

## Why Was Jesus Baptized?

The baptism of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-22, raises profound theological questions. Why would the sinless Son of God submit to a baptism of repentance? What purpose did this act serve in the redemptive mission of Christ? Jesus' baptism carries deep significance, affirming key aspects of his identity and mission. Below, we will explore five primary reasons for Jesus' baptism, grounding our reflections in Scripture.

### 1. To Fulfill All Righteousness

When John the Baptist hesitated to baptize Jesus, saying, *"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"* (Matthew 3:14), Jesus responded, *"Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness"* (Matthew 3:15). This statement encapsulates the purpose of Christ's baptism.

From a Biblical perspective, the fulfillment of all righteousness is not merely an abstract ideal but a necessary aspect of Christ's active obedience. As the Second Adam (Romans 5:12-21), Jesus came to fulfill the righteous demands of the law that Adam failed to meet. His baptism symbolized his identification with God's redemptive plan, including his perfect obedience to the Father's will. By being baptized, Jesus demonstrated his submission to the covenantal requirements of righteousness on behalf of his people, paving the way for their justification (2 Corinthians 5:21).

### 2. To Identify with Sinners

Although Jesus had no sin, his baptism by John signified his identification with the sinners he came to save. Isaiah 53:12 prophesied that the Messiah would be *"numbered with the transgressors."* By undergoing a baptism intended for repentance, Jesus identified himself with humanity's sin and guilt, though he himself was sinless (Hebrews 4:15).

This identification with sinners foreshadows his ultimate work on the cross, where he bore the sin of his people as their substitute (1 Peter 2:24). His baptism served as a visible and public declaration of his role as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, emphasizes this aspect of Christ's baptism:

*"Christ's baptism was a sort of entrance into his office, and it was in no other respect than that he might fulfill the duty which he owed to us—that he might acquit himself as a faithful servant of God."*

### 3. To Inaugurate His Public Ministry

Jesus' baptism marked the formal beginning of his public ministry. Until this point, Jesus had lived in relative obscurity in Nazareth. His baptism signaled his public manifestation as the Messiah and the start of his redemptive mission.

At his baptism, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove (Matthew 3:16). This visible anointing by the Holy Spirit fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah being empowered by the Spirit for his mission (Isaiah 42:1, Isaiah 61:1-2). It also authenticated Jesus as the Christ—the Anointed One.

Furthermore, the Father's voice from heaven declared, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). This divine pronouncement affirmed Jesus' identity as the Son of God and his role as the Servant of the Lord (cf. Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 42:1).

### 4. To Prefigure His Death and Resurrection

Baptism, even in its earliest practice, symbolized death to sin and newness of life (Romans 6:3-4). For Jesus, his baptism foreshadowed his own death, burial, and resurrection. By going into the waters of baptism, Jesus prefigured his descent into death on behalf of sinners. By emerging from the waters, he symbolized his future resurrection and victory over sin and death.

In Luke 12:50, Jesus refers to his impending suffering on the cross as a "baptism":

*"I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!"*

Thus, Jesus' baptism was not merely symbolic; it was prophetic. It anticipated the greater baptism of judgment he would endure on the cross, drinking the cup of God's wrath in full (Mark 10:38-39).

### **5. To Establish a Pattern for Christian Baptism**

Jesus' baptism also serves as a model for Christian baptism. While the baptism of John was one of repentance in preparation for the coming kingdom, Christian baptism signifies union with Christ in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12).

By being baptized, Jesus sanctified the waters of baptism for his people. His act provides the foundation for the sacrament of baptism in the New Covenant, which signifies and seals the believer's inclusion in Christ, the remission of sins, and the promise of new life by the Spirit (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38-39).

### **A Rich Theological Act**

Jesus' baptism was a multifaceted event, rich in theological significance. It revealed his obedience to the Father, his identification with sinners, his anointing by the Spirit, his prefiguration of the cross, and his establishment of Christian baptism.

Though sinless, Jesus willingly submitted to baptism to *"fulfill all righteousness"*—a righteousness imputed to all who trust in him. His baptism, like every act of his earthly ministry, was for our salvation and the glory of God. In the words of the great hymn by Charles Wesley:

*"He left His Father's throne above,  
So free, so infinite His grace!  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race."*

Let us, then, marvel at the beauty of Christ's obedience and rejoice in the salvation he accomplished for his people.



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