

# Mark - the Baptism of Jesus

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The sermon explores the significance of Jesus' baptism as a moment of dedication, divine affirmation, and the beginning of his ministry in the context of the Trinity.*

**Duration:** 42:32

**Scripture:** Psalm 2:6-7, Isaiah 42:1, Mark 1:1-11

**Topics:** "Baptism"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the passage from Mark chapter 1, verses 9-11. The main character, Jesus, makes his first appearance in Mark's Gospel. The preacher emphasizes that Jesus spent most of his life in obscurity, but throughout those years, he brought pleasure to the Father. The sermon also highlights the Father's announcement of his plan for Jesus, declaring him as his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased. The preacher concludes by discussing the renewed dedication of Jesus to the task of our redemption.

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## Transcript

Last Lord's Day morning we began a new series of studies in the Gospel recorded by St. Mark. And I have felt constrained that we should continue those this morning. I believe that the subject that awaits our attention is very relevant to the occasion that brings us together to the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Will you turn with me then to Mark chapter 1 and we'll read verses 9 to 11. And as we do so we pray that God in his grace will help us to understand his word, to get its message and to apply it to our own lives. And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized of John in Jordan.

And straightway coming up out of the water he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him. And there came a voice from heaven saying, Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Now the opening paragraph verses 1 to 8 that we were meditating upon last Lord's Day, describing the beginnings of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that paragraph has set the stage for the appearance of the main character, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And today we see him, the main character in the drama of our redemption, coming onto the scene for the first time in Mark's Gospel. God had ordained that his Son incarnate should spend 30 of his 33 or so years in comparative obscurity. That has much to tell us.

His public ministry was to be crammed within the space of about three years. But within those three years he was to accomplish a work that would mean eternal bliss for all his people. But for 30 years he lived in comparative obscurity.

In fact, next to nothing is known of those years. About the only two things that we can be sure about are these. One, to quote scripture, that during those first 30 years he continued to increase in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

And then the other is this, that he was a carpenter. That is evident because later on in the Gospel of Mark when he became involved in public ministry and exercised the power that was given him, folk were amazed and they said something like this, where did this man get these things? This power and this authority. What's this wisdom that has been given him? That he even does miracles.

And then this question, isn't this the carpenter? That's from Mark chapter 6 verses 2 and 3. So then about the only two things we know of Jesus' early years, the first 30 years of his life, we have suggested now. These two main things, he grew in stature, in acceptance with God and with man, and that he practiced the trade of a carpenter. Jesus then spent his formative years in that kind of obscurity.

Nazareth was not known by hardly anyone and was not a reputable city. No known major character had emerged from Nazareth, but Jesus lived in Nazareth as a carpenter. The guileless Nathanael could well ask Jesus as we read in John chapter 1, can any good thing come out of Nazareth? The best that ever was produced in any earthly city actually emerged out of Nazareth when Jesus came from Nazareth into Galilee and was baptized of John in Jordan.

Now this morning, we can only deal with some of the main arteries of divine truth that are revealed here. Now I have to ask you prayerfully to put flesh on the bones. There are three main things to focus upon in order to get any semblance of wholeness as we examine this picture.

First of all, we look at the dedication of the Son. Then we must focus some attention upon the descent of the Spirit. And thirdly, upon the words, the declaration of the Father to his Son.

You see, this is a Trinitarian passage. It's very significant, it seems to me. At the beginning of the old creation in Genesis, we have a manifestation of the doctrine of the triune God.

God the Father brings the whole cosmos into being by his logos, his word, his Son. Simultaneously, the Holy Spirit broods over the vast chaos. Here we stand at the threshold of the new creation.

The church, the gathering out of a people from among mankind who are God's new creation to last forever and a day. And here too we have this triune majesty of God breaking forth upon the scene. We need to see that redemption no less than creation is the work of the triune God.

The Father speaks from his unseen heaven. The Spirit comes down in the form of a dove as the Son, rededicating himself to the task now before him, emerges out of the water of Jordan. Our gospel then is the gospel of a triune God.

There are mysteries about the Trinity we cannot fully understand. No man can. We cannot understand all there is to be said about God or to be known about him.

If we could then we would not be creatures and he would not be God. There are some things that transcend our reason but one thing is clear in Scripture. He reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now come with me then briefly to look at these three main areas of truth that emerge here. First of all we look at the renewed dedication of the Son. I want to underline that word renewed because it does qualify what happened here.

I use it because our Lord had obviously dedicated himself to the task of our redemption in eternity. When in the counsel of the triune God he accepted responsibility for becoming man, dying the death of others in bearing away their sin upon the cross of Calvary. Only on the basis of such understanding can we say that the Lamb was slain from before the foundations of the world.

He dedicated himself to die before he ever became a babe in the virgin's womb. But now you see he's landed on our planet. He's come into our life.

He's come into our human situation and he stands on the borders, on the edge, on the beginning, at the beginning of his public ministry. And so here on Jordan's banks he renews his dedication to what awaits in the good will of God. Can I just say a word about the timing? I think this is exceedingly precious to all of us who ponder it.

When our Lord Jesus as a boy went into the temple, a boy of 12, do you remember how his parents were bewildered that he had stayed behind when they were going home? They found him at last and he said to them, why are you so fussy? Or words to that effect, not disrespectfully, but that's the implication of it. Didn't you know that I must be about my father's business or in my father's house? Now there you have the youth of 12 years old already caught up with one thing, his father's will, his father's pleasure, his father's business, his father's house. He sees his own personal involvement already in the things of his father.

In a sense, might we dare we say that our Lord as a boy of 12 was itching to be about that business. But for 18 years he had to wait for the word go. 18 years in obscurity, waiting for the hour on God's timepiece when he leaves the ordinary carpenters shed and the humble village of Nazareth and moves out into the public arena when he can say now this is the work for which I was born.

But now let me add to that something else which is exceedingly precious here. He knew the time on God's timepiece. I want to point to that spiritual sensitivity to the voice of God, even when it doesn't speak audibly as it did on Jordan's bank.

The father doesn't need to shout in the years of his son, he can whisper. We have no evidence to say that the father raised his voice to say my son the hour has come, but he knew it. And then I want to point to this also, the magnificent sovereignty of God.

Oh some of us need to have this picture of God that he can simultaneously communicate with two people, one his son and the other John the Baptist. And he can send John the Baptist into the wilderness of Judea to preach as the preparer of the way of the Lord. And then he can at the same time communicate with his son and say now here is the way walk you in it.

You see God in sovereign power and omnipotence can bring all the loose pieces of prophecy and promise together and make them into a perfect pattern that fits his will. You and I need to get this picture of God.

Now so much about the timing, let's look at the task to which he dedicates himself here on Jordan's bank.

What is it? And here again I'm very conscious I can only throw in a few threads. Matthew tells us quite clearly that when Jesus presented himself to John, John was taken aback. He says do you come to me? When really he says I have need to come to you.

Do you expect me to baptize you with water when really I need the baptism that you give? John was challenged with a sheer incongruity of Jesus coming to him. He said I'm not worthy even to unloose the latchet of his shoes. There was this awful incongruity about it.

Now we have this phenomenon and we have a question raised here. John's baptism was a baptism of water, it was a baptism of repentance. Why then did Jesus come when he had no sin? And he was not a sinner.

Now I want you to notice and you must follow this up yourselves, I haven't time to develop it. I want you to notice that this is something that comes out not only with respect to the baptism of Jesus but with regards to his circumcision. As a boy of eight years old he was taken to be circumcised.

Now the act of circumcision symbolically proclaimed the bloody removal of the body of sin. Now that is biblical language. The removal of the body of sin.

But Jesus had no body of sin to remove. There was no need for the symbol of circumcision as far as he was concerned and yet he submitted himself to it. And this is the significant thing you see.

Lest we see or lest we tend to think we see that Jesus is a sinner because he was circumcised. On that very day it was declared thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins. He's going to be circumcised not because he's a sinner with a body of sin to be symbolically cast away.

He's not the sinner he's the Savior and yet he submits to circumcision the sinner's right. Now you have the same kind of thing on Jordan. Jesus goes down to a baptism which was virtually the baptism of repentance of sin and everybody else that went into the water confessed his sin.

John the Baptist saw to that. It was a baptism of repentance. But the voice comes from heaven as we shall see in a moment and the Father says this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

He's no sinner. He's no transgressor. He stands in the water with sinners.

He joins in the popular movement led by John the Baptist or should we say instituted by the Holy Spirit through John the Baptist. He joins in the popular movement away from sin to God a movement of repentance. But he himself is a part.

He's my beloved son and I'm pleased in him. I have no charge to level against him. You see the paradox.

Why then was Jesus baptized? May I dare put it, try to put it into a nutshell. Because he was here coming to identify himself wholly with sinners in their need. Did not Isaiah the prophet write he was numbered with the transgressors? And the being numbered with the transgressors begins right here as far as his public ministry is concerned.

He goes into the Jordan as sinners did and stood with them. The baptism of Jordan was a prelude in fact to another baptism about which Jesus spoke. More than once, twice actually according to the Gospels,

Jesus spoke of another baptism.

Not a baptism with water nor the baptism with a spirit. He referred to something which was beyond this water baptism or even the spirit baptism. The first time when James and John asked him if they could sit on either side of him at his kingdom, you remember how he replied.

He asked them, are you able to be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized? What's he referring to? He's referring to the baptism of suffering and sorrow and death. He's referring to the total submergence of his soul in the darkness and the chaos and the lostness of Calvary and of the grave. He's referring there to what will ultimately happen when he will cry on the cross, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? When he is submerged under the billows and the waves of the wrath of God against your sin and mine that he was bearing.

Thus his baptism of water looked forward to his baptism with blood. To quote a very pregnant phrase from someone, that Jordan flowed into the Red River of Calvary. And in his mind he was here going into the waters of Jordan to rededicate himself to die the death of the cross.

So that when he came at last to drink the cup in Gethsemane and on Calvary, the battle was over. Therefore, in principle, he is doing exactly what the Father wants him to do. To do the Father's will is his meat, as it was at the beginning of his ministry.

The rededication of the Son. My friend, oh, if you and I were as dedicated as our Lord, there are things we would know, there are depths we would plumb, there are heights into which we would ascend, there is grace that we should experience and glory to, and a service we could accomplish. Now that brings us to the second point here, the visible descent of the Spirit.

We must not conclude that because the Spirit came now upon the Lord Jesus that he had been without the Spirit until this point. That is not true. He was conceived of the Spirit, and if John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, as scripture tells us, much more so was his blessed cousin, our Lord Jesus Christ.

What happens here, however, is something different. The Spirit comes upon him in order visibly to make it clear that he can depend upon the power and enabling of the Spirit for the ministry to which he has rededicated himself. Now, can I just mention two things here, very briefly.

I want you to notice that when the Spirit came upon him, there was this signal symbol in the sky, thy heavens were rent. That's a phrase which I don't think we really get in our English, because what it means is this, somehow or other, the clouds were parted asunder. All the formations of the clouds are so wonderful from day to day, but on this occasion they were exceedingly so.

It was as if the clouds were rent asunder and there was a passageway through into the highest heights that we cannot see. That's the symbolism. And the symbolism means, if it means anything, it means that between the sun upon earth and the Father in heaven, there's not a cloud.

Not a cloud. Not a cloud. It's an open heaven.

There's an open way. The fellowship is deep and real and unclouded. The heavens were rent.

The Spirit descended like a dove. Immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove. Now the dove is a symbol of peace.

In order to see the significance of this, let me remind you of something else. You remember that when John the Baptist, according to Matthew's version, when John foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he said, he will baptize you with the Spirit and with fire. With fire.

Now in that context, John had been pouring the judgment of God upon sinners of all kinds. And he evidently envisaged that when the Spirit came upon men, he would come with fire burning and judging and condemning. There was so much to burn in everybody else.

The Pharisees and the scribes and the Jewish leaders. The hypocrites of the old church. Not only among them, but various segments of the community came to ask John, what shall we do? They were all condemned by John's preaching and they needed to show signs of repentance.

But now notice, when the Spirit comes down upon the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, he doesn't come as fire, he comes as a dove. What does that mean? I'll tell you what it means. It means that there's nothing in him to burn.

It means that there is nothing in him that needs to be burnt up or devoured in the estimation of the Spirit and of the Father. He's pure. He's spotless.

He's undefiled. He's ready for the slaughter. He's acceptable in the sight of God.

There's nothing to burn. When the Spirit comes as the dove of peace with God. That is more, John the Baptist and John the author of the Gospel tell us in chapter 1 of John's Gospel that it isn't simply that the Spirit came down upon him as a dove, but the Spirit abode upon him as a dove.

Now my friend, it is very wonderful to have the Spirit in your life even as fire. Because if the Spirit is in your life even as fire devouring your sin, it means that God is at work to the salvation of your soul. It may be very uncomfortable when you read the Scriptures, when you pray, when you're in fellowship with God's people, the Spirit is burning, burning, burning, judging, judging, judging, condemning, converting, convincing, but that's salvation.

But I'll tell you something which is infinitely more precious. When the burning has been done and the dove of peace sits on your heart and cools the peace of God to your soul. A dove.

Now that leads me hurriedly into the third main artery of divine truth. We find here the audible declaration of the Father. You will meditate upon this when we're away this morning, won't you? There is so much that must remain unsaid.

A voice came from heaven, thou art my beloved son, with thee I am well pleased. Again as if the spectacle of the dove was at least visible to John and to Jesus, so was the voice audible to both. Now just notice the pronouncement of the Father.

We've referred to it and I'll only say this about it. It's not simply that we hear the Father publicly, audibly I should say, more than publicly. We don't know that other people hear the voice, apart from John and Jesus, but audibly the Spirit wants to make it clear to him who is to introduce the bridegroom to his bride, that this person coming out of Jordan is first of all God's Son, that's one thing, and that as God's Son

incarnate the Father is well pleased with him.

Now if I dare summarize it like this, I would put it in this way. It means this, you see, that for the first thirty years of his life, as a boy, an ordinary boy, living in circumstances that were not altogether easy, if as we are told Joseph died when he was very young, it must have been a difficult home materially. Then we understand later on that on one occasion Jesus had to say that his brothers and his mother didn't understand him.

Mark will tell us that, we'll study it later on. One day they tried to muzzle him and tried to shut him up and tried to persuade him not to talk anymore because they thought that he was beside himself, they thought he was mad. And Jesus in response to that said, you see these people around here, here's my mother and here's my brother and here's my sister, those who do the will of God, and he distinguishes them from his family.

Now that's the kind of home that he was brought up in. And through the turbulent age of youth into young manhood he passed through all the stages and God comes and says over it all, this is my son, yes, in whom I'm well pleased. Through all those turbulent years when so often passion rages and mars a life for all time, Jesus brought pleasure to the father.

And the other thing I want you to look upon is this, the announcement of the father's plan for his rededicated spirit endowed son. And a voice came from heaven, thou art my beloved son, with thee I am well pleased. You say, where's the plan there? I don't see the plan there, you must have quoted wrongly.

Well now, the casual reader may miss something of tremendous significance in those words. The casual reader may miss what Jesus, on the basis of his sensitivity to the father's will and on the basis of his profoundest knowledge of the scriptures, would not fail to notice in this, his father's statement. When God said, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased, he did something out of the ordinary.

He couched his words in terms of two Old Testament statements. Oh may the Lord help us to get hold of this, and we'll see the value of scripture as well as the glory of the saviour and the wonder of our God. In order to communicate his message to the son he takes two phrases from two places in the Old Testament and he weaves them together into one message, that's what the father does.

Now the two messages come first from Psalm 2 verses 6 and 7 and then from Isaiah chapter 42 and verse 1. Now let me read to you from Psalm 2, this is why I read it earlier on. This is the voice of God to the kings of the earth who take counsel against the Lord and against his anointed as fulfilled in the life of Jesus according to Peter in Acts. I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.

God says that about his son. My son is the sovereign, he's the king and I've established his kingship and his throne. I've set him upon my holy hill.

Now here in the next part of the psalm we hear the voice of the chosen king, the son replying. This is what he says, I will tell of the decree of Jehovah. He said to me, you are my son, today have I begotten thee.

You are my son. When Jesus heard the voice of the father of Jordan, the first words he said, you are my son, from Psalm 2. Now we'll come back to it in a moment. The next few words were taken from Isaiah 42 verse 1 which reads, behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.

I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. Now come with me. I must take a moment for this.

You've got the two phrases. First of all, you are my son, then in whom my soul delights. Why should God do this? Well I believe that we have the kind of thing here that can only happen between two people that are intimate, the one with the other.

You can pass a message as it were in telegram form, in a summarized form, and you only give the quintessence of it, but it is so meaningful to the person who knows you. Well what's the message? Well the message is this. Psalm 2 is a messianic psalm describing the coming king, the son of God, the sovereign whom God has appointed to be king of kings and lord of lords.

God is saying to you, I remember, I remember, you're my son whom I've set upon my holy hill, Zion. You're my son, the sovereign of the ages. Right.

But where do the other words come from? In whom my soul delights. They come from what theologians speak of as a servant passage. There are a number of them toward the end of Isaiah from 40 onwards, culminating in the great servant song of Isaiah chapter 53.

Where our Lord Jesus Christ is describing as being made sin for us who knew no sin, bearing our shame and our curse upon himself. Now, this is culled then from a series of parts of God's word, a series of chapters or parts of chapters describing the suffering servant of the Lord, bearing anguish and shame and misery and torture in the process of performing the work that leads to his kingship. Now you say to me, what does all this mean? You're being very mysterious about it.

Well, not really. What it means is this. Seems to me that God is saying to his son, you're on the way to the throne, you are my son, I've established your rule.

But the way to the throne is the way of the suffering servant. The way to your kingship over men and over nations, over time and over eternity is the way which means that you must go the way that Isaiah the prophet prophesied. And you see, the Lord Jesus, knowing the scriptures and sensitive to his father's mind, would put it all together.

I conclude, what has all this got to say to us? Well, the first thing it has to say, of course, is about the glories of our Lord. Oh, my good people, the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of your trust and mine. He stands in a category all his own.

There is no other that has known this kind of thing. The Father has gone out of his way to set him apart before the eyes of men as his one and only beloved son, appointed to suffer and appointed to be king. More than that, I think it has something to say to us as Christian people.

Here, you see, is a pattern. It has three points to it. One, the dedicated child of God should patiently wait his father's timing and be ready for his will.

Are you ready to hear God's will this morning? Are you ready for the almighty God to come to you and say, look, man, look, woman, look, fellow, look, girl, you were born for a purpose. You've waited a long time and you've been a little bit impatient. Now, I want to tell you why you were born.

You've come into the kingdom for such a time as this. My friend, there is only one way of hearing the Father's voice. It's to be in that place of dedication and rededication.

Second thing, the rededicated child of God who is available to do his will at any moment, in any place, in any circumstances, that rededicated and utterly dedicated child of God will never lack the sufficiency of the spirit to do God's will. Dare I say this, may the Lord forgive me if I go beyond the bounds of propriety, but in one sense there was no need for the spirit to come down in the form of a dove for Jesus' sake. He was filled and flooded and empowered and ennobled and engraced by the spirit and all the fullness of the divine power was his and had been his in Nazareth.

But in order to make it clear that when he goes out into his service for which he was born he does not go alone, the spirit comes in the form of a dove and he was seen. See, God wants us to know that when we go out to labor for him, though we've waited thirty years to know his time, we do not go alone. And lastly, God has a way of approving and reassuring his obedient child.

When you and I have worked with God and have known what it is to be dedicated utterly to him, you know he'll find a way of communicating his approval with us. He'll speak to us through little passages of scripture that he will weave together and they will be meaningful to you and meaningful to me because we are living in the word as his son was and we are subject to the spirit as his son was. Being subject to the spirit and learned in the word and dedicated to the will of God, my friend, you cannot go wrong.

And though all hell be let loose against you as it was against Jesus Christ, you will have peace that passes understanding for you will know that you are in your father's will. That's the pattern here. Two things then.

We adore the infinite grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the infinite wisdom and mercy of the Father in giving him to us to be our Savior. And then we ask, O Lord, may this pattern in principle apply to me. Help me today at the table to put myself upon the altar for whatever you have for me in this day.

My little life may be very brief, but let me do what I was born to do before I die. And in so doing, I can depend upon the ministrations of the Holy Spirit in the way of obedience. And I can be assured of the Father's method being perfect to confirm his word to me, to assure me and to sustain me until I come not only with the Lord Jesus, but with the Apostle Paul to say I have finished the course.

I have kept the faith. Shall we spend just a moment in the silence before we sing our hymn? Father, relate your word to the condition of my soul and the condition of all my brothers and sisters here this morning, so that each of us may recognize your voice teaching us from this passage in your holy word. May our response to it be such as will enable us, in a manner that is acceptable to you, to partake of the broken bread and the outpoured wine of sacrifice as symbolically given to us today.

Hear us in Jesus' name. Amen.

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