

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Devotional Reading: John 1:29–34

Background Scripture: Acts 2:38, 41; Romans 6:1–14;

1 Corinthians 11:23–29

Today's Scripture: Matthew 3:13–17; 28:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–29

I. Tradition of Baptism

Matthew 3:13–17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

¹⁵ Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

13. Because he grew up in Nazareth of Galilee, Jesus travels south to Judea and the banks of the Jordan River. This is where John the Baptist is baptizing and preaching about the coming Messiah. Jesus' trip is not a sightseeing journey; he comes to be baptized by John.

14. John, however, knows Jesus' identity. John identifies himself—a mere man—as one needing to be baptized, but by Jesus. John had predicted the arrival of one “whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” (John 1:27). The words of his question are incredulous: *do you come to*

me? This is not a rebuke but a surprise. John reveals humility, for he considers himself unworthy to baptize Jesus, as God's anointed king.

15. Jesus replies to John's reticence by encouraging the baptism *now*. The immediacy of Jesus' baptism is necessary because of what it achieves and signifies.

Jesus' baptism has three implications. First, it initiates his public ministry. Second, Jesus' ministry fulfills messianic expectations and supports John's preaching of repentance. Third, through baptism, Jesus identifies with the people he comes to save: sinful humans in need of repentance.

16a. The Gospels do not dwell on the method of Jesus' baptism, only that he *was baptized* by John in the Jordan River. Since the Greek word for “baptize” is the same as “wash,” flowing water is a fitting image of cleansing (every other person coming to John was repenting for sins).

16b. Scripture speaks of the opening of the heavens as a way to indicate divine revelation. The opening of *heaven* here leads to two miraculous occurrences.

First, Jesus sees the *Spirit of God descending like a dove*. It is not necessarily the case that any actual bird is present, since the wording does not require one. The Gospel of John recounts the event from the viewpoint of John the Baptist,

who also witnesses the descending Spirit (John 1:32). The Spirit is not a bird, but a dove is the most fitting comparison for what Jesus and John see.

The coming of the Spirit and *alighting on* Jesus is a powerful representation of God's approval. It shows his status as God's servant. Jesus receives the Holy Spirit so that he might fulfill the mission of his heavenly Father. Later, Jesus will empower followers to receive the same Spirit.

17. The second miraculous occurrence is *a voice from heaven*—an indication that the words come from God. The proclamation of Jesus as *my Son, whom I love* shows that the voice belongs to the Father. Therefore, this scene has all three persons of the Trinity: God the Father is *well pleased*, giving approval of his Son and his ministry; Jesus displays obedience and willingness to follow the will of his heavenly Father; and the Spirit descends to authorize and empower Christ's work.

II. Making Disciples

Matthew 28:19–20

¹⁹ “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

19a. Following Jesus' resurrection, he brings the disciples to a mountaintop in Galilee. Jesus proclaims his universal rule: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18).

Since Jesus possesses all authority, he commands the disciples to *go* to continue their ministry of God's kingdom. Their task is disciple-making, teaching others of the resurrected Christ. Jesus had focused his earthly ministry on the people of Israel. But now Jesus expands the

ministry of the kingdom to include people from *all nations*.

19b. In this verse, Jesus does not explain every aspect of baptism but says it should occur *in the name* of the triune God: *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. Baptism signifies entry into the community of God's people and identifies a person as “*in Christ*” (Romans 6:3–4). It accompanies repentance and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

20a. *Teaching* does not end when someone becomes a disciple. Discipleship requires a lifelong commitment to obey Christ. Through teaching one another, disciples receive Christ as Lord and learn to abide by the words, “*live . . . in him*” (Colossians 2:6–7).

20b. Matthew first presents the birth of Jesus as fulfillment of prophecy: “They will call him Immanuel, . . . God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Now Matthew concludes his Gospel with Jesus' assurance that he will always be with followers as they carry out the task of making disciples, even *to the very end of the age*.

III. Tradition of Communion

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

23a. Paul plants a church in Corinth during his second missionary journey. But the church develops problems regarding how they observe the Lord's Supper.

IV. Warning Disciples

1 Corinthians 11:27–29

The apostle provides instruction and points to his source of tradition: *the Lord*.

23b. Paul recounts the events of the “Last Supper.” He describes it as the *night* in which Jesus *was betrayed*. The memory of Jesus’ betrayal is strong. It set into motion the dramatic events of the Friday of Holy Week. This *bread* is the unleavened bread consumed during Passover.

24. The Greek word *eucharisteo* is behind the phrase *he had given thanks*. This is why some refer to the Lord’s Supper as the Eucharist. It is appropriate, when we observe the Lord’s Supper, to give thanks to God for the sacrifice of Christ.

Jesus links the bread of this meal with his physical *body*. Although churches may use different versions of communion bread, the symbol of breaking bread points to Jesus’ sacrifice.

25. *The cup* symbolizes Christ’s *blood* shed on the cross. Blood is a token of life and sacrifice throughout the Old Testament. Blood that is spilled is a sign of death and the seriousness of sin. The spilling of blood can accompany the making of a covenant—a binding agreement between two parties.

Jesus’ words inaugurate this new agreement, the same covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31. The new covenant restores the relationship between God and his people: instruction shall be written on their hearts and sins forgiven. Thus, sharing the cup prompts *remembrance* of forgiveness through Christ. Like the group of Israelites who made a covenant with God, the Lord’s Supper is for a forgiven people, those saved by his blood. This is the essence of the *new covenant*.

26. When we *eat this bread and drink this cup*, we partake in a meal of remembrance, thanksgiving, and anticipation. We remember *the Lord’s death*, give thanks for the new covenant, and anticipate that Christ will one day *come* again.

²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

27. The rebuke to *whoever eats . . . or drinks . . . in an unworthy manner* addresses the Corinthians’ abuses and mishandling of the meal. Their mishandling had severe consequences.

To participate unworthily is to become guilty of disrespect for Jesus, the behavior of Jesus’ enemies during his trial. The way the Corinthians observe the Lord’s Supper makes a mockery of Christ’s death, disrespecting *the body and blood* of the crucified *Lord*.

28. Paul advises self-examination to avoid unworthy participation. Elsewhere, he invites the Corinthians to examine whether “Christ Jesus is in you.” This occurs through reflection on actions and attitudes, prompting confession and repentance of selfishness and sin.

29. Paul warns against failure to discern *the body of Christ*. This phrase can refer to the elements of the Lord’s Supper and also the assembly of Christ’s followers. The connection anticipates Paul’s use of the metaphor to represent the church.

To partake in the Lord’s Supper is to participate alongside the body of the church. The meal helps us to contemplate Christ’s love, remember our identity as a forgiven people, and celebrate Christ’s redemption. All are sinners in need of a Savior, and there are no privileged diners at the Lord’s table.

Involvement Learning

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Into the Lesson

What do the following items symbolize?

Wedding ring: _____

Yellow rose: _____

Dove: _____

Flag: _____

Cross Necklace: _____

Today we will study two practices of the Christian church. The symbolic elements of these practices help us understand more significant spiritual realities.

Into the Word

Read Matthew 3:13–17. Explain the reason Jesus gave for approaching John for baptism.

Read Matthew 28:19–20. What directive(s) did Jesus give his disciples?

How does each directive in these verses relate to the next one?

What role does baptism play in your church?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–29. What significance did Jesus give to each element in the Lord's Supper?

What is accomplished in us through participation in the meal?

What role does the Lord's Supper play in your church?

Key Text

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
—Matthew 28:19–20

Into Life

Reread Matthew 28:19–20. List ways your congregation can “go” and “teach” others about God’s kingdom.

List ways your congregation can bring the good news of Jesus to people with spiritual, economic, or social needs.

Thought to Remember

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are unifying gifts for God's people.