

Homily 12 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 12 on Matthew explores the significance of Jesus' baptism as a fulfillment of righteousness and a call for believers to embrace their heavenly identity.

Scripture: Genesis 3:19, Matthew 3:14-25, John 13:7, Acts 2:2, 1 Corinthians 14:22, 2 Corinthians 9:15

Topics: "Baptism Of Jesus", "Heavenly Citizenship"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the baptism of Jesus, emphasizing the humility and exaltation displayed by Christ in being baptized by John. He explains how the heavens opened, the Spirit descended like a dove, and a voice proclaimed Jesus as the beloved Son of God, highlighting the significance of this event. Chrysostom urges believers to live a life worthy of their heavenly citizenship, focusing on storing up treasures in heaven rather than on earth, to avoid the punishment of clinging to worldly possessions. He warns against the folly of prioritizing earthly wealth over spiritual riches, emphasizing the need to break free from the chains of greed and set our sights on eternal blessings.

Transcript

Matt. III. 13.

Then comes Jesus from Galilee to Jordan, etc.

With the servants the Lord, with the criminals the Judge, comes to be baptized. But be not troubled; for in these humiliations His exaltation does most shine forth. For He who vouchsafed to be borne so long in a Virgin's womb, and to come forth thence with our nature, and to be smitten with rods, and crucified, and to suffer all the rest which He suffered -- why do you marvel if He vouchsafed also to be baptized, and to come with the rest to His servant. For the amazement lay in that one thing, that being God, He would be made Man; but the rest after this all follows in course of reason.

For this cause, let me add, John also by way of anticipation said all that he had said before, that he was not worthy to unloose the latchet of His shoe; and all the rest, as for instance, that He is Judge, and rewards every man according to his desert, and that He will bestow His Spirit abundantly on all; in order that when you should see Him coming to the baptism, you might not suspect anything mean. Therefore he forbids Him, even when He had come, saying,

I have need to be baptized by You, and You come to me. Matthew 3:14 For, because the baptism was of repentance, and led men to accuse themselves for their offenses, lest any one should suppose that He too comes to Jordan in this sort of mind, John sets it right beforehand, by calling Him both Lamb, and Redeemer from all the sin that is in the world. Since He that was able to take away the sins of the whole race of men, much more was He Himself without sin. For this cause then he said not, Behold, He that is without sin, but what was much more, He that bears the sin of the world, in order that together with this truth you might receive that other with all assurance, and having received it might perceive, that in the conduct of some further economy He comes to the baptism. Wherefore also he said to Him when He came, I have need to be baptized by You, and You come to me?

And he said not, And are You baptized of me? nay, for this he feared to say: but what? And You come to me? What then does Christ? What He did afterwards with respect to Peter, this did He then also. For so he too would have forbidden Him to wash his feet, but when he had heard, What I do you know not now, but you shall know hereafter, and you have no part with me, John 13:7-8 he speedily withdrew from his determination, and went over to the contrary. And this man again in like manner, when he had heard, Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness, straightway obeyed. For they were not unduly contentious, but they manifested both love and obedience, and made it their study to be ruled by their Lord in all things.

And mark how He urges him on that very ground which chiefly caused him to look doubtfully on what was taking place; in that He did not say, thus it is just, but thus it becomes. For, inasmuch as the point unworthy of Him was in his mind chiefly this, His being baptized by His servant, He stated this rather than anything else, which is directly opposed to that impression: as though He had said, Is it not as unbecoming that you avoid and forbid this? Nay, for this self-same cause I bid you suffer it, that it is becoming, and that in the highest degree.

And He did not merely say, suffer, but He added, now. For it will not be so forever, says He, but you shall see me such as you desire, for the present, however, endure this. Next He shows also how this becomes Him. How then does it so? In that we fulfill the whole law; and to express this He said, all righteousness. For righteousness is the fulfilling of the commandments. Since then we have performed all the rest of the commandments, says He, and this alone remains, it also must be added: because I have come to do away the curse that is appointed for the transgression of the law. I must therefore first fulfill it all, and having delivered you from its condemnation, in this way bring it to an end. It becomes me therefore to fulfill the whole law, by the same rule that it becomes me to do away the curse that is written against you in the law: this being the very purpose of my assuming flesh, and coming hither.

2. Then he suffers Him. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him.

For inasmuch as many supposed that John was greater than He, because John had been brought up all his time in the wilderness, and was son of a chief priest, and was clothed with such raiment, and was calling all men unto his baptism, and had been born of a barren mother; while Jesus, first of all, was of a damsel of ordinary rank (for the virgin birth was not yet manifest to all); and besides, He had been brought up in a house, and held converse with all men, and wore this common raiment; they suspected Him to be less than John, knowing as yet nothing of those secret things -- and it fell out moreover that He was baptized of John, which thing added support to this surmise, even if none of those mentioned before had

existed; for it would come into their mind that this man was one of the many (for were He not one of the many, He would not have come with the many to the baptism), but that John was greater than He and far more admirable:-- in order therefore that this opinion might not prevail with the multitude, the very heavens are opened, when He is baptized, and the Spirit comes down, and a voice with the Spirit, proclaiming the dignity of the Only Begotten. For since the voice that said, This is my beloved Son, would seem to the multitude rather to belong to John, for It added not, This that is baptized, but simply This, and every hearer would conceive it to be said concerning the baptizer, rather than the baptized, partly on account of the Baptist's own dignity, partly for all that has been mentioned; the Spirit came in form of a dove, drawing the voice towards Jesus, and making it evident to all, that This was not spoken of John that baptized, but of Jesus who was baptized.

And how was it, one may say, that they did not believe, when these things came to pass? Because in the days of Moses also many wonderful works were done, albeit not such as these; and after all those, the voices, and the trumpets, and the lightnings, they both forged a calf, and were joined unto Baal-peor. And those very persons too, who were present at the time, and saw Lazarus arise, so far from believing in Him, who had wrought these things, repeatedly attempted even to slay Him. Now if seeing before their eyes one rise from the dead, they were so wicked, why marvel at their not receiving a voice wafted from above? Since when a soul is uncandid and perverse, and possessed by the disease of envy, it yields to none of these things; even as when it is candid it receives all with faith, and has no great need of these.

Speak not therefore thus, They believed not, but rather inquire, Did not all things take place which ought to have made them believe? For by the prophet also God frames this kind of defense of His own ways in general. That is, the Jews being on the point of ruin, and of being given over to extreme punishment; lest any from their wickedness should calumniate His providence, He says, What ought I to have done to this vineyard, that I have not done? Just so here likewise reflect; what ought to have been done, and was not done? And indeed whenever arguments arise on God's Providence, make use of this kind of defense, against those who from the wickedness of the many try to raise a prejudice against it. See, for instance, what astonishing things are done, preludes of those which were to come; for it is no more paradise, but Heaven that is opened.

But let our argument with the Jews stand over unto some other time; for the present, God working with us, we would direct our discourse to what is immediately before us.

3. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo! The heavens were opened unto Him. Matthew 3:16

Wherefore were the heavens opened? To inform you that at your baptism also this is done, God calling you to your country on high, and persuading you to have nothing to do with earth. And if you see not, yet never doubt it. For so evermore at the beginnings of all wonderful and spiritual transactions, sensible visions appear, and such-like signs, for the sake of them that are somewhat dull in disposition, and who have need of outward sight, and who cannot at all conceive an incorporeal nature, but are excited only by the things that are seen: that so, though afterward no such thing occur, what has been declared by them once for all at the first may be received by your faith.

For in the case of the apostles too, there was a sound of a mighty wind, Acts 2:2 and visions of fiery tongues appeared, but not for the apostles' sake, but because of the Jews who were then present. Nevertheless, even though no sensible signs take place, we receive the things that have been once

manifested by them. Since the dove itself at that time therefore appeared, that as in place of a finger (so to say) it might point out to them that were present, and to John, the Son of God. Not however merely on this account, but to teach you also, that upon you no less at your baptism the Spirit comes. But since then we have no need of sensible vision, faith sufficing instead of all. For signs are not for them that believe, but for them that believe not. 1 Corinthians 14:22

But why in the fashion of a dove? Gentle is that creature, and pure. Forasmuch then as the Spirit too is a Spirit of meekness, He therefore appears in this sort. And besides, He is reminding us of an ancient history. For so, when once a common shipwreck had overtaken the whole world, and our race was in danger of perishing, this creature appeared, and indicated the deliverance from the tempest, and bearing an olive branch, Genesis viii published the good tidings of the common calm of the whole world; all which was a type of the things to come. For in fact the condition of men was then much worse, and they deserved a much sorer punishment. To prevent your despairing, therefore, He reminds you of that history. Because then also, when things were desperate, there was a sort of deliverance and reformation; but then by punishment, now, on the contrary, by grace and an unspeakable gift. 2 Corinthians 9:15 Therefore the dove also appears, not bearing an olive branch, but pointing out to us our Deliverer from all evils, and suggesting the gracious hopes. For not from out of an ark does she lead one man only, but the whole world she leads up into heaven at her appearing, and instead of a branch of peace from an olive, she conveys the adoption to all the world's offspring in common.

Reflect now on the greatness of the gift, and do not account His dignity the less for His appearing in such a likeness. For I actually hear some saying, that such as is the difference between a man and a dove, so great is that between Christ and the Spirit: since the one appeared in our nature, the other in the likeness of a dove. What must we say then to these things? That the Son of God did indeed take upon Him the nature of man, but the Spirit took not on Him the nature of a dove. Therefore the evangelist also said not, in the nature of a dove, but in the form of a dove. Accordingly, never after did He so much as appear in this fashion, but at that moment only. And if on this account you affirm His dignity to be less, the cherubim too will be made out by this reasoning much His superior, even as much so as an eagle is to a dove: because they too were figured into that visible shape. And the angels too superior again, for they no less have many times appeared in the fashion of men. But these things are not so, indeed they are not. For the truth of an economy is one thing, and the condescension of a temporary vision another.

Do not now, I pray you, become unthankful towards your Benefactor nor with the very contraries requite Him that has bestowed on you the fountain of blessedness. For where adoption is vouchsafed, there is also the removing of evils, and the giving of all good things.

4. On this very account the Jewish baptism ceases, and ours takes its beginning. And what was done with regard to the Passover, the same ensues in the baptism also. For as in that case too, He acting with a view to both, brought the one to an end, but to the other He gave a beginning: so here, having fulfilled the Jewish baptism, He at the same time opens also the doors of that of the Church; as on one table then, so in one river now, He had both sketched out the shadow, and now adds the truth. For this baptism alone has the grace of the Spirit, but that of John was destitute of this gift. For this very cause in the case of the others that were baptized no such thing came to pass, but only in the instance of Him who was to hand on this; in order that, besides what we have said, you might learn this also, that not the purity of the baptizer, but the power of the baptized, had this effect. Not until then, assuredly, were either the heavens opened, nor did the Spirit make His approach. Because henceforth He leads us away from the old to the new polity, both opening to us the gates on high, and sending down His Spirit from thence to call us to our

country there; and not merely to call us, but also with the greatest mark of dignity. For He has not made us angels and archangels, but He has caused us to become sons of God, and beloved, and so He draws us on towards that portion of ours.

Having then all this in your mind, show forth a life worthy of the love of Him who calls you, and of your citizenship in that world, and of the honor that is given you. Crucified as you are to the world, and having crucified it to yourself, show yourself with all strictness a citizen of the city of the heavens. And do not, because your body is not translated unto heaven, suppose that you have anything to do with the earth; for you have your Head abiding above. Yea with this very purpose the Lord, having first come here and having brought His angels, did then, taking you with Him, depart there; that even before your going up to that place, you might understand that it is possible for you to inhabit earth as it were heaven.

Let us then keep watch over that noble birth, which we received from the beginning; and let us every day seek more and more the palaces there, and account all that is here to be a shadow and a dream. For so, had any king among those on earth, finding you poor and a beggar, made you suddenly his son, never would you have thought upon your cottage, and your cottage's mean appointments. Yet surely in that case the difference is not much. Do not then either in this case take account of any of the former things, for you are called unto much greater. For both He who calls is the Lord of the angels, and the good things that are given surpass all both word and thought. Since not from earth to earth does He remove you, as the king does, but from earth to heaven, and from a mortal nature to an immortal, and to glory unspeakable, then only possible to be properly manifested, when we shall actually enjoy it.

Now then, having to partake of such blessings, do I see you minding money, and clinging to the pomp which is here? And do you not esteem all that is seen to be more vile than beggars rags? And how will you appear worthy of this honor? And what excuse will you have to plead? Or rather, what punishment will you not have to suffer, who after so great a gift art running to your former vomit? For no longer are you punished merely as a man, but as a son of God that has sinned; and the greatness of your honor becomes a mean of bringing a sorer punishment on you. Since we too punish not equally slaves that do wrong, and sons committing the same offense; and most of all when they have received some great kindness from us.

For if he who had paradise for his portion, for one disobedience underwent such dreadful things after his honor; we, who have received Heaven, and have become joint heirs with the Only Begotten, what excuse shall we have, for running to the serpent after the dove? For it will be no longer, Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return, Genesis 3:19 and you till the ground, and those former words, that will be said to us; but what is far more grievous than these, the outer darkness, Matthew 25:30 the bonds that may not be burst, the venomous worm, the gnashing of teeth; and this with great reason. For he that is not made better even by so great a benefit, would justly suffer the most extreme, and a yet more grievous punishment. Elias once opened and shut Heaven, but that was to bring down rain, and restrain it; whereas to you the heaven is not so opened, but in order for you to ascend there; and what is yet more, not to ascend only, but to lead up others also, if you will; such great confidence and power has He bestowed on you in all that is His.

5. Forasmuch then as our house is there, there let us store up all, and leave nothing here, lest we lose it. For here, though you put a lock on it, and doors, and bars, and set thousands of servants to watch it; though you get the better of all the crafty ones, though you escape the eyes of the envious, the worms, the wasting that comes of time; which is impossible -- death at any rate you will never escape, but will be

deprived of all those things in one moment of time; and not deprived of them only, but will have to transfer them into the hands often of your very enemies. Whereas if you would transfer them into that house, you will be far above all. For there is no need to apply either key, or doors, or bars; such is the virtue of that city, so inviolable is this place, and by nature inaccessible to corruption and all wickedness.

How then is it not of the utmost folly, where destruction and waste is the lot of all that is stored, there to heap up all, but where things abide untouched and increase, there not to lay up even the least portion; and this, when we are to live there forever? For this cause the very heathens disbelieve the things that we say, since our doings, not our sayings, are the demonstration which they are willing to receive from us; and when they see us building ourselves fine houses, and laying out gardens and baths, and buying fields, they are not willing to believe that we are preparing for another sort of residence away from our city.

For if this were so, say they, they would turn to money all they have here, and lay them up beforehand there; and this they divine from the things that are done in this world. For so we see those who are very rich getting themselves houses and fields and all the rest, chiefly in those cities in which they are to stay. But we do the contrary; and with all earnest zeal we get possession of the earth, which we are soon after to leave; giving up not money only, but even our very blood for a few acres and tenements: while for the purchase of Heaven we do not endure to give even what is beyond our wants, and this though we are to purchase it at a small price, and to possess it forever, provided we had once purchased it.

Therefore I say we shall suffer the utmost punishment, departing there naked and poor; or rather it will not be for our own poverty that we shall undergo these irremediable calamities, but also for our making others to be such as ourselves. For when heathens see them that have partaken of so great mysteries earnest about these matters, much more will they cling themselves to the things heaping much fire upon our head. For when we, who ought to teach them to despise all things that appear, do ourselves most of all urge them to the lust of these things; when shall it be possible for us to be saved, having to give account for the perdition of others? Do you not hear Christ say, that He left us to be for salt and for lights in this world, in order that we may both brace up those that are melting in luxury, and enlighten them that are darkened by the care of wealth? When therefore we even cast them into more thorough darkness, and make them more dissolute, what hope shall we have of salvation? There is none at all; but wailing and gnashing our teeth, and bound hand and foot, we shall depart into the fire of hell, after being full well worn down by the cares of riches.

Considering then all these things, let us loose the bands of such deceit, that we may not at all fall into those things which deliver us over to the unquenchable fire. For he that is a slave to money, the chains both here and there will have him continually liable to them; but he that is rid of this desire will attain to freedom from both. Unto which that we also may attain, let us break in pieces the grievous yoke of avarice, and make ourselves wings toward Heaven; by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might forever and ever. Amen.

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