

RECAP

This week's focus: Jesus is affirmed as God's Son by John the Baptist.

If God's prophets were meant to be peculiar, John the Baptist did not disappoint. Eccentric is too mild a description for this wilderness dwelling preacher who wore odd clothes and lacked both a sense of tact and a balanced diet. His message, though, was right in step with a long line of prophetic predecessors. He called for Israel's repentance and baptized the penitent in the Jordan River. John was awestruck when Jesus came to be baptized by him. Then he watched in amazement as heaven opened wide and the Spirit of God came to rest on Jesus. John and those with him were astonished to hear the voice of the Father Himself broadcasting His divine approval. The community of God had gathered to bear witness to their incarnation.

John the Baptist denied claims that he was Messiah. He baptized others in the Jordan River as a sign of repentance and to prepare the way for the Lord. One day as he stood in the middle of the river, he looked up and saw Jesus. He immediately announced to all who could hear, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

Jesus suddenly stepped into the water and told John to baptize him. Astonished and perplexed John did what he had done many times with so many others, but this time was different. He would take the hands of the Messiah, the Promised One of Israel, sent from heaven, and plunge his body into the murky waters of the Jordan.

In that moment, as Jesus came out of the water, heaven opened. God then affirmed in an audible voice and a descending dove that Jesus was indeed His Son. The scene was surreal. God would use this strange, eccentric desert preacher in the middle of a murky river to publicly announce His Son as the Chosen One.

Jesus himself demonstrated what it meant to follow God in obedience. He submitted himself to baptism as a public proclamation of who He was. God responded by affirming that He was the One; His chosen instrument to save mankind.

Baptism for the believer would become an identifying marker of a life lived in obedience and repentance. Jesus himself commands his followers in Matthew 28:19-20 *"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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

For two thousand years, millions of believers around the world have been identifying with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through baptism. Baptism is a public proclamation of faith in Jesus and an act of obedience to His command. It symbolizes a lifestyle of repentance and new life in Christ.

After his public baptism, Jesus would step out of the Jordan and into the desert to be tested. There he would meet the Adversary who would do everything possible to thwart God's plan. Steady and faithful nothing would distract or detour Jesus from His mission: The mission to bring you back to the Father!

SHARE (5-10 min)

Icebreaker Question: Have you been baptized? If so, why did you get baptized?

STUDY (about 30 min) Read Matthew 3:1-17

1. Reflect on last week's reading and the sermon. Is there any truth that stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?
2. What was John the Baptist's message? Why would that message have surprised the Jewish people he was talking to?
3. Read Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:2-3. What was John the Baptist's role?
4. Read Matthew 3:2. What does it mean to repent and why is repentance important? According to Isaiah 1:16-17, what are the fruits of repentance?
5. Read Matthew 3:13-17, 28:19-20. Why is it important that Jesus modeled and commanded baptism?
6. What is the purpose of baptism according to Romans 6:1-4?
7. Baptism doesn't save you, but it is a symbol of a spiritual truth. What does it symbolize?
8. According to Acts 2:41 and Romans 6:3-5, who should be baptized?
9. John prepared the way for the Lord. How do we prepare the way for the Lord today?
10. Baptism is a sign of repentance and repentance is a lifestyle for the believer. In what area of your life have you been prompted by the Holy Spirit to repent (thinking differently)?

SUPPORT (15 min)

Read James 5:16. Share what God has been teaching you about repentance and confession. Spend some time praying for each other.