

Day 1: Matthew 3:11-12 *'I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'*

John's baptism was a call for people to repent. Repentance is a change of mind along with a change in behavior. It means "turn around," stop going in the direction you are going because that direction will end in your destruction. John's baptism was a sign of the coming judgment. The one coming with "fire" brings the judgment itself. The judgment would purify the righteous and burn up the unrighteous. Here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, John's call is to the people to turn around and look for the kingdom that is in the other direction. Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!

Question: Why does John believe he is not worthy to carry "His" sandals?

Challenge: Why do you think we use water in our baptism services?

Scripture: Mark 1:1-11

Day 2: Matthew 3:13

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

Jesus begins His public ministry by going to see John where he was baptizing at the Jordan River. John will be the one to announce to the world that the Savior has come to call all humanity to Him. It is fitting that Jesus began His ministry where John was baptizing. John had been telling people that the time had come for them to repent so that they might "see" the messiah. John baptized in the Jordan near the place where the people of Israel crossed the Jordan centuries ago to take possession of the Promised Land. They had to go through the Jordan to reach the Promised Land and John is calling them back to the Jordan so that they can once again go to the Promised Land.

Question: How old do you think Jesus was when he was baptized?

Challenge: In the United Methodist Church we baptize in one of three ways: *sprinkling* (a small amount of water), *pouring* (a larger amount poured on the head), and *immersion* (the whole person going under the water). If you were being baptized which one would you want and why?

Scripture: Luke 3:2-23

Day 3: Matthew 3:14

John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'

John recognizes that Jesus does not need to repent and does not need to go into the water. John sees before anyone else that Jesus comes from God. John's question allows Jesus to state that He is obedient to God's will.

Question: Do you think that Jesus ever baptized anyone? Why or why not?

Challenge: Think back on a baptism service you have been to - what was the most meaningful part?

Scripture: John 1:19-37

Day 4: Matthew 3:15

But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented.

Righteous here means doing the revealed will of God. Fulfill means to simply perform. Both John and Jesus are linked in carrying out God's plan of salvation for the world. God's plan includes the baptism of Jesus. The Gospel does not get into what was the motive behind the act or what was on the mind of either participant. The key is that they carry out God's commands and that they are obedient to God's commands. In the Gospels, as important as the people involved are (and we do not get much more important than Jesus), all their actions point to their obedience to God's commands. The Creator, not the creature, is important.

Question: How do you feel about the concept of obedience?

Challenge: How do you see yourself being obedient to God's will?

Scripture: Acts 2:24-32

Day 5: Matthew 3:16

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

The image of the dove is found at some critical moments in the Bible. At creation the Spirit of God went across the chaotic waters (Genesis 1:2). The dove flew out from the ark across the dangerous water (Genesis 8:8) and brought back an olive branch. In both of these events the dove is a sign of the new creation. The appearance of the dove in the midst of chaos is the sign that God is creating order out of chaos. The appearance of the dove in Matthew is the sign that the new kingdom has come. Out of the chaos of the world a new creation is emerging.

Question: Why a dove?

Challenge: When do you think of water as soothing, dangerous, and comforting?

Scripture: Romans 6

Day 6: Matthew 3:17

And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved with whom I am well pleased.'

The term "Beloved" is used in Isaiah 42:1 (in Isaiah it is translated *servant*). Matthew has now completed his introduction of Jesus. He has shown his lineage and divine birth in chapters 1 and 2, now he shows the complete picture of Jesus as the Son of God and the suffering servant. Jesus' baptism is a matter of obedience and receiving of the Spirit. It is the same with our baptism. Jesus was declared Son of God when he was baptized. Christians are declared to be God's children in the act of baptism.

Question: Why was God pleased with Jesus?

Challenge: Do you feel a sense of calling by your baptism? And called to do what?

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1-10, Psalm 2:7