS A BIG DEAL!!!! Sorry for the digital shouting but I wanted to make sure the point was made. So Jesus comes and John (after a bit of convincing) agrees to baptize Him and then this happens:

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. Matthew 3:16-17 (NLT)

There are a couple of important things going on here. First this is the moment of Jesus' anointing as Israel's perfect Prophet, Priest and King. This is an important moment because the word, Messiah means "the anointed one" (so does the word, "Christ" but it's the Greek word for anointed one and Messiah is Hebrew). This is where Jesus is anointed for the roles He came to fulfill. These were the 3 most important "offices" in ancient Israel and Jesus came to perfectly fulfill the tasks of all of them. In the Old Testament whenever a new prophet, priest or king was commissioned they were always anointed with oil. This is Jesus' anointing but not with oil- Jesus would be anointed by the Holy Spirit. We'll see tomorrow that at our own baptisms we were anointed not with oil but by the Holy Spirit- just like Jesus (well, somewhat like Jesus ;o).

This is an amazing occurrence that as far as we know doesn't happen very often: God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit all together at the same place at the same time. It's not the first time that's happened in the Bible:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Genesis 1:1-3 (NLT)

Do you see them? All three of them together in the very beginning. I know it's hard to see Jesus in this passage. In fact we wouldn't know it to this day if John hadn't explained it to us:

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. John 1:1-5 (NLT)

John lets us in on the secret that Jesus was there in the beginning. And now at the "beginning" of His ministry all three are together... again. As far as I know it's the only two times in the Bible that this happens and nobody had a clue that this beginning was starting off very similarly to the very beginning. I wonder how often God does that? In video games and Marvel movies the hip kids call these "Easter eggs". They're hidden treats that you have to be a super fan to see and get. There are "Easter eggs" hidden throughout the Bible and I imagine all of creation that God has put there to bring delight to His children who dedicate their lives to His ways. So maybe today spend some time thinking about how you were anointed at your own baptism not with oil but by the Holy Spirit Himself. What does that mean about your own baptism (and if you've never been baptized we think that's something you should be talking over with Jesus. If you want to be baptized just message me and we'll make it happen)?

Thursday Reflection: Another thing that happens at Jesus' baptism is we learn all about His ipseity. That's right, you read that right (but did you pronounce it correctly? ;o)- ipseity.

What is ipseity you ask? It's sort of like Jesus' spiritual or heavenly or prophetic attributes. Well why didn't you just say that Pastor Ed? Because attributes wasn't exactly what I was wanting to get at but that concept might help us understand ipseity better. If you've ever played D&D you know that the attributes of your character are pretty important. The attributes of your character will determine how you proceed through your adventure. At the baptism of Jesus God gives us some pretty great insight into the ipseity or the spiritual attributes of Jesus that will inform His "adventure" or quest on this earth.

Who were the Jews expecting? A Messiah. A Christ. A Rescuer. And that's exactly what Jesus was. But not in the way they expected. In fact in most ways John The Baptizer much more resembled the Messiah figure the people of first century Israel were expecting. This Messiah was to come and set everything right that the people of Israel had gotten so wrong. There was a lot of information in the Old Testament that described who the Messiah would be and what He would do. But the information confused the heck out of the religious leaders of Israel.

There were tons of prophecies about the Rescuer/Messiah/Christ but they seemed to be contradictory. On the one hand the Messiah would be a conquering King who would trample God's enemies under His feet and establish God's throne upon which He would reign for all eternity. On the other hand the Messiah would be a shadowy, mysterious figure whose sacrificial death would bring about the healing of the nations.

Do you see why the experts were confused? How could one person fulfill both prophecies? If the Messiah died to bring about the healing of the nations then how could He establish God's throne and reign for eternity? The religious leaders of the first century reasoned that there must be at least two different people they were waiting for. Into this cauldron of confusion came Jesus and God tries to clear up the mystery for anyone who would listen:

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. Matthew 3:16-17 (NLT)

Growing up I always thought this was just something God decided to say that meant a lot to Him maybe and was instructing us to pay attention to Jesus but it turns out it's more than that. This is what fans of the TV show Glee would recognize as a mashup. If you are not familiar with the TV show then you might not understand what a mashup is. A mashup is when someone takes two different songs and "mashes" them together to create a new song that contains the most important elements of both songs. It's become a popular thing to do but God has been doing it for at least 2,000 years. The statement God makes about Jesus is a mashup of two different scriptures- Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. God mashes these 2 scriptures together and if you walk with us through the next year of Jesus we'll see that Jesus will continue the practice.

In first century Israel the people shared a cultural and religious consciousness the same as any group of people. They were so familiar with the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament that you didn't have to quote the whole passage in order for people to know what you were talking about- just quote the most famous part of that scripture and everyone would sort of fill-in-the-blanks.

It's like the old joke about a guy who stops in a tiny town with one diner in the middle of nowhere to get dinner. While he's sitting at the bar eating he hears one of the regulars yell out, "number 5!" and everybody laughs. After a few minutes another regular shouts out, "number 22"

and everyone laughs even harder than before. The new guy asks his server what's up with the numbers? She explains that since they all know each other they also know each other's jokes so they compiled their jokes in a booklet and numbered them so instead of telling the whole joke they could just call out the number and everyone knew the joke they were going to tell. The new guy gets out the joke book and looks it over and finally blurts out, "number 34!" all the while trying to contain his laughter. There is no laughter from anyone else in the diner. It's dead silence and a few shaking heads. The new guy looks to the server who shakes her head and says, "some people just can't tell a joke..."

That's sort of what's going on here with God's mashup. When the people hear the voice from heaven the first thing they would have all thought about what Psalm 2:

The king proclaims the Lord's decree: "The Lord said to me, 'You are my son. Today I have become your Father. Only ask, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the whole earth as your possession. You will break them with an iron rod and smash them like clay pots.'" Psalm 2:7-9 (NLT)

This is one of the messianic prophecies that indicated that the Messiah would be a conquering king who would defeat the enemies of God. The second half of God's mashup was a line from Isaiah 42:

Look at my servant, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or raise his voice in public. He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. Isaiah 42:1-3 (NLT)

Psalm 42 is one of the prophecies of the Messiah that indicates the Anointed One would be a sacrificial suffering servant who would be gentle and die a sacrificial death to bring about the healing of the nations. So what does it mean when God mashes up those two categories of Old Testament messianic prophecies at Jesus' baptism? I think God's letting anyone who will pay attention know that they shouldn't be expecting multiple Messiahs who would each fulfill a particular role that the prophecies suggest must be fulfilled. For God's Anointed One will fulfill all of them Himself.

At His baptism God let's us in on an important secret that nobody could see coming- it's only when looking back that we all say, "ohhhhhhhhhh that's how He did that!" And what did He do? He perfectly merged (or mashed) the role of the conquering King who would defeat all of God's enemies with the suffering servant whose sacrificial death would heal the nations. How did He do that? On the cross. On the cross Jesus trampled on the enemies of God- hell and death. It wasn't what the Jews were expecting. They thought their biggest enemies were the Romans. They thought the Messiah would establish a military, political kingdom that would never be defeated. They were wrong. God's Messiah would defeat much bigger enemies than Rome. And with His sacrificial death on the cross- in what appeared to be the greatest expression of weakness ever witnessed in the history of this planet- Jesus died and brought about the healing of the nations while He conquered the enemies of God and established His throne upon which He reigns to this very day (and will for the rest of eternity).

Is your mind blown? Because mine is. How did He do that? I mean we can see it now looking back but who could have possibly seen this coming? Anyone who was listening at Jesus' baptism. God told us- we humans just couldn't see it.

I wonder how many of God's promises that we find in the words of the Bible are still like that? Things that we just can't comprehend because of our limited perspective and insight. Most of the prophecies we focus on in the church these days revolve around the second coming of the Messiah- when He will set everything right again. I imagine when that's all said and done most of us will be walking around Heaven with our jaws hanging open in wonder because we never would have dreamed the ways in which God fulfilled prophecies which we thought we understood but in the end we will realize we understood nothing (sort of like Jon Snow [that was a little nod to any Game of Thrones fans out there]).

Friday Reflection:

An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan-the one you testified about-look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." To this John replied, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less." John 3:25-30 (NLT)

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." Matthew 11:2-6 (NLT)

Reflection: John the baptizer was in many ways more like the man the Israelites expected in a messiah than Jesus was. Like the prophets of the old testament, John vibrated with passion and eccentricity. He convicted people of sin and interrupted their complacency with the announcement of God's coming kingdom. Even the jaded pharisees, who doubted John's authority, came to him. They recognized that his message was gaining momentum at a rate they couldn't ignore.

Before Jesus began His ministry He came to John to be baptized. The gospels tell us that this made John uncomfortable. He felt like this couldn't be right. He knew that Jesus was the important one, and yet here was Jesus asking John to baptize Him. I guess it goes to show that even those participating in God's plan find it hard to predict what God will do next. Maybe that's because God puts so little effort into trying to look important or live up to our expectations.

From a human point of view, John baptizing Jesus appears to place him in a position of leadership or authority over Jesus; it goes against the hierarchy of power. But from Jesus' point of view, obedience is always more important than power. He doesn't seem concerned with making sure He is seen to have the upper hand in all things. As long as God is pleased, He doesn't think twice about how it looks to the neighbors. And He certainly doesn't put His effort into making others feel comfortable, even those on the same team.

As Jesus begins collecting disciples, John gladly loses his best followers to Jesus. He is content to be able to point the way, he doesn't need to BE the way. Some of his followers got defensive on

his behalf, but John tells them things are as they should be. After hearing God's validation of Jesus upon His baptism, John is pleased to shift the focus of attention to Jesus.

Not long after this, John finds himself in prison for some of the previously mentioned passion and conviction. Long dark days in the dungeon make it harder and harder for him to remember the glory of Jesus' baptism. Finally John's doubts creep in and he sends some of his followers to ask Jesus if He's really THE ONE.

And despite John's faithfulness, Jesus doesn't rush to him to reassure him that He is the one, that everything is going according to plan, and that all will be well. Instead He tells John's followers to report what they have seen – that the blind can see and the lame can walk. Was it enough?

We can't really know. And maybe that's the point. Jesus doesn't give us the answers for every question. He doesn't remove our doubts. In fact, our doubts don't seem to trouble Him much at all. We have moments with Jesus where we feel like we hear the voice of God and rejoice that we get to be a part of amazing things. But we also have moments where we were just not sure how (or even if) it's all going to work out.

And either way, Jesus just keeps on doing what He does – taking the step the Father has put in front of Him, submitting to baptism or healing the sick or having a conversation. And whether we feel it or not, Jesus goes right on being our enough even when we can't feel it. Maybe I'm a jerk to feel good when John feels bad, but it's reassuring to know that even those who saw Jesus and believed in Him didn't always feel sure or triumphant. At least I know I'm in good company.