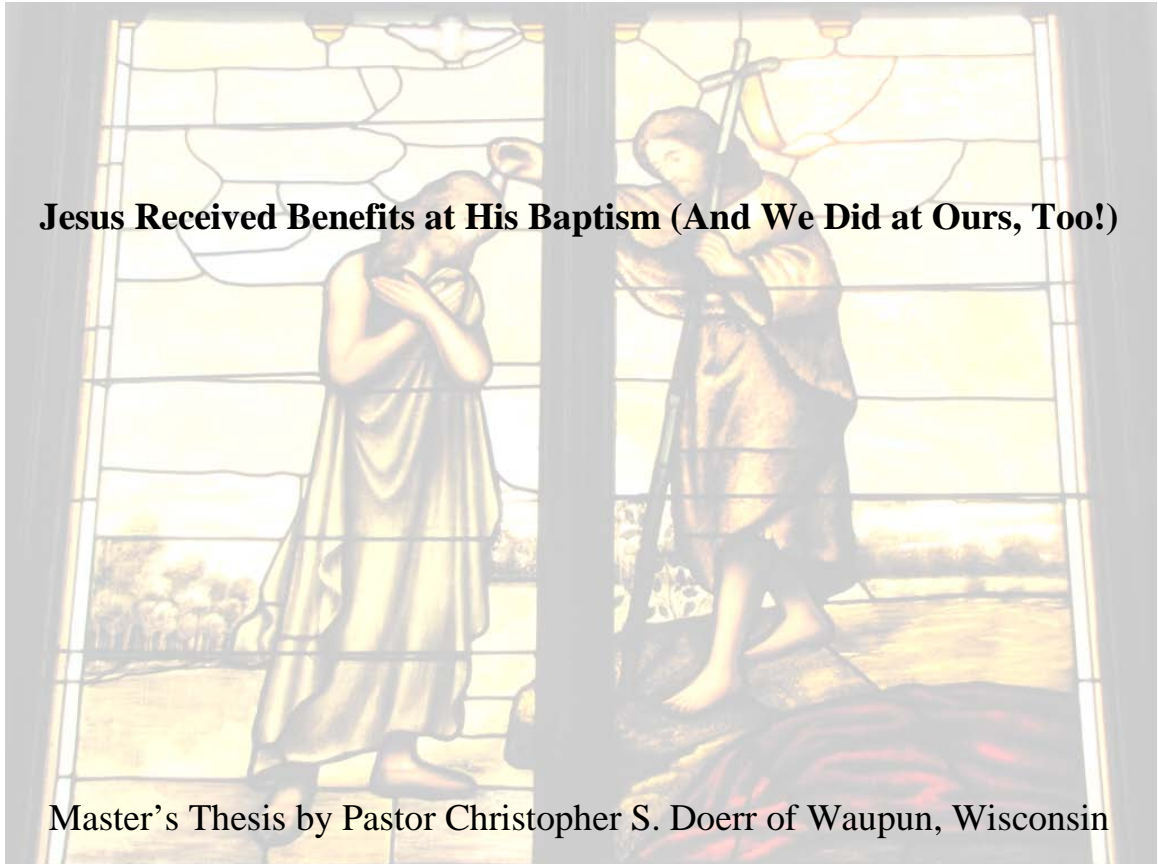


**Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism (And We Did at Ours, Too!)**



Master's Thesis by Pastor Christopher S. Doerr of Waupun, Wisconsin

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## **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, as you spoke from the torn-open heavens at the baptism of your Son, in your mercy, please speak to our hearts through our contemplation of that same baptism, and so lead us to love your Son as much as you do.

Chosen Savior, as you prayed to your Father upon coming up out of the baptismal waters, in your mercy and according to your promises please pray for us now at God's right hand, so that in view of your well-pleasing merits your Father will bless us in our study, even as he blessed you beyond measure during your earthly life.

Holy Spirit, as you anointed Christ with counsel and knowledge, in your mercy, please anoint us with the same and grant us to think only correct thoughts and preach only correct words about the holy mysteries of the Trinity and the incarnation.

High and alone-wise Triune God, we thank you for your grace, which moved you to reveal yourself to us ungrateful sinners. Help us to praise you always and depend on you till the end. Let us never doubt that all three Persons of the Trinity now dwell in our hearts through our own Holy Baptism, nor ever fail to honor you with the bodies you have so washed and made your temple. "Having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" we "draw near to" you in prayer "with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith."<sup>1</sup> Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:22.

## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

An incorrect understanding of Jesus' baptism by John can lead to an incorrect understanding of Jesus' incarnation, his divinity, his state of humiliation, the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' saving work, the meaning of Jesus' title "Christ," the prophecies of Jesus' anointing in Isaiah and the Psalms, the power of baptism for sinners today, and whether Jesus came to be a second law-giver like Moses. What is left of the Christian faith if all of these are misunderstood?

On the other hand, the pastor who preaches correctly on Jesus' baptism has a powerful and joyful opportunity to instruct his people in all these doctrines, vital and central to the faith.

Besides this, Jesus' baptism appears annually in the pericopes,<sup>3</sup> is part of our Bible history curricula for LES and Sunday school, is a key seat of doctrine for demonstrating

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<sup>2</sup> Although I do not agree with all of his subsequent conclusions, as will come up later in the paper, Arthur W. Pink has two lines that are especially fitting here, both as introduction and as another opening prayer: "To apprehend aright, even according to our present limited capacity, the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Redeemer, throws much light on some difficult problems, supplies the key to a number of perplexing passages in the Holy Writ, and better enables us to understand the work of the Spirit in the saint. May we be mercifully preserved from all error as we endeavor to give our best attention to the present theme, and be guided to write that which will glorify our Triune God and edify His dear people." (*The Holy Spirit*. 3<sup>rd</sup> printing. Ann Arbor, MI: Cushing-Malloy, Inc., 1974. p. 28.)

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 3:13-17 is the Gospel for Epiphany in the Eisenach and Thomasius pericopes, for Epiphany 1 in ILCW-A, and for Trinity Sunday in the Synodical Conference pericope. Mark 1:4-11 is the Gospel for Epiphany 1 in ILCW-B. Luke 3:15-17,21-22 is the Gospel for Epiphany 1 in ILCW-C, and 3:21-33 for Trinity Sunday in the Soll pericope. John 1:29-34 is the Gospel for Advent 4 in the Synodical Conference, and 1:29-41 for Advent 2 in ILCW-A. Acts 10:34-38 is a lesson for Epiphany 1 in ILCW-A,B,C, and 10:34-43 for Easter Sunday in ILCW-A. (ed., Ernst H. Wendland. *Sermon Texts*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1984. pp. 131, 135, 138, 141, 145.)

The accounts of Jesus' baptism are conspicuously absent from the Historic pericope, but Martin Luther considered Matthew 3:13-17 one of the key Gospel readings for Epiphany and thus preached on it several times. In his 1534 house sermon for the Day of Epiphany, he said, "*Das höchste und größte Wunderwerk, davon man auf dies Fest predigen soll, ist, daß Christus getauft ist.*" ("Dr. Martin Luthers Haus-Postille nach Georg Rörer." *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*. ed., Joh. Georg Walch. St. Louis, MO: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag. vol. 13b. p. 1574.—The highest and greatest miracle you should preach about on this festival is that Christ has been baptized.)

J. H. C. Fritz only partially explains the absence in the pericope, "While *the baptism of Jesus* was made the subject of sermons on the festival of Epiphany in the Eastern Church, the *coming of the Magi* to worship the new-born Savior at Bethlehem, Matt. 2, 1-12, was finally used as the Gospel pericope for this Sunday in the Western Church." [italics his] ("Epiphany: Matt. 3, 13-17." *The Thomasius*

the scriptural teaching of the Trinity in catechetics and membership classes, and is important simply as the beginning-point of Jesus' public ministry.

Therefore, the Lutheran pastor should not and cannot avoid the topic of Jesus' baptism in his preaching and teaching as something difficult, doctrine-heavy, impractical, or "old hat."

Nor should the pastor despise an opportunity to make sure that he himself understands Jesus' baptism correctly, especially when it is a topic concerning which there is not unanimity in our synod's publications or preaching.

One of our prominent synodical fathers, John Schaller<sup>4</sup> (our Seminary's second president, whose textbook on Christology has been reprinted just this past year by our publishing house), has written that Jesus neither needed nor received any "additional spiritual endowments" from either his baptism or the descent of the Spirit immediately following it.<sup>5</sup> In what follows, I intend to show from Scripture that this sainted man was unclear in writing that. He overstated his case. I pray that my study will lead to a greater correctness and unanimity among us in how we present to God's people this glorious event from our Savior's pathway to the cross.

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*Gospel Selections: An Exegetico-Homiletical Treatment.* ed., L. Fuerbringer. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1937. p.89.)

<sup>4</sup> Born Dec. 10, 1859. Died Feb. 7, 1920. Served as professor, Inspector, and President of Dr. Martin Luther College; President of the Wauwatosa Seminary, 1908-1920; and author of *The Books of Books*, *Pastoral Practice*, and *Biblical Christology*. (Morton A. Schroeder. "Sound Theologian: Loving Father." *Northwestern Lutheran*. vol. 84, no. 4. Apr., 1997.)

<sup>5</sup> For his exact comments see Part Nine of the paper.

**Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism—Part One: The setting of Jesus’ baptism allows us to say so.**

A look at how the synoptic gospels lead into and introduce the account of Jesus’ baptism sets important parameters for our understanding of the baptism itself.

On the one hand, we are clearly told here not to hold to an adoptionist, kenoticist, or rationalist view of Jesus and his baptism. All three views, adoptionism, kenoticism, and rationalism, would deny that, at least before his baptism, Jesus was true God with all divine attributes and powers. However, Jesus was almighty, eternal, holy Lord, even before his baptism. We see this in the statements John made in his preaching and in trying to deter Jesus from being baptized.

Note: We will not understand why Schaller made his unclear statements about whether Jesus received spiritual benefit from his baptism, unless we have some familiarity with these three incorrect views, because Schaller made his statements in an effort to combat such views. Also, an understanding of these heresies is vital lest, in correcting Schaller, we speak incorrectly about Christology ourselves.

*Adoptionism* is the view that Jesus wasn’t God or the Christ until his baptism when the divine nature came upon him.<sup>6</sup> False teachers promoted this view early on in the history of the Christian church. Several of the early church fathers’ references to Jesus’ bap-

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Peppard cleverly uses Octavian’s adoption by Julius Caesar into the imperial line and into the status of being a “son of god” as an illustration to make a contrast between “low-Christology adoptionism” and what Mark was saying about Jesus’ divine sonship in the baptism account: “it does not appear to be a ‘low’ Christology at all. To the contrary, adoption is how the most powerful man in the world gained his power.” However, Peppard does not take the opportunity to rule out adoptionism *per se*. (“The Eagle and the Dove: Roman Imperial Sonship and the Baptism of Jesus (Mark 1.9-11).” *New Testament Studies*. vol. 56. 2010. pp. 440-441.)

tism are in the context of refuting this error.<sup>7</sup> Still today some accuse the holy evangelists of teaching adoptionism, or at least leaving room for it.<sup>8</sup>

*Kenoticism* is the view that, in the incarnation, the Son emptied himself of many of his divine attributes. But then, at his baptism or anointing, he received the divine aid that he lacked (because he had emptied himself). He in turn used that divine aid to carry out his saving work. You will notice that the effect of the anointing of Jesus ends up pretty much the same for an adoptionist as for a kenoticist: for both, Jesus had no divine power beforehand and lots of it afterward.

A “focus on kenosis” is not just a doctrinal fad from a few centuries past, but a heresy still promoted. For example, as recently as 1958, an author named Norman F. Langford used kenoticism to try to explain how Jesus could have made scientific errors in his preaching (although he says this far more euphemistically) and still have been true God:

There is no picture of a superman in the gospel narratives. In the light of what we have been saying, we need not shrink even from regarding Jesus as in a very real sense a child of his time. If he really emptied himself and became an actual man, no doubt he shared the limited knowledge available to his contemporaries, and held opinions (about science, for example) that were prevalent in his day.<sup>9</sup>

More recently, the 2002 book *Across the Spectrum* counted kenoticism as a view “discussed and embraced *within evangelicalism*.”<sup>10</sup> The book’s presentation of what it considers scripturally acceptable kenoticism is not as scriptural as it tries to paint itself to be.

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<sup>7</sup> cp. Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*. bk. I, ch. 7, par. 2; ch. 14, par. 6; ch. 26, par. 1; bk. III, ch. 11, par. 3; ch. 16, par. 1; ch. 17, par. 1.

<sup>8</sup> For examples see the bibliographical footnote in Charles G. Dennison, “How Is Jesus the Son of God? Luke’s Baptism Narrative and Christology.” (*Calvin Theological Journal*. vol. 17, no. 1. April, 1982. p. 7, fn. 8.) A. E. J. Rawlinson replies somewhat to such modern allegations in his appended note “On the alleged ‘Adoptionism’ of Primitive Christianity.” (*The New Testament Doctrine of the Christ: The Bampton Lectures for 1926*. New York, NY: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1929. pp. 265-269.) cp. also “Is John’s Christology Adoptionist?” by Francis Watson, whose answer is “Maybe.” (*The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*. ed., L. D. Hurst & N. T. Wright. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987. pp. 113-124.)

<sup>9</sup> *Barriers to Belief*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1958. p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory A. Boyd & Paul R. Eddy. *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002. p. 7.

It says Jesus retained all his divine attributes, but then, instead of saying something like, “he did not generally use them,” it says he no longer had the “ability to use” them:

Jesus did not cease to be God, of course, and his divine attributes did not cease to exist. But the Second Person of the Trinity temporarily relinquished his ability to use these attributes.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, later in that chapter, it becomes clear that the kenoticists consider Jesus to have relinquished more than just his “ability to use” his divine attributes:

Without ceasing to be God, Jesus divested himself of some of the riches, glory, rights, and attributes of his divinity in order to invest himself fully in humanity.

It seems clear, therefore, that as a full human being, Jesus was not omniscient. He had a finite mind, for this is an essential part of what it means to be human.

Kenotic Christology empowers believers to take Jesus’ humanity seriously. There simply is no way to affirm coherently that Jesus was a human in every respect while also affirming that he was omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent while here on earth.

He was omniscient, but just didn’t always use his omniscience? The Evangelical kenoticists condemn that scriptural view as incoherent. The only “coherent” position is that Jesus was not “omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent while here on earth.” It is sad to read that such a position is publicly embraced by many modern Evangelicals.

Some have accused Luther and us Lutherans of kenoticism. For example, Francis Joseph Hall wrote,

The seeds of modern kenoticism were sown by Martin Luther, although he did not adopt the idea that the Divine nature was changed by the incarnation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> *The Kenotic Theory: Considered with Particular Reference to Its Anglican Form and Arguments*. New York, NY: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1898. p. 12. Reprinted for me through amazon.com by BiblioLife LLC, Charleston, SC.—Hall levels this accusation against Luther because his own solution against kenoticism is a Calvinistic separation of the two natures, which says the communication of attributes is in name only (p. 44), and which Luther often and publicly condemned and Melancthon flatly rejected too, at least at the Marburg Colloquy. (cp. Hermann Sasse. *This Is My Body: Luther’s Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing



Friedrich Loofs, in his article on “Kenosis” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, seems at first to be responding to the charge that Hall and others had leveled against Luther:

Luther’s own teaching has so many sides that great care is needed to avoid misrepresenting him. Certain points may be brought out safely, however. (1) Luther adhered with equal firmness, during his whole public career, to the true divinity and the true humanity of the one historic person of Christ. (2) He was never inclined to bring the two into relation by anything like the theory of Thomasius [whose 1845 book, *Beiträge zur kirchlichen Christologie*, “inaugurated the triumph of the modern conception of the kenosis,”]<sup>13</sup> and as early as 1518 gave an exegesis of Phil. ii. 7, which would cut all Scriptural ground from under such a theory. . . .<sup>14</sup>

However, further on Loofs hypothesizes that some of Luther’s logic and assertions would have led to a new Christology like kenoticism, except that loyalty to tradition held Luther and his followers back:

. . . sober thought must be convinced that the root of his doctrine was not in the teaching as to the two natures into which his historic position forced it to grow. (6) It is rather the ultimate datum of his Christology, that the historic person of Jesus was and is the God of revelation. The essential feature of his Christology is really this understanding of the revealing condescension of God, this harking back to “simple-modalistic” ideas. In connection with the notion of the dynamic indwelling of God in the man Jesus, this understanding of the historic personality of Jesus might have led to a new construction of Christology—if theologians had not been bound to the old tradition which constructed from above downward and to the scheme of the natures.

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House, 1959. p. 227.) In other words, Hall says that omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence were never and will never be communicated to the human nature, except verbally. Hall also transforms the Council of Constantinople’s doctrine of two wills in Christ (680 A.D.) into an idea of “two consciousnesses” of Christ (pp. 48-51), so that in one consciousness Christ could be ignorant of some things, while in the other consciousness he was omniscient. This deficiency in Hall may remind us that there is something good behind kenoticism, if it is ever proper to say such a thing about any Christological heresy, that is, kenoticism at least displays a healthy and steadfast dissatisfaction with those who “regard the divine and human natures in our Lord as simply placed side by side” and “speak of Him as acting now in the one and now in the other.” (William Sanday. *Christologies Ancient and Modern*. Oxford, Great Britain: Clarendon Press, 1910.)

<sup>13</sup> Hoenecke has a succinct summary and rebuttal of Thomasius. (Adolf Hoenecke. *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics: Volume III*. transl. by James Langebartels. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003. p. 108f.)

<sup>14</sup> Ed.-in-chief, Samuel Macauley Jackson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1956. vol. VI. pp. 315-318.

These accusations are unfounded.

For one thing, as I will show later in the paper in quotations from his sermons, Luther did not at all hold to a kenoticist's view of Jesus' baptism. In none of his printed sermons about Jesus' baptism did I find Luther say anything about Jesus receiving power or attributes from the Holy Spirit either through or at his baptism. I was looking for him to, because then he could have been a good ally in demonstrating my thesis.

For another thing, Lutheranism has a completely developed system of Christological doctrine, a system which is "bound to the old tradition" only because that tradition agrees with Scripture. Because we are bound by Scripture, we refuse to speak like kenoticists. While kenoticists say that, during the state of humiliation, the Son of God relinquished some of his divine attributes, this is not what Lutherans say. We would object to a term like "relinquished."<sup>15</sup> For example, the *Formula of Concord* says,

[T]his majesty He had immediately at His conception, even in His mother's womb, but, as the apostle testifies [Phil. 2, 7], laid it aside; and, as Dr. Luther explains, He kept it concealed in the state of His humiliation, and did not employ it always, but only when he wished.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Would we still object to a word like "relinquished" if the object of the verb were something besides "divine attributes" or an example of a divine attribute? For example, in a devotional book on Philippians 2, Evangelical Pastor Bill Hybels used this verb to say of Jesus, "He chose to descend, to relinquish His divine rights." (*Descending into Greatness*. Co-written with Rob Wilkins. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993. p. 60.) That sounds more palatable at first take, but is it? Should we Lutherans imitate that way of talking about Christ's state of humiliation? We should not. Having certain rights is an attribute of God. We should rather say that Jesus relinquished constant *use* of his divine rights.

William Sanday notes the same difference in terminology between kenoticists and orthodoxy: "[Dr. Gore] does not hesitate to speak of the 'abandonment', 'real abandonment', or 'surrender' of some of the divine attributes, where a writer like Dr. Bright would speak of voluntary self-restraint in their exercise." (*Christologies*, op. cit., pp. 76-77.) But Sanday made his own pseudo-psychological innovations in his opposition to kenoticism, proposing that the divinity of Christ was real and retained all divine attributes, but was located in Christ's subconscious, so that in his humiliation he could make no more constant or willful use of it than we can make of whatever resources or hidden strength we have in our subconscious. (ibid., p. 159ff.)

<sup>16</sup> Jacob Andreae, Martin Chemnitz, David Chytraeus, Christopher Cornerus, Andrew Musculus, and Nicholas Selnecker. "The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration." Art. VIII, par. 26. *Triglott Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English, Published as a Memorial of the Quadricentenary Jubilee of the Reformation anno Domini 1917 by resolution of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States*. transl. by W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente. 2<sup>nd</sup> reprint. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House. p. 1025.

Note that Jesus is not said to have relinquished his divine majesty, nor to have relinquished either completely or constantly the use of his divine majesty. Rather the Formulators say he had it even from conception. He only “kept it concealed.” He used it sometimes but “did not employ it always.” Similarly, Hoenecke wrote, “The exinanition consists in this: that the God-man did not constantly use or manifest the divine majesty.”<sup>17</sup> Note the word “constantly.” Sometimes, then, even in his exinanition he did “use or manifest the divine majesty.” Schaller explained it the same way, “Hence in the ‘form of a servant’ he abstained from the full and continuous use (χρησις) of his divine majesty as given to his human nature.”<sup>18,19</sup> The last condemnation under Article VIII of the Epitome of the *Formula of Concord* clearly rules out kenoticism and explains how it is destructive to saving faith:

[We reject and condemn w]hen it is taught, and the passage Matt. 28, 18: *All power is given unto Me*, etc., is thus interpreted and blasphemously perverted, namely, that all power in heaven and on earth was restored, that is, delivered again to Christ according to the divine nature, at the resurrection and His ascension to heaven, as though He had also according to His divinity laid this aside and abandoned it in His state of humiliation. By this doctrine not only the words of the testament of Christ are perverted, but also the way is prepared for the accursed Arian heresy, so that finally the eternal Deity of Christ is denied, and thus Christ, and with Him our salvation, are entirely lost if this false doctrine were not firmly contradicted from the immovable foundation of the divine Word and our simple Christian faith.<sup>20</sup>

*Rationalists* have expressed various views of Jesus’ baptism. This is a typical view of theirs: upon hearing John’s powerful preaching and then being baptized himself, Jesus, a

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<sup>17</sup> op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>18</sup> John Schaller. *Biblical Christology: A Study in Lutheran Dogmatics*. revised by Siegbert Becker, Wilbert Gawrisch, Joel Gerlach, and Heinrich Vogel. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1981. p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> cp. also Franz Pieper, who wrote that Jesus only “relinquished full use of the divine majesty.” (*Christian Dogmatics: Volume II*. transl. by Theodore Engelder and John T. Mueller. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1951. p. 294)

<sup>20</sup> *Triglot*, op. cit., p. 827.

mere man, had some kind of religious experience (perhaps even some kind of transcendent vision) which awakened him to the possibility that he could live the rest of his life as a prophet for God, a possibility of which he had previously been largely unaware.<sup>21</sup> Although they deny many other events reported in the Gospels, rationalists speak in favor of the “historicity” of Jesus’ baptism by John, for two reasons. One is that all four evangelists report it. The other seems to hold more weight for them: Matthew seems (to the rationalists) to have such difficulty fitting Jesus’ baptism into his Christological views. If it hadn’t really happened, he would have just omitted it, rather than “force” it to fit his schema by “inventing” the objections of John and “inserting” them into the account. Therefore rationalist critics say things like,

What really happened at Jesus’ baptism? We can be quite sure that Jesus was baptized by John, if only because his baptism caused such problems for the later church . . . The *fact* of the baptism itself, therefore, is a bed-rock historical datum.<sup>22</sup>

That last sentence sounds like a *confession* of faith, but it is only a *concession* of arrogant human reason.<sup>23</sup> Some rationalists even seem willing to allow that Jesus may have heard

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<sup>21</sup> F. W. Wenzel, interestingly enough, in criticizing such rationalist views, does allow that the preaching of John may have had such a revelatory effect on Jesus: “We admit that in the human life a time must have come when He for the first time realized that He was the Messiah. But when that time was and just how the realization was brought about, who can tell? Possibly when John started to preach and baptize. At all events, Christ knew before His baptism that He was the Messiah, or He would not have come to be baptized. . . . to be the Messiah, was a knowledge that could not have come from human speculation, but must have been given to Him from above.” (*The Wenzel Commentary: An Exegetical Study, Based on a Harmony of the Gospels.* ed., Martin H. Wenzel. Bemidji, MN: Arrow Printing, 1986. p. 77)—Pastor Wenzel was too generous to the rationalists on this point, however. Jesus had known he was the Messiah long before John began preaching: he knew already at age twelve, when he said to his mother that the Temple was his “Father’s house,” Luke 2:49.

<sup>22</sup> Joel Marcus. “Jesus’ Baptismal Vision.” *New Testament Studies.* Vol.41, No.4. October, 1995. p. 512. (cp. also Howard Clark Kee [on Matthew, p. 613] and Lindsey P. Pherigo [on Mark, p. 646] in *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible: Introduction and Commentary for Each Book of the Bible Including the Apocrypha.* ed., Charles M. Laymon. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971.)

<sup>23</sup> D. O. Wenthe has a memorable reply to the rationalists, “The idea that the early Christians and disciples freely created and shaped episodes in Jesus’ life springs not from the Jewish soil of Palestine, but rather from the desk of a German professor’s study.” (“The Historical-Critical Interpretation of the Baptism of Jesus from the Perspective of Traditional Lutheran Exegesis.” *The Springfielder.* vol. 37, no. 4. March, 1974. pp. 230-240.—The whole article is a nice demonstration, using the account of Je-

a voice and/or seen a dove, at least in his own mind, as if in a religion-induced hallucination.<sup>24</sup> Some say this is “a psychological necessity”:

[I]n a vision at his baptism Jesus receives his call and commission to a public career. Just such a personal experience, amounting to a personal call from God, as Mark here ascribes to Jesus we find in the life of practically every great founder and figure of religion. The great biblical characters had such calls: Amos (7:14-15), Isaiah (6), Jeremiah (1:4-10), Paul (Acts 9:1-19), Peter (Acts 10:9-16), John (Rev. 1:9-20); outside of the Bible are Buddha, Mohammed, Luther, St. Teresa, George Fox, and a host of others. From some such great moments of revelation, involving an upheaval in the personal life, the great figures in the history of religion have received the decisive impulses and incentives that have brought them into, and carried them through, their life-work. And not a few modern students of the life of Jesus agree that the Jordan vision is a psychological necessity in the experience of Jesus, since the aggressiveness of Jesus’ approach to his work and the intensity of his consecration to his cause must have had their source in the deepest and strongest religious impulses.<sup>25</sup>

Others argue for the reality of some dove/voice experience for Jesus on the basis of anthropology, saying that people in many cultures experience and even cultivate an “altered state of consciousness” in which they are temporarily or permanently possessed by a spirit:

The implications of anthropological research on altered states of consciousness for historical Jesus research are clear: this widespread and well-attested phenomenon, which usually comes to expression in Mediterrane-

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sus’ baptism as a case study, of how different the historical-critical method of the rationalists is from proper grammatical-historical exegesis.)

<sup>24</sup> However, Dale C. Allison Jr. says, “Few still believe that it records a historical fact, in other words, that ‘like a dove’ appears in the Gospels because Jesus or others actually saw something that reminded them of a dove.” (“The Baptism of Jesus and a New Dead Sea Scroll.” *Biblical Archaeology Review*. vol. 18, no. 2. March/April, 1992. p. 58.)

Dennison has a very apt reply to the likes of Allison: “Is this the reason for the emphasis in Luke’s Gospel on the bodily form of the dove? The Holy Spirit’s descent was no less actual than the words of the Father’s voice or Jesus’ baptism by John. Was Luke faced with those who thought the descent and voice were internal illusions, unreal, mere interpretation, unhistorical? How ironic if the critics of the historicalness of these events were the very ones addressed, i.e., the very ones the text sought to refute.” (op. cit., p. 13.)

<sup>25</sup> In his next two paragraphs Walter E. Bundy discounts the view that he here represents (a view especially popularized by F. Lentzen-Deis, who came up with a term for this experience, the *Deute-Vision*) as “not at all a necessary conclusion,” but he does not rule it out. One of the reasons he gives does seem pertinent: “Jesus at the Jordan receives no such personal call and definite commission to a concrete task.” If the main point of Jesus’ experience at the Jordan were a call to ministry, we are not told in the accounts what kind of ministry he was called to. (“The Meaning of Jesus’ Baptism.” *The Journal of Religion*. vol. 7. 1927. pp. 65-66.)

an societies as possession trance [that is, a trance induced by possession, as opposed to just plain “trance,” in which the person’s soul supposedly leaves their body], provides the basis for keeping Jesus’ baptism and baptismal vision together and treating the whole episode as a historically plausible account. For in a culture that allowed for possession trance, individuals could certainly have experienced what the synoptic tradition reports. Furthermore, they would have been socialized to expect that certain rituals induced such experiences.<sup>26</sup>

John the Baptizer’s words refute all three of these heretical views. There is no place for any view of Jesus’ baptism that claims his baptism or the descent of the Spirit somehow turned Jesus into the Savior or made him fully God.

John’s words *before Jesus’ baptism* show this. John called him “one more powerful than I.”<sup>27</sup> He did not say, “one who *will be* more powerful than I *after his baptism.*” John said he was “not to fit to carry” Jesus’ sandals, or untie them.<sup>28</sup> John said Jesus was more deserving to be a baptizer than he was.<sup>29</sup> This refers to holiness that Jesus had even before his baptism. Before the baptism, John said heaven belonged to Jesus, called it “his barn,” and ascribed to Jesus authority both to save and damn.<sup>30</sup> These are divine attributes. No one but God can save and damn.

Even though John’s testimony as recorded in John 1 was given *after Jesus’ baptism*, it is also to the point here. He said he was making “straight the way for the Lord,”<sup>31</sup> not just making straight the way for a mere human being who was especially spiritually self-aware. He called Jesus a man who had existed before him and then a few lines later said that this man is whom he saw the Spirit come down and remain on.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>26</sup> Richard E. DeMaris. “Possession, Good and Bad—Ritual, Effects and Side-Effects: The Baptism of Jesus and Mark 1.9-11 from a Cross-Cultural Perspective.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. Issue 80. December, 2000. pp.14ff.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:27; Acts 13:25.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 3:15.

<sup>30</sup> Luke 3:17.

<sup>31</sup> John 1:23.

<sup>32</sup> John 1:30-32.

descent of the Spirit didn't change him into eternal God. Rather, John had baptized someone who was already eternal God.

In all four gospels, John spoke of Jesus as having been almighty, eternal, and holy Lord even before Jesus had been baptized him.

On the other hand, John's baptism is clearly presented as a means of grace, and, rather than saying, "Since he was God's almighty Son, it wasn't a means of grace for Jesus," the synoptists make the point that he was baptized right along with everyone else.

Through John's baptism the Holy Spirit worked repentance and the forgiveness of sins. We see this from Jesus' nighttime conference with Nicodemus, when he testified that the Holy Spirit worked through John's baptism to give entrance into God's kingdom.<sup>33</sup> Again, the effects that Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 ascribe to John's baptism—repentance and forgiveness—are the same effects that Peter in Acts 2:38 ascribed to Christian baptism. As with Christian baptism,<sup>34</sup> John's baptism required faith in the promises connected with baptism. Some went around preaching what they claimed was John's baptism without preaching faith in John's promises, but the Apostle Paul made clear that their baptism was not John's baptism and was not baptism at all, "Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe. . . .'"<sup>35</sup>

This rules out, for example, Thomas Aquinas' position on John's baptism of Jesus. He wrote that John's baptism did not confer grace or the remission of sins; consequently,

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<sup>33</sup> John 3:5.—Cornelis Bennema points to another verse in the same chapter to show that John's baptism was meant to cleanse people, John 3:25-26, "An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing (περὶ καθαρισμοῦ). They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.'" ("Spirit-Baptism in the Fourth Gospel: A Messianic Reading of John 1,33." *Biblica*. vol. 84, fasc. 1. 2003. p. 39.)

<sup>34</sup> cp. how believing is mentioned in connection with Christian baptism in Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36-37; and Galatians 3:26-27. (cited by C. F. W. Walther. *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: 39 Evening Lectures*. transl., W. H. T. Dau. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. p. 352f.)

<sup>35</sup> Acts 19:4.

it should give us no pause that Christ (who needed neither remission of sins nor, as Thomas claimed, grace) received John's baptism.<sup>36</sup> In fact, John's baptism did confer grace to sinners. Did it, then, also confer some kind of grace upon sinless Jesus? The holy evangelists do not deny that it did.

Instead, the phrases that the synoptic gospels use to introduce the account of Jesus' baptism group him with the others to be baptized. Matthew 3:13's "Then" and Mark 1:9's "during those days" point to the time when the other people were being baptized.<sup>37</sup> Luke 3:21 makes the comparison explicit and emphasizes it with the adverb καί, saying, "when all the people were being baptized, Jesus *also* was baptized."<sup>38</sup>

It is hard to reconcile the nature of John's baptism with the idea that the main purpose of Jesus' baptism was that in it Jesus first publicly took a stand with sinners—a side pur-

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<sup>36</sup> *Summa Theologica*, Tertia Pars, q. 39, art. 2—Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/4039.htm#article1>

Aquinas' position is held by others, e.g., Dr. John Cumming, who says, "We read that those baptized by John were baptized afterward by our blessed Lord. That would prove that they were not recipients of Christian baptism. You read in the Acts that many received Christian baptism who had received the baptism of John; and, therefore, to argue from John's baptism and its meaning, whatever that may be, to Christian baptism, with its particular meaning, is to argue erroneously, for the two things are perfectly distinct." (*Sabbath Evening Readings on the New Testament: St. Matthew*. Boston, MA: John P. Jewett and Co., 1855. p. 18.)—He lists no Bible passages to prove his assertions. Doesn't John 4:2 make it clear that the Lord didn't baptize anyone? As far as "many" in the book of Acts, does he have in mind the baptisms in Acts 19? But Paul made it clear that the men he baptized there had not actually received John's baptism, only a caricature of it.

Luther also made a difference between John's baptism and Christian baptism, in an attempt to explain John's statement, "I baptize you with water," etc.: "*So ist nun der Unterschied der Taufe Christi und Johannis, daß Johannes spricht: 'Ich taufe mit Wasser'; ich gebe nicht den Heiligen Geist, so vergebe ich nicht die Sünde.*" (Auslegung über Joh. Cap. 1-4. "Dr. Martin Luthers Auslegung des Neuen Testaments: Auslegung über die Evangelisten Matthäus, Lucas und Johannes, bis zum sechsten Capitel Johannis (incl.)." Walch, op. cit. vol. 7, p. 1733.—Here then is the distinction between Christ's baptism and John's: John says, "I baptize with water," I do not give the Holy Ghost and so I do not forgive sins.) I'm not sure how Luther reconciled this with his view that John's baptism actually gave Jesus forgiveness for the sins of the world that he was already bearing!

<sup>37</sup> Translations of the baptism accounts, as well as John 1:32 and Acts 10:37-38, are generally my own, from here on.

<sup>38</sup> So Karl Heinrich Rengstorff: "Lk. very emphatically integrates Jesus' baptism into the movement initiated by the Baptist." ("Ἰορδάνης," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. ed., Gerhard Kittel. transl. & ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 2<sup>nd</sup> printing. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993. vol. VI, p. 616.)



pose, perhaps, but not the only or main purpose. A very popular WELS<sup>39</sup> explanation for Jesus' baptism is that it's when Jesus showed that he was choosing to be "identified with sinners." We find this in NPH's *Sermon Studies on the Gospels: Series A*: "Therefore Jesus wants to stand beside his "brothers" in the Jordan. To receive the baptism they are receiving will identify him clearly."<sup>40</sup> It is also what we find in the *Sermon Studies on the Epistles: Series A*:

Jesus reveals himself as the Savior who came to be numbered with the transgressors. He made this disclosure of himself in his baptism. He began to demonstrate how he would identify with sinners and assume their debt and punishment.<sup>41</sup>

Werner Franzmann promotes this idea, too, "Here Jesus steps to your side, takes up your cause, and sees it through to the bitter and victorious end!"<sup>42</sup> And Joel Gerlach: "Jesus' baptism was . . . a way of identifying himself with us."<sup>43</sup> And Victor Prange: "Jesus identifies with the people whom he came to save."<sup>44</sup> And G. Jerome Albrecht: "Jesus' baptism identified him with the world of sinners."<sup>45</sup> While these men may not say it is the only reason Jesus got baptized, in many cases, they offer their readers or listeners no other reason.

Let me be clear that in what follows in this paragraph I am not accusing any of our men of sacramentarianism, especially not the esteemed writers just mentioned: my purpose is only to point out an area in which our preaching needs to explain Jesus' baptism

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<sup>39</sup> The Missouri Synod's men have talked this way, too. cp. Fritz, op. cit., p. 89ff.

<sup>40</sup> Roland Cap Ehlke, ed. *Sermon Studies on the Gospels (ILCW Series A)*. General editor, Richard D. Balge. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989. p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> John A. Trapp, ed. *Sermon Studies on the Epistles (ILCW Series A)*. General editor, E. H. Wendland. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1986. p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> *Bible History Commentary: New Testament—Volume 1*. Milwaukee, WI: WELS Board for Parish Education, 1989. p. 63.

<sup>43</sup> *God's Master Plan: New Testament—An Introduction and Survey, Student's Manual*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993. p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> *The People's Bible: Luke*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988. p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> *The People's Bible: Matthew*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000. p. 42.

more completely. That said, it is noteworthy that many sacramentarians would explain *Christian baptism* the same way our brothers seem to explain *Jesus' baptism*. To the sacramentarians, our baptism is merely a symbolic action in which a person demonstrates his or her own "conscious personal committal to a life of self-identification with Christ."<sup>46</sup> But a baptism that only asks a person to commit to a new identity is a perversion of baptism. Indeed, if that's all there was to Jesus' baptism, how was it really a baptism? Baptism is nothing if it has no promises attached to it for the baptized to believe in. But if, in a sermon, "identifying with sinners" is the only explanation we give our people for why Jesus was baptized, haven't we given them the impression that there is such a thing as a baptism that doesn't have any promises attached to it? How does that help our people think straight about baptism?

So then, the context to Jesus' baptism sets up two important boundary lines, which we must not transgress when we explain this event to our people. Boundary line number one: Jesus was already in possession of all of his divine attributes before his baptism, including omnipotence, holiness, ownership of heaven, authority to judge souls, deity itself, and eternity. We must not explain Jesus' baptism in any way that denies this. Boundary line number two: the baptism Jesus received was a means of grace. It saved people and brought them into God's kingdom through the work of the Holy Spirit and through faith in the promises God had connected to it, just as Christian baptism does today. We must not explain Jesus' baptism in any way that denies this either.

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<sup>46</sup> And sadly, as we might expect, sacramentarians use the above one-sided of Jesus' baptism to reinforce their empty view of their own baptisms, as, e.g., in the article this quote is taken from. (J. K. Howard. "The Baptism of Jesus and Its Present Significance." *The Evangelical Quarterly*. vol. XXXIX, no. 3. July-September, 1967. p. 137.)

**Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism—Part Two: Jesus’ own words  
at his baptism allow us to say so.**

On the one hand, Jesus tacitly agreed with John’s estimate of his superiority.

The third century bishop Gregory Thaumaturgus handsomely paraphrased John’s question for Jesus in Matthew 3:14 (except for the universalism implied by his line about the prayers of those ignorant of Jesus):

“How shall I wash Thee, who art undefiled and sinless? How shall I enlighten the light? What manner of prayer shall I offer up over Thee, who dost receive the prayers even of those who are ignorant of Thee? When I baptize others, I baptize into Thy name, in order that they may believe on Thee, who comest with glory; but when I baptize Thee, of whom shall I make mention? and into whose name shall I baptize Thee?”<sup>47</sup>

J. Sheatsley also put it well, “Therefore this call for baptism seemed strange to John; it was like bleaching snow white cloth, or like washing spotless linen.”<sup>48</sup> But when John talked this way,<sup>49</sup> when he said, “I myself have a need to be baptized by you,” Jesus did not contradict him. Jesus did not say, “Cousin, you overestimate me. You are talking like I’m the Son of God or something. Stop it!”

Jesus also agreed with John that he himself did not “need” baptism *per se*. He was being baptized because it was “fitting”: “Permit it to be this way now, because it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” (Αφες ἄρτι οὕτως γὰρ πρέπον ἐστὶν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην)<sup>50</sup> Being true God, as well as having the Holy Spirit from conception, Jesus had no *absolute* need for any spiritual aid or benefit.

<sup>47</sup> “Homily on the Holy Theophany.” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. vol. VI. p. 69.

<sup>48</sup> “Jesus’ Manifestation as the Messiah.” Sermon on Mt. 3:13-16. *Sermons on the Eisenach Gospels*. Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1915. p. 76.

<sup>49</sup> The imperfect verb διεκώλυεν indicates John made an ongoing attempt to dissuade Jesus. That is, John said more to Jesus than just the one line Matthew reports as a summary. Of course, Gregory Thaumaturgus was just imagining what other things John might have said.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew 3:15.

Note: The word “fitting” is also not the word we would expect if Jesus considered baptism a legal ordinance of God, although many commentators speak of Jesus’ baptism this way, or if he could not be the Savior without baptism, as the adoptionists or kenoticists would claim. If those claims were correct, wouldn’t Jesus have used a word like “necessary”? What Jesus *did* say was that being baptized was “fitting”: it was in line with God’s arrangement for his life. As I intend to demonstrate in this paper, God had arranged for Jesus not to make constant use of his own innate divine power and grace, although he never relinquished the same; consequently, Jesus was to depend on prayer and the means of grace as we sinful human beings have to. God had decided it was “fitting” for the Savior to live in this spiritually dependant way in his state of humiliation.

On the other hand, then, so as to reflect his being in the state of humiliation, Jesus words to John can be read as if he were addressing John as in some way *his* superior. Jesus asked John to “permit” the baptism. (As if to emphasize this point, Mt. 3:15 uses Jesus’ verb again: “Then he permitted it.”) Some speak as if Jesus was issuing an order to John, which John then obeyed with alacrity. Compare, as an example of this, NPH’s *Sermon Studies* commentary on Matthew 3:13-17, which says, “Like a commanding officer Jesus has issued an order.”<sup>51</sup> That interpretation of Jesus’ word “permit” focuses on the imperative form, without noting the range of meaning allowed by the verb itself. It can and often enough does mean “permit,” not only something like, “I order you.”<sup>52</sup> Jesus admitted that they could not proceed with the baptism without John’s *permission*. Jesus was, then, foregoing the use of his divine authority over John.

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<sup>51</sup> Ehlke, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>52</sup> Rudolf Bultmann refers to its use here as “the Hellenistic request formula.” (“αφίημι.” *TDNT*. Kittel, *op. cit.* vol. 1, p. 511.)

But, more to my point, the reason Jesus gave John for his baptism certainly leaves room for the idea that he expected his baptism to be an aid for his life of sanctification. Jesus said, “Permit it to be this way now, because it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

What did Jesus mean by those last three words, “fulfill all righteousness”?

In Matthew 5:17-20, we see Jesus use those same words in context, which helps us see what Jesus meant by them just before his baptism: for Jesus, “to fulfill all righteousness” meant to live a life that would be, both inwardly and outwardly, in perfect congruity with God’s laws.<sup>53</sup> In Matthew 5 he was addressing the concern some had that he intended to abolish the Old Testament law code as a worthless thing. He told the crowd at

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<sup>53</sup> NPH’s *Sermon Studies* says, without giving any evidence to support it, that the word here “represents God’s gracious policy towards sinners.” (Ehlke, op. cit., p. 67) Certainly the word “righteousness” can refer to the forensic righteousness God imputes to us for Christ’s sake and *does* often mean that in the Scripture. But that doesn’t mean Jesus himself used the word that way *here* or in Matthew or possibly ever in his preaching. We need to look at what Jesus meant by the word, not just assume he meant the same as Paul meant by it. This is not to say, however, that Jesus and Paul had different *theology* about forensic justification, but maybe they had different *terminology*.

To this end, Gottlob Schrenk writes, “If we ignore these passages [six passages where δικαιοσύνη means just judgment or rule], and postpone for the moment our consideration of the distinctive Pauline formula δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, we may first maintain that δικαιοσύνη is almost always used in the NT for the right conduct of man which follows the will of God and is pleasing to Him, for rectitude of life before God, for uprightness before His judgment.” In the next par., he says of this meaning of δικαιοσύνη, “It is the consistent usage in Mt.,” and proceeds to demonstrate this. (“δικαιοσύνη.” *TDNT*. Kittel, op. cit. vol. II, p. 198.) cp. also O. Eißfeldt, “Πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνη in Matthäus 3:15.” (*Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche*. vol. 61. 1970. pp. 209-215.)

In his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, Werner H. Franzmann points to the fourth beatitude as an example of Jesus using the word δικαιοσύνη in a forensic, Pauline sense. Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” He points to the passive, “will be filled,” and says, “‘Righteousness’ here can designate only a righteousness which comes entirely from God’s side. That is God’s righteousness in Christ. [justification]” (op. cit., pp. 236-237.) Why can it “only” refer to that kind of righteousness? Jesus is preaching sanctification here, as the surrounding beatitudes show. The fourth beatitude makes fine sense if understood as sanctification preaching, too. Luther took it that way in an undated sermon he preached on the Beatitudes. (Walch, op. cit., vol. 13, pp. 1006-1008.) If we are hungry to be more sanctified, will not God fill that hunger too through his means of grace?

Franzmann finds another example of forensic “righteousness” on Jesus’ lips in Matthew 6:33: “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,” and comments, “The righteousness we are to seek is ‘his,’ that is God’s. God gives it. He sent Christ to win it for us. The righteousness so won he makes our own through faith in the gospel.” (op. cit., p. 264.) But on the previous page, in his comments on this very same verse, he listed sanctification-righteousness as one of the “blessings of his reign,” so can’t that be called “his righteousness,” too? Can’t the verse be about sanctification? Yes, it can.

the Mount, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” “Fulfill,” there, meant to carry out, to live in complete accord with.<sup>54</sup> Jesus then went on to say:

Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

What did Jesus mean by “righteousness” there? He said the Pharisees’ righteousness wasn’t sufficient for them to enter heaven. Again Jesus was referring to obedience to the divine statutes.<sup>55</sup> The Pharisees and law-teachers claimed to obey God’s statutes, but in fact disobeyed them and tried to cover up their disobedience through re-interpretations of the Old Testament texts, as Jesus would go on to demonstrate in Matthew 5:21-48, six times saying something like, “You have heard that it was said, . . . But I tell you . . . .”

Jesus used the word again with the same meaning in Matthew 6:1, where he said, “Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them.” The following verses show that “acts of righteousness” included alms-giving (6:2-4), prayer (6:5-15), and fasting (6:16-18). Under his discussion of each of the three “acts of righteousness,” Jesus repeated a promise: “your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” What, then, did the word righteousness mean to Jesus? Again, it meant putting God’s commands into practice in one’s life, living the kind of sanctified and pious life that God the Father promised to reward.

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<sup>54</sup> The lexicon proposes two other meanings for “fulfill” here: (1) bring to full expression, that is, bring out its full or true meaning; or (2) complete, that is, add the rest of the laws mankind needs. However, 5:18-19 go on to talk about obeying the laws already written, not just explaining them and especially not adding to them. (Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. transl. and adapted by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1979. p. 671.)

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 196.

Another pertinent passage here is Jesus' statement in Matthew 21:32 that "John came to show the way of righteousness." With this statement, Jesus introduced his explanation of the parable of the two sons, which is about not just saying you will obey your Father, but actually obeying him, as Jesus showed in the previous verse, asking the question, "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" Here again, when Jesus used the word "righteousness," he meant obedience to the declared will and laws of God the Father.

Returning to our topic, then, we must ask, if Jesus used the word "righteousness" to mean obeying God's laws, was Jesus saying in Matthew 3:15 that John's baptism was part of God's law? Was it part of that law, from which "not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen" would ever disappear?<sup>56</sup> Was being baptized by John in itself an "act of righteousness," an act of piety and obedience, like alms-giving? Or was John's baptism rather part of the gospel, that is, a means of grace? It is true enough that we baptize at Christ's command, just as John baptized at God's command.<sup>57</sup> However, we must be careful whenever we emphasize the command-aspect of baptism, whether John's baptism or Christian baptism (for both proffer the same benefits, as shown above), lest we give any impression that we are making Christ out to be a new Law-giver and making mere law-fulfillment out of a means of grace. The sacramentarians also view baptism in this harmful "a-law-to-be-fulfilled" way.<sup>58</sup> August Pieper roundly condemned this way of speaking about the sacrament of baptism and the other means of grace:

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<sup>56</sup> Matthew 5:18.

<sup>57</sup> Otherwise the Lutheran Church would not call baptism a sacrament, as Melancthon explained in Art. XII of the *Apology*: "If we call Sacraments, rites which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added, it is easy to decide what are properly Sacraments." (cited by Walther, op. cit., p. 357.)

<sup>58</sup> C. F. W. Walther lamented how the sacramentarians have even misused Matthew 3:15 to teach this, "The fanatical Anabaptists caused a schism on account of Baptism, although they asserted that Baptism is useless; they said it was a mere act of outward obedience which—imagine their impudence!—a person must render in order to fulfil all righteousness. That is the Anabaptist way of coming to an agreement with the teaching of Christ." (ibid., p. 162)

As legal arrangements the preaching of the gospel, baptism and the Lord's Supper would be powerless, impotent ordinances not imparting salvation but killing and damning us; under them we would be frightened and yearn for other, new ordinances which would give us salvation. The proclamation of the gospel, baptism and the Lord's Supper are not legal but *evangelical* arrangements. . . . It is veritably an annihilation of all Christianity, making an Old Testament out of the New, a law out of the gospel, a curse out of grace, death and damnation out of Spirit and life, when one demands preaching and hearing the gospel, baptizing and being baptized, administering and receiving Holy Communion of people and of Christians as works of the law. By doing that we do not make Christians but hypocrites and Pharisees, and twice-damned slaves.<sup>59</sup>

Because, then, the baptism that Jesus received, that is, John's baptism, was a means of grace and not merely a legal ordinance of God, we must use caution if we tell our people that Jesus got baptized in order to obey a righteous ordinance of God in our place, an interpretation of Jesus' baptism that is heard often enough among us. This interpretation has had its advocates throughout the centuries.<sup>60</sup> For example, Thomas Aquinas:

It was fitting that Christ should not only fulfill what was prescribed by the Old Law, but also begin what appertained to the New Law. Therefore He wished not only to be circumcised, but also to be baptized.<sup>61</sup>

Or John Calvin: "Thus he himself affirmed even his baptism to be a branch of his righteousness, because he acted in obedience to the command of the Father."<sup>62</sup> The Missouri

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<sup>59</sup> August Pieper. "Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament?" transl. by Carl J. Lawrenz. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. vol. 86, no. 1. Winter, 1989. p. 40.—"Professor Pieper served on the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from 1902 to 1941." (ibid., p. 34)

<sup>60</sup> cp. also Johann A. Bengel (*Gnomon*. transl., C. F. Werner. Erster Band. Ludwigsburg: Druck und Verlag von Ferd. Riehm. p. 37.); Calov, as summarized by Robert D. Preus, "the Son obeys the Law for us" at his baptism (*The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: God and His Creation, Volume II*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1972. p. 129); Chrysostom ("Homily 12 on Matthew," part 1); Gregory Thaumaturgus (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VI, p. 70); Adolf Hoenecke (op. cit., pp. 183-184); and NPH's *Lutheran Parent* magazine (Jan./Feb. 2003, p.15) where even the title of a devotion on Jesus' baptism is "Meeting the Requirements."

<sup>61</sup> Aquinas, op. cit., Q.39, Art.1.

<sup>62</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. transl., John Allen. 7<sup>th</sup> American edition. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Bd. of Education, 1936. vol. I, p. 556.



Synod's William Arndt wrote, "as he said, 'to fulfill all righteousness' (Matt. 3:15), to fulfill the Law for us."<sup>63</sup> Our own John Schaller agreed:

As to his baptism, his own words assure us that he recognized it as part of the 'righteousness' which he had come to fulfill, just as it was John's official duty to administer the sacrament to him who came to him to be baptized (Mt 3:15).<sup>64</sup>

Also, Joel Gerlach, in our Synod's series, *Training Christians for Ministry*: "Jesus' baptism was . . . a necessary requirement for him 'to fulfill all righteousness' as a substitute for us."<sup>65</sup> Or the ELS's William Kessel, in a workbook used by our Synod's *Congregation Evangelist Program*, wrote: "Jesus' saving mission included perfect submission to the law . . . therefore, Jesus underwent this rite."<sup>66</sup> Did Jesus have this kind of law-emphasizing view of his own baptism? As I have already shown, baptism is far more than just a work of the law.<sup>67</sup> Unlike the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision, which at Sinai was taken into the Mosaic law code and was then no longer only "a seal of the righteousness" that the Israelites "had by faith,"<sup>68</sup> baptism is part of the new covenant and is gospel through and through. Along these lines, Werner H. Franzmann wrote in a manual for our synod's Sunday school teachers that this command-emphasizing way of

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<sup>63</sup> *New Testament History: A Survey of the Life of Christ and the History of the Apostolic Church for Church Leaders*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. revised by A. C. Mueller and D. E. Hoferkamp. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963. p. 28.

<sup>64</sup> Schaller, *op. cit.*, p. 119.—He stated this again, p. 130: "His own words (Mt 3:15) show that he received baptism in conscious performance of his priestly office ('it behooves us' means: it is our official duty)." He listed Jesus' baptism on pp. 148-149 as part of how "Christ *submitted to the law* in order to fulfill it." And he listed it again on p. 155 in proving that "Christ, who actually observed the law with perfect obedience, did so *vicariously*, in our place."

<sup>65</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>66</sup> *The Life of Christ*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Madison, WI: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1997. p. 11.

<sup>67</sup> Some authors will admit baptism is not law, but despite that go on to say that the reason Jesus was baptized was still in order to be obedient to God. e.g., Ohio Synod Pastor J. Sheatsley: "Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness, to do all the will of God. . . . John's baptism was not a part of the Law; it rather belonged to the Gospel dispensation. But it was from heaven, from God, and full righteousness required that it be accepted, even also by Jesus." In fact, on the next page he turns it all into law again, even calling Jesus' baptism part of "the law of righteousness": "The other thing we should here note is an admonition. Jesus was obedient to the law of righteousness in all things; and He did this for us. Shall we now not obey in the few things which are demanded of us?" (*op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.) How could this not have been confusing for his listeners?

<sup>68</sup> Romans 4:11.

speaking about Jesus' baptism is completely inappropriate: "We must forget about the idea of Jesus fulfilling some legal requirement by permitting himself to be baptized. Here we are in the field of the gospel."<sup>69</sup>

It can be argued that, since despising baptism is a sin, Jesus was obeying God by not despising baptism. Yes, we would even say that willful rejection of baptism damns a person to hell.<sup>70</sup> But it is not God's gracious gift of baptism that teaches us this. It is not his invitation, "Be born again as my dear and holy child," that teaches us this. It is the law, the First Commandment, that teaches us that unbelief and despising God's promises are sins.<sup>71</sup> We must keep this straight or we will be leading our people into the error of the antinomians, an error refuted by Article V of the *Formula of Concord*:

Luther writes to the law-stormers: *Everything that reproves sin is and belongs to the Law, whose peculiar office it is to reprove sin and to lead to the knowledge of sins*, Rom. 3, 20; 7, 7; and as unbelief is the root and well-spring of all reprehensible sins, the Law reproves unbelief also. . . . although it is properly the Gospel alone which teaches concerning saving faith in Christ.<sup>72</sup>

Could a Lutheran pastor explain all this in a sermon? Yes, but is that what we do? We are not explaining enough if all we say is something like this: "Why was Jesus baptized?—to fulfill all righteousness! God told people to be baptized, so Jesus was obeying

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<sup>69</sup> op. cit., p. 63.—R. C. H. Lenski makes the same point, but more tersely, "When we remember that John's baptism, like its extension in Christian baptism, was pure gospel (v.3) and in no sense law we see at once that by accepting baptism for himself Jesus is in no sense obeying a law." (*The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*. Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1951. p. 208.)

<sup>70</sup> Luke 7:30, "But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John." cp. also John P. Meyer's lucid discussion of the necessity of baptism. (*Studies in the Augsburg Confession*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995. p. 127f.)

<sup>71</sup> August Pieper is making a different point when he says: "Yet this necessity [of using the word and sacraments] is not a legal one, but one that is evangelical. Whoever does not believe will be damned, not because he commits a sin against the law, not because he commits a sin that is all too great and in itself cannot be forgiven, but because by doing that he rejects his salvation." ("Legal Regulations?" op. cit., p. 41.) He is not saying that unbelief is not condemned by the law. His point is that unbelief is a unique way to sin against the law and it is this unique feature that makes it a damning sin: it is the sin that rejects forgiveness.

<sup>72</sup> op. cit., Art. V, par. 17-19, p. 959. cp. also Walther, op. cit., p. 282.

God in our place.” If we are going to say that Jesus lived up to God’s law in our place by being baptized, we need to explain clearly that baptism itself (whether Jesus’ or ours) is not a demand of God’s law: at the Jordan River, what Jesus was obeying in our place was the First Commandment. I agree that is true and could be explained correctly and edifyingly, but I would still ask, “Jesus was obeying the First Commandment his whole life: why make a point to bring it up here? Is that the most significant thing that happened at Jesus’ baptism?”

Note: Once again, let me be clear that I am loathe to accuse any of my brothers or synodical fathers of sacramentarianism in this regard, but it is striking that in explaining *Jesus’ baptism*, we Lutheran pastors have so often used the sacramentarians’ explanations of *Christian baptism*—and that on two counts: Jesus was committing himself to a life of identifying himself with sinners (an interpretation I gave caution about in Part One) or Jesus was obeying an ordinance of God. Not that we come right out and say, “That’s *all* Jesus’ baptism was for,” but we easily give that impression when we fail to explain or emphasize to our people also the tremendous spiritual strength and gifts Jesus received at his baptism. Reading some devotions and sermons in my file that I have presented on the baptism pericopes in the past, I know that I have not always thought this through the way I should have either.

But back to Jesus’ words! Jesus did not say that he was getting baptized because it would give him spiritual benefits. Nor did he say that his baptism was a means by which he would be able to perform future acts of righteousness. He said his baptism was *itself* an act that fulfilled righteousness. Yes, and he said that both he and John were fulfilling all righteousness in the act of baptism. Notice how Jesus said “us”: “it is fitting for us to

fulfill all righteousness.” And that’s all he says. How can I say that there is something incomplete about the sermon that only says, “Jesus was baptized because it was part of obeying God’s will,” when that was all Jesus had to say about his baptism? Am I not, then, saying there is something incomplete about Jesus’ own words about his baptism? Those are fair questions.

Three thoughts here:

(1) What did Jesus mean by the word “all,” when he said he and John would “fulfill all righteousness”? Did he mean that getting baptized was for him all there was to living a righteous life? And baptizing Jesus was all that God required of John as far as holy, pious living? To the contrary, Jesus later said he had come to do all that was required by every letter of the Old Testament, as quoted above from Matthew 5:17-18. Nor was John excused from living up to the rest of his calling or to the totality of Moses’ law, except at risk of being “called least in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>73</sup> We must admit Jesus means his baptism was a *part* of fulfilling all righteousness.

What part? Was it just one particular command of God? Jesus obeyed the command to be baptized, a command God issued to all Israel through his prophet John. John obeyed the command to baptize, which he had received from the Father.<sup>74</sup> Without obeying those commands, neither John nor Jesus could fulfill all righteousness.

Or was Jesus’ baptism a part of fulfilling all righteousness, in that it was the strengthening means *by which* he could fulfill all righteousness? That would seem to leave out John. Jesus said that in the baptism John was fulfilling all righteousness, too.<sup>75</sup> Shouldn’t we assume that whatever Jesus did at his baptism to fulfill righteousness must

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<sup>73</sup> Matthew 5:19.

<sup>74</sup> John 1:33.

<sup>75</sup> This point was brought out by a member of my Thesis Oral Examination Committee, who wrote in an e-mail, “However one would understand ‘to fulfill all righteousness,’ it must refer in some respect—and with strong inclination to ‘as similar a respect as possible’—to both John and Jesus.”

be something John did, too? And what did they both do, besides obey a command of God?

(2) This leads to the second thought. We must admit that John could not “fulfill all righteousness” *in the same way* Jesus could, or *to the same extent*. First, they were doing two different things: one being baptized, one baptizing. More than that, one acted vicariously as Substitute and Savior for all the world: the other did not and could not. One would never sin: the other would. Jesus would finally “fulfill all righteousness”: John would not. Instead, John would need to be covered with someone else’s righteousness, with his Cousin and Savior’s righteousness, or end up damned to hell. How then was John “fulfilling *all* righteousness” by baptizing Jesus?

Perhaps John was too humble to follow up his first objection, “I need to be baptized by you,”<sup>76</sup> with another almost just like it: “I need you to fulfill all righteousness for me, and now you say we shall fulfill it together?”

Is it legitimate to say that the only way John fulfilled *all* righteousness was by the important role he played in Jesus’ righteous life: giving him, in baptism, the spiritual strength to be righteous? There is a sense in which a preacher, a dispenser of the means of grace, can boast of the faith and sanctification that his words produced in his hearer’s lives.<sup>77</sup>

(3) The third thought: even if you limit the “righteousness” fulfilled at Jesus’ baptism to the obedience that he and John displayed by receiving and administering baptism according to God the Father’s ordinance, that still does not exclude the idea that Jesus expected to receive some benefit or “spiritual endowment” from his own baptism. For you

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<sup>76</sup> Matthew 3:14.

<sup>77</sup> As, for example, Paul wrote about doing in 2 Corinthians 1:14b; Philippians 2:16; or 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20.

are not truly submitting to baptism, unless you put your faith in baptism's promises. The *Augsburg Confession* states, "Wherefore we must so use the Sacraments that faith be added to believe the promises which are offered and set forth through the Sacraments."<sup>78</sup> Baptism is, after all, only God's promises attached to water. You cannot use God's promises without putting faith in them. When you say, "Look at this righteous thing Jesus did: he submitted to baptism," what does that mean? It means Jesus must have used baptism properly, that is, by adding faith to his use of it. He must have not merely used the water of baptism, but also used the promises, without which the water would not have been baptism.<sup>79</sup> He did not need baptism's promise of forgiveness, but why not baptism's promise to help him live the righteous life demanded by his Father?

There is one last important point to make about what Jesus said at his own baptism. He said a prayer. Only Luke reports this.<sup>80</sup> Luke's purpose in mentioning Jesus' prayer was not just to explain why Jesus was looking up, so that next he would have noticed when the sky got torn open and the dove started coming down. Nor did Luke say that Jesus only acted as if he were praying, since according to his divinity there was nothing he could pray for that he didn't already have. He really did pray, because he really did want something from his Father. We don't know what he asked for. But the mere fact of his asking and praying (and then getting such a dramatic answer)<sup>81</sup> shows that at his baptism he was seeking some kind of benefit from God his Father. William Dallmann con-

<sup>78</sup> Melancthon, Philip. "Augsburg Confession." Art. XIII. *Triglot*, op. cit., p.49.

<sup>79</sup> Cp. a similar point earlier in the paper, p.18.

<sup>80</sup> With a participle, προσευχομένου, Luke 3:21.—Luke uses this verb seven times with Jesus as the subject, as opposed to only three by Matthew or Mark. Martin H. Franzmann had this kind of thing in mind when he wrote, "He does go beyond the other evangelists in depicting Jesus at prayer (Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28,29; 22:41 ff.; 23:34, 46) and in recording Jesus' teaching on prayer." (*The Word of the Lord Grows: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the NEW TESTAMENT*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1961. p. 203.)

<sup>81</sup> Bengel, for example, calls the Father's voice "*Eine Antwort auf das Gebet V.21.*" (op. cit., p. 284—An answer to the prayer in v.21.) Lenski disagrees, "Then wonderful things, indeed, occurred, but they were of such a kind that we cannot say that they came in answer to Jesus' prayer." Why can't we? He doesn't give a reason. (*Interp. Luke*. op. cit., p. 210.)

jectured that “He prayed for strength to resist all temptations and to overcome all opposition; He prayed to . . . remain faithful unto death.”<sup>82</sup> Similarly, a Lutheran family devotion book asks,

We do not know what Jesus said in that prayer, but can we doubt that He was thinking of the great work that He had now begun and asking His Father to give him joy in that work and faithfulness to do it, even unto the end?<sup>83</sup>

These are fitting things for us to pray for, too, that our baptism would give us such strength, victory, faithfulness, and joy in our calling.

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<sup>82</sup> *Jesus: His Words and His Works, According to the Four Gospels*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1914. p. 50.

<sup>83</sup> Edward W. Schramm, ed. “Jesus Begins His Life’s Work.” Devotion #26, on Matthew 3:13-17. *At Jesus’ Feet: A Book for the Family Altar Containing a Simple Devotion for Each Day in the Year*. 7<sup>th</sup> printing. Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1936. p. 56.

**Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism—Part Three: The miracles that were directly connected with Jesus’ baptism say so.**

First, some general observations that apply to both the Spirit’s descent and the Father’s voice:

Under divine inspiration, neither Mark nor Luke felt it was necessary to include for their readers the baptism conversation between Jesus and his cousin, that is, John’s objection to Jesus’ baptism and Jesus’ response thereto. Rationalists use this omission as “proof” that the conversation didn’t really happen.<sup>84</sup> We Lutheran preachers should use this omission as a God-given reminder that, although the pre-baptism conversation really happened and it teaches us much, we don’t have to refer to it in every sermon we give on Jesus’ baptism, as is our habit. Mark and Luke obviously had God-given confidence that they could omit it from their explanation of Jesus’ baptism without giving their readers the wrong impression. How then did Mark and Luke show their readers that Jesus’ baptism was different from the baptism that the “normal sinners” received? They went on to describe the miraculous events that followed on the heels of Jesus’ baptism, events that did not follow the baptisms of the “normal sinners.” The Jordan miracles were the only answer Mark and Luke offered to the question, “Why did Jesus get baptized?” We the readers, then, are not meant to separate the miracles from the baptism.<sup>85</sup>

Again, both Matthew and Mark used the adverb “immediately” (εὐθὺς), in order to make sure we would not miss this connection between these theophanies and the baptism.

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<sup>84</sup> e.g., Bundy, op. cit., pp. 57-59.

<sup>85</sup> Along the same lines, it has been observed that Luke doesn’t say specifically who baptized Jesus. That is because his emphasis is not on what John did, so much as on what God did through John’s words and water. Luke does the same thing in Acts 10:37, which we will discuss later. Ulrich Wilckens, discussing both passages, writes, “*Mit keinem Wort wird dabei Johannes als der Taufende erwähnt, sondern **Gott** handelt hier an Jesus.*” (“Kerygma und Evangelium bei Lukas (Beobachtungen zu Acta 10 34-43).” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche.* vol. 49. 1958. p. 232.—With not one word is John here mentioned as the one baptizing, rather here **God** deals with Jesus.)



Neither evangelist comes right out and says, “The result of Jesus’ baptism was the Spirit and the voice”; that is, neither explicitly ascribes a cause-and-effect relationship between the baptism and the miracles. To the same point, saying that baptism was a means of grace for Jesus is not necessarily the same as saying that Jesus’ baptism was in some way the cause of the two subsequent miracles. But the adverb, at the least, tells us that we are not meant to separate too far from each other in our minds Jesus’ baptism and the torn cloud, the Spirit’s descent, and the Father’s voice that all followed “immediately” after the baptism.<sup>86</sup> Luther says that they occurred “*über und bei der Taufe Christi*” (over and at the baptism of Christ).<sup>87</sup>

Here is another significant point that both Matthew and Mark make: both only mention Jesus as seeing and hearing the theophanies. Both use the third-person singular verb εἶδεν, “he saw.”<sup>88</sup> Matthew wrote, “he saw the Spirit of God descending.”<sup>89</sup> Mark wrote, “he saw the heavens torn open.”<sup>90</sup> Neither says anything about the crowds seeing the dove-likeness or the heavenly rift. Again, the well-attested phrase “to him,” in Mt. 3:16, “The heavens were opened to him” (αὐτῷ), would also emphasize that this was for Jesus’ benefit.<sup>91</sup> And again, although none of the synoptic writers say anything about who could hear the Father’s voice, in both Mark and Luke the voice uses a second-person pro-

<sup>86</sup> Fritz disagrees, but gives no reason for it. (op. cit., p. 91)

<sup>87</sup> Von der Taufe Christi. “Dr. Martin Luthers Kirchen-Postille, Epistel-Theil, nebst vermischten Predigten.” Walch, op. cit. vol. 12, p. 1132.

<sup>88</sup> However, Barnes, for example, says the subject of the verb is John. This is not based on a reason that he gives from the texts of Mt. or Mk., but as he states because he has already made up his mind that the point of the miracles was to be “a testimony given to *John* that this was the Messiah.” (Albert Barnes. *Notes on the New Testament Explanatory and Practical: Matthew and Mark.* ed., Robert Frew. 15<sup>th</sup> printing. Ann Arbor, MI: Cushing-Malloy, Inc., 1972. p. 31.)

<sup>89</sup> Matthew 3:16.

<sup>90</sup> Mark 1:10.

<sup>91</sup> H. W. Gockel devotes an entire sermon part just to this line, detailing how each of the opened heaven, the dove’s descent, and the Father’s voice were meant for Jesus’ encouragement, and closing with this line: “‘The heavens were opened *unto Him*.’ And from the heavens there streamed down comfort, encouragement, and strength for the difficult path which lay ahead.” (“The Opened Heavens.” Sermon on Mt. 3:13-17. *The Concordia Pulpit for 1947.* vol. XVIII. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1946. pp. 108-110.)

noun and verb. It says, “You are (Σὺ εἶ) my Son.”<sup>92</sup> This emphasizes that the message was especially meant to be heard by Jesus, whether or not it was heard by anyone else at all. These facts tell us that the appearance of the Holy Spirit and the sounding of the Father’s voice were also for Jesus’ benefit and assurance. It makes no sense to assume that these Jordan River miracles were only for the benefit of John or the assurance of the crowd, when not one word of the Bible accounts tells us that the crowd witnessed them.<sup>93</sup> Jesus did witness them. They were meant to show him something and tell him something.

Despite these plain facts about what the Bible accounts say and do not say, a popular interpretation of these Jordan River signs is that one of their main purposes was to reassure the crowds about Jesus. They were meant to identify Jesus as God’s Son for them.

Chrysostom taught this in the early church:

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.”<sup>94</sup>

Our own publishing house’s *Sermon Studies on the Gospels* taught this also:

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<sup>92</sup> Mark 3:11; Luke 3:22.

<sup>93</sup> Joh. Ph. Koehler agrees, “*Ob andere Leute das Wunder auch gesehen, steht nicht in der Schrift.*” (“*Taufe und Versuche Christi.*” *Theologische Quartalschrift.* vol. 5, no. 1. January, 1908. p. 22.—If other people also saw the miracle, it doesn’t say in Scripture.)

We do not follow the “apocryphal addition” to Matthew 3:15 in two Old Latin N.T. manuscripts that says at the baptism, “a tremendous light flashed forth from the water, so that all who were present feared.” (Bruce M. Metzger. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration.* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1968. p. 204) Nor do we agree with Justin Martyr, who said in his “Dialogue with Trypho the Jew” that when Jesus had descended into the water “fire was kindled in the Jordan.” (cited by Hans Conzelmann, “φῶς,” *TDNT*, Kittel, op. cit., Vol.IX, p. 358, fn. 410.) Andrew Gregory claims that the apocryphal *Gospel of the Ebionites* as quoted in the writings of Epiphanius should also be considered as a witness to the authenticity of such a miraculous light in the original accounts. (“Prior or Posterior? The *Gospel of the Ebionites* and the Gospel of Luke.” *New Testament Studies.* vol. 51, no. 3. July, 2005. p. 351ff.) However, even if this light miracle really happened, Mark and Luke evidently felt that Jesus’ baptism would make perfect sense to their readers without it.

<sup>94</sup> “Homily 12 on Matthew.”—Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/200112.htm>. cp. also the same idea in Homily 17, par.3.

The anointing of the Spirit is the Father's way of identifying his Son. Also, . . . the audible and visible approval by the Father publicly authorizes Jesus.<sup>95</sup>

Victor Prange in *The People's Bible: Luke* made the same claim: "The visible descent of the dove is public witness to the fact that here truly is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One."<sup>96</sup> Note the words "publicly" and "public" in the last two quotes. There are other variations on this theme that the miracles were mostly to benefit the crowds. It was to confirm in the people's minds that the preaching of John was true. Or it was to reassure the crowds that God approved of Jesus' active, vicarious obedience up to that point in his life. But I will repeat my reply to these interpretations: We don't know if the crowd even saw or heard these miracles. Maybe they did. Why not? But none of the gospel writers considered it worth mentioning at all.<sup>97</sup> In fact, in John 5:37, Jesus himself seems to say outright that the crowds had not witnessed the Jordan signs or any theophany like them, "And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form."<sup>98</sup>

Of course, this is not to say that only Jesus saw the signs. It is obvious from John 1:32-34 that seeing the Spirit's descent did identify Jesus for John. We will consider some of John's words from those verses later in the paper. Also, the identifying-purpose

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<sup>95</sup> Ehlke, op. cit., p.68.

<sup>96</sup> op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>97</sup> Frank J. Matera ("The Prologue as the Interpretative Key to Mark's Gospel." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. Issue 34. October, 1988. p. 5ff.) makes a pertinent observation here when he writes that the prologue of Mark's gospel, which he says is Mark 1:1-13, is stylistically set apart from the rest of the book because in the prologue "the narrator communicates privileged information about John and Jesus to the reader," whereas, in contrast, "the events beginning with 1.14 are public in nature." His thesis is that Mark has structured his book in this way to highlight the drama of the crowds, disciples, scribes, etc. struggling to figure out the identity of Jesus, an identity that the reader has been informed of at the outset of the book. In this way, "the reader is being warned that knowledge gained from the prologue must not be taken for granted. Such knowledge can be rendered useless by hardness of heart." (pp. 13-14.—If his observation were right, the structure of Mark would be very reminiscent of the book of Job, in which the readers get privileged information in the prologue and then watch the drama unfold as the people in "real life" struggle to make sense of things without that privileged info.)

<sup>98</sup> It could be argued that Jesus knew that none of the people hearing his words in John 5 had been at his baptism, but that seems somewhat of a stretch to me.

of the Father's voice is hinted at by Matthew 3:17's use of a third-person pronoun and verb, "This is (Οὗτος ἐστιν) my Son,"<sup>99</sup> where Mark and Luke had used second-person. But again, identifying Jesus for John could not have been the main purpose of the Jordan miracles, since God led the writers of the synoptic gospels to consider their accounts of the baptism complete without mentioning that John saw or heard the miracles there.

Note: The Father's voice also spoke from the sky during Holy Week. It is instructive for us to compare that theophany with this one at the Jordan. During Holy Week, Jesus clearly stated that the voice was not for his own benefit, but for the benefit of his listeners, the crowd.<sup>100</sup> That said, how did the crowd benefit from the voice? They didn't understand that it had been the Father's voice, but maybe an angel's. Some didn't even understand it had been a voice: they said it had been a boom of thunder.<sup>101</sup> If Jesus had not explained the voice to the crowd, how much, then, would it have benefited them? Would it have at all?

But we have no record of such a commentary having been provided for the crowds who were at Jesus' baptism, nor provided for anyone, as far as we know, until John's "Lamb of God" sermon in John 1, which he didn't preach till at least a month and a half after the baptism.<sup>102</sup> Even if, then, the people gathered along the riverbanks *had* heard the Father's voice after the baptism, would some have said it was just thundered? Would it have benefited them?

Also, we have to temper Jesus' statement, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine," with the fact that the voice was a response to Jesus' prayer in John 12:27-28, in which Jesus admitted, "my heart is troubled." In his classic com-

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<sup>99</sup> Bengel explains, "*Markus und Lukas geben es wörtlich: Du bist zc. Matthäus giebt den Sinn.*" (op. cit., p. 37—Mark and Luke give it word for word, "You are," etc. Matthew gives the sense.)

<sup>100</sup> John 12:30.

<sup>101</sup> John 12:29.

<sup>102</sup> In between the baptism and John's sermon, Jesus had spent forty days being tempted in the wilderness.

mentary on the Gospels, J. Ylvisaker described this troubled time of Jesus as “a preface to the struggle in Gethsemane.”<sup>103</sup> Therefore, it is fitting for us to ask, if Jesus sought encouragement from God in order to have the strength to *end* his ministry faithfully, as he did in John 12:27-28, why not seek the same from God in order to *begin* his ministry well? And why not say that his baptism was where he sought that encouragement?

Moving on from these general observations about the Jordan miracles, we note that the description of the Holy Spirit’s descent indicates that there was a benefit for Jesus.

Although Jesus already had the Spirit, the dove doesn’t fly out of Jesus. It flies out of the rent-open heaven *to* Jesus.<sup>104</sup> All four gospels describe the Spirit as “descending,” all using the same verb (καταβαίνον or καταβαίνειν). And in case it wasn’t obvious enough that the Spirit descended out of the hole that had been torn into heaven, John’s Gospel specifically says so: “from heaven” (ἐξ οὐρανοῦ).<sup>105</sup>

Matthew 3:16 describes the Spirit as “coming upon Jesus” (ερχόμενον ἐπ’ αὐτόν). This same phrase is used in Ezekiel 2:2 (LXX, ἦλθεν ἐπ’ ἐμὲ πνεῦμα) and Acts 19:6 (ἦλθε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐπ’ αὐτούς) to describe someone having a special manifestation of the Spirit given to or through them.<sup>106</sup> It is natural, then, to assume that also here, in

<sup>103</sup> Johannes Ylvisaker. *The Gospels: A Synoptic Presentation of the Text in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John with Explanatory Notes*. transl., the Board of Publication of the Norwegian Lutheran Church and Augsburg Publishing House. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1977. p. 592.

<sup>104</sup> Some have pointed to this as fulfillment of Isaiah 63:7-64:4, which speak of the heavens being rent open so that God would help his people again as in days of old, days when he “set his Holy Spirit among them” (63:11) and gave them “rest by the Spirit of the LORD.” cp. Christian Maurer. “σχίζω.” *TDNT*. Kittel, op. cit. vol. VII. p. 962.

<sup>105</sup> John 1:32.

<sup>106</sup> Bauer, p. 311. cp. also Ezekiel 3:24. Joh. Ph. Koehler makes the same point. (op. cit., p. 22.) The same preposition is used often in the LXX for when the Spirit came upon people to give them special abilities or revelations, but usually with other verbs. cp. Heinrich Greeven, “περιστέρα,” *TDNT*, op. cit., vol. VI, p. 68, fn. 56, for a partial list of such verbs.

Mark uses a different preposition, εἰς, which some would translate as “into”: “the Spirit like a dove descending *into* him.” e.g., De Maris, op. cit., p. 15. There is a lengthy attempt to prove this translation in Edward P. Dixon’s “Descending Spirit and Descending Gods: A ‘Greek’ Interpretation

direct connection to Jesus' baptism, a special manifestation of the Spirit was given to Jesus.

Furthermore, what would it matter that the Spirit descended "in bodily form" (σωματικῶ εἶδει), except that then Jesus could physically feel him land on him and be assured thereby? Who else besides Jesus would have been able to tell that the Spirit had taken on himself a physical body, rather than only the appearance of one? As Jesus had physically felt the baptism water touch him, so then afterwards he felt the dove land on him.

Luke's account mentions that the Spirit was holy.<sup>107</sup> He could then assist Jesus in living his holy life and thereby "fulfilling all righteousness." The Old Testament prophets foretold that the Spirit would help the Messiah live a holy and righteous life. For example, the prophet Isaiah listed six separate gifts the Spirit would give to Jesus, because he rested on him.

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.<sup>108</sup>

And what would be the results of having all these gifts from the Spirit?

He will delight in the fear of the LORD . . . Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

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of the Spirit's 'Descent as a Dove' in Mark 1:10." (*Journal of Biblical Literature*. vol. 128, no. 4. Winter, 2009. p. 771f.)—The preposition sometimes means "into." And this meaning certainly would fit well with my thesis, but I can't see how it fits well with Luke's description of a "bodily form." What kind of bodily form would allow the dove to go "into" Jesus?

<sup>107</sup> Luke 3:22.

<sup>108</sup> Isaiah 11:2ff. As another, and far less explicit, example of an O.T. prophecy of the connection between the Messiah receiving the Holy Spirit and his living a holy life, the angel Gabriel told the prophet Daniel, "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy." (Dn. 9:24) Jesus could not "bring in everlasting righteousness," without being "anoint[ed]" with the Holy Spirit. (cp., however, a different interpretation of "anoint the most holy" by Seth Erlandsson, who says Jesus gained us access to the most holy *place*, by anointing it with sacrificial blood from his own body—"Die siebzig 'Jahrwochen' in Daniel 9,24-27." transl., David Edvardsen. *Theologische Handreichung und Information für Lehre und Praxis der lutherischen Kirche*. vol. 28, no. 2. Apr., 2010. p. 9.)

Or, according to the hymnist Phillip Doddridge:

On him the Spirit largely poured  
Exerts its sacred Fire;  
Wisdom and Might and Zeal and Love  
His holy Breast inspire.<sup>109</sup>

Isaiah 42:1-4 also finds its fulfillment here. The one the Lord is well-pleased in has the Spirit put on him, so that by the Spirit's power he can do his saving work in faithfulness and without faltering:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. . . . In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged.<sup>110</sup>

Because the Savior would have the Spirit of the LORD resting on him (and, yes, the LXX has  $\epsilon\pi' \alpha\upsilon\theta\acute{\nu}$  there, just like Mt. 3:16)—which is to say, because the Savior would receive special gifts of the Spirit at his baptism—he would be able to live a God-fearing, righteous, and faithful life, or as he said it himself, “to fulfill all righteousness.”

Again, the Spirit appeared as a dove,<sup>111</sup> an animal that symbolized innocence, as Jesus said in Matthew 10:16.<sup>112</sup> This was a fitting appearance, because the Spirit would assist Jesus in living an innocent life and thereby “fulfilling all righteousness.”

<sup>109</sup> “Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes.” Hymn 12, original stanza 2. *Christian Worship: Handbook*. Ed., C. T. Aufdemberge. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997. p. 27.

<sup>110</sup> Joachim Jeremias points out several verbal parallels between the baptism account and Isaiah 42:1, especially as quoted in Matthew 12:18. (“ $\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ .” *TDNT*. Kittel, op. cit. vol.V, p. 701.)

<sup>111</sup> Not “in the form of a fiery dove,” as Dr. Henry Burton claims, assuming that fire was involved because, he says, here Jesus received baptism “with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” Creative, but merely his own assumption! (*The Expositors' Bible: The Gospel according to St. Luke*. Series ed., W. Robertson Nicoll. New York, NY: Hodder & Stoughton. p. 99.)

<sup>112</sup> “Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” cp. Ylvisaker, p.119, where he refers also to Song of Songs 1:15; 2:14; and Hosea 7:11.

Much ink has been spilt by those who assume that there was no appearance of a dove and that the dove was inserted into the account by the evangelists or other early Christians, which leaves such critics with the question, “From what literary or cultural source did the early Christians get this idea of the Holy Spirit being like a dove?” For a survey of their many suggested answers to this question, see, e.g., Stephen Gero’s article, “The Spirit as a Dove at the Baptism of Jesus.” (*Novum Testamentum*. vol. XVIII, fasc. 1. January, 1976. pp. 17-35.) Peppard writes wittily, “The poet Wallace Stevens

We also receive the Spirit for the same purposes in our baptism. Cp. Titus 3:5-6, for example, where Paul wrote,

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Paul testifies that baptism did not give us only a smidgeon of the Spirit, but a generous outpouring of him.<sup>113</sup> What does the Spirit do for us in baptism? He renews us. We no longer need to live according to our old sinful nature. Rather “by the Spirit [we] put to death the misdeeds of the body.”<sup>114</sup> He helps us live righteous lives, as he helped Jesus to.

Turning our attention to the other miraculous sign at the Jordan, we must admit that what the Father said there was clearly aimed at reassuring Jesus. That is another benefit for him at his baptism.

On the one hand, as God’s true Son, what benefit could Jesus receive from baptism or from hearing the Father’s voice? All things were already his from all eternity, including being the Father’s beloved favorite.

On the other hand, as stated earlier, in both Mark and Luke the voice uses second-person pronouns: “You yourself are my beloved Son: I have greatly preferred you.” This

penned ‘Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird’ but one recent NT commentary offers *sixteen* ways of interpreting the dove. Other studies describe even more.” (op. cit., p. 441.)

There was also the view, popularized by L. E. Keck, that “as a dove” originally described the Spirit’s flight, not his appearance. (“The Spirit and the Dove.” *New Testament Studies*. vol. 17, no. 1. Oct., 1970. pp. 41-67.) G. Richter does a nice job refuting Keck, because the point of the phrase “as a dove” was to explain how people could *see* the Holy Spirit, who is normally invisible. (“Zu den Taufzählungen Mk 1<sub>9-11</sub> und Joh 1<sub>32-34</sub>.” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche*. vol. 65, no. 1. 1974. pp. 43-56.—However, on purely conjectural grounds Richter rejects the voice from heaven as part of the original accounts.) cp. also P. Joseph Knackstedt. “Manifesto SS. Trinitatis in Baptismo Domini?” *Verbum Domini: Commentarii de Re Biblica*. vol. 38. 1960. p. 87. (Graciously translated for me by Pastors Nathaniel Biebert and Benjamin Schaefer.) Joh. Ph. Koehler anticipated both Keck and Richter’s arguments by seventy years. For Koehler Luke’s term *σωματικῶ εἶδει* made the whole matter *selbstverständlich* (self-evident): the word “dove” described the appearance of the Spirit, not the style of his descent. (op. cit., p.23.)

<sup>113</sup> De Maris lists also Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 12:13; and 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 in this connection. (op. cit., p. 17.)

<sup>114</sup> Romans 8:13.



emphasizes that the message was especially meant for Jesus, for his reassurance and encouragement.<sup>115</sup> In the midst of the suffering and frustration of his upcoming ministry, he was to know and never doubt that he was God's beloved Son.<sup>116</sup>

It is hard to reconcile the Father's words with the teaching that Jesus *did* receive the forgiveness of sins at baptism, only not forgiveness of his own sins, but of the sins of the world, which he was bearing already then. This is taking the idea of an "identification with sinners" one step farther. Some Lutheran exegetes have spoken this way, notably Luther himself, for example, in a pair of 1540 sermons on Matthew 3:

Here John gets hold of a sinner, who has no sin for his own person and yet is the biggest of sinners, having and bearing all the world's sin. . . . Since he has now become such a sinner, who has had all of our sins laid upon him, he truly needs baptism and must have himself baptized for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>117</sup>

F. W. Wenzel said this, too:

Christ was serious as our substitute. He made our burden His burden. He seriously felt the burden that was on Him. He felt it now as much as He did later during His passion. Baptism to Him was a baptism of repentance, confessing the sins that He had taken on Himself. Baptism to Him was for the remission of sins, sins not His own, but ours.<sup>118</sup>

A sermon in the 1946 *Concordia Pulpit* said it this way:

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<sup>115</sup> Note the reason Fritz gives for denying this, "Jesus did not need to be told in what respect He is the Son of God; He well knew that, and He was such from eternity." (op. cit., p. 93) True enough, Prof. Fritz, but in his state of humiliation (by definition thereof) Jesus did not constantly make use of his divine knowledge!

<sup>116</sup> I see no reason to entertain the variant reading in Luke 3:22, "This day I have begotten you." See Lenski's comments on why it is spurious and what heresies other commentators try to spin from it. (*Interp. Luke*. op. cit., p. 217.) cp. also Wilhelm Schneemelcher, whose argues against the variant reading on the basis Lu. 1:35, where Luke says that Jesus would be God's Son already from birth. "υιός κτλ." *TDNT*. Kittel, op. cit. vol. VIII. p. 381. Dennison comes to the same conclusion after a concise review of the textual evidence. (op. cit., p. 11)

Sheatsley has a nice illustration at this point of his sermon on Matthew 3:13-16. He compares the encouragement Jesus received from the Father's voice to the encouragement Joshua received from Moses and the Lord when about to commence the conquest of Canaan. (op. cit., p. 81.)

<sup>117</sup> "Auslegung des Neuen Testaments" Walch, op. cit. vol. 7, p. 691f.—"*Johannes kriegt allhier einen Sünder, der keine Sünde für seine Person hat; und ist doch der größte Sünder, der aller Welt Sünde had und trägt. . . . Weil er nun solcher Sünder worden ist, der unser aller Sünde auf ihm liegend hat, so darf er wahrlich der Taufe, und muß sich lassen taufen zur Vergebung der Sünden.*" cp. also vol. 12, p. 1137, a sermon Luther gave on Matthew 3:13-16 shortly before his death.

<sup>118</sup> op. cit., p. 75.

God washed Him in advance of all sins which as our Substitute He bore for us, and absolved Him with His own voice, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”<sup>119</sup>

One nice thing to be said for this view of Jesus’ baptism is that it treats the baptism as a real means of grace, as opposed to just law-fulfillment or an outward rite by which to identify with others. But again, not one word of the baptism accounts (unless maybe the word “baptism” itself) says that Jesus had sins on him that needed washing off, whether his own or anyone else’s. Also, the Father does not say, “Now that the world’s sins have been washed off of you in baptism, I will now prefer you.” Rather the Father’s statement used the aorist tense in all three synoptic gospel accounts, in order to say, “I have greatly preferred you.”<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, Jesus did not say to the Baptizer, “John, you are wrong:

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<sup>119</sup> “The Importance of Christ’s Baptism.” Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17 (adapted from *Hom. Mag.*, vol. 22, p. 16). *The Concordia Pulpit for 1946*. vol. XVII. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1945. p. 52.

<sup>120</sup> In an apparent effort to say that the divine favor was something new for Jesus, James R. Edwards cites some commentators who call this a “timeless aorist” and then again J. Moulton who translates it, “I have just set my favor’ on him.” He concludes, “The aorist form alone argues for neither position,” that is, whether the favor was new or not. (“The Baptism of Jesus according to the Gospel of Mark.” *Journal of the Evangelical Society*. vol. 34, no. 1. March, 1991. p. 54, fn. 53.) Wallace also lists this as a “possible” example of what he calls an “Immediate Past Aorist,” but he gives no reason for it. (Daniel B. Wallace. *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996. p. 565.) At any rate, we are here talking about an anthropopathism, that is, depicting God as if he had emotions like ours. It is not as though God has changing feelings. The question, then, is whether the reason for God’s good pleasure was something recent, as in the life of obedience Jesus had lived up to that point or perhaps, some would say, the commitment Jesus made to serve God, as symbolized by his coming to be baptized. Gottlob Schrenk says the aorist cannot tell us either way, but points to the accompanying expression “beloved Son” and to the context to say that Jesus’ election as the Savior did not begin at his baptism. (“ευδοκέω,” *TDNT*, op. cit., Vol.II, p.741.)

Obviously, I have used a less traditional translation for the verb ευδόκησα. Schrenk says the verb “implies volition, though with an emotional element.” (ibid., p. 739.) In regard to the voice at Jesus’ baptism, he comments, “Of all the terms for election (αιρετίζειν, εκλέγεσθαι, προσδέχεσθαι, θέλειν), ευδοκῆν brings out most strongly the emotional side of Him who elects. (p. 740.) “Esteemed” or “favored” didn’t seem to convey the idea of election very well. The word “prefer” didn’t seem to me to have enough emotion in it, so I went with “greatly prefer.” I am open to other suggestions. C. H. Dodd also argues that this verb almost always in the NT has the sense of “choose” or “prefer,” but then he rejects that sense at Jesus’ baptism on the basis of his presumption that Mark was trying to allude to Isaiah 42:1’s Hebrew verb רצה. (“New Testament Translation Problems II.” *The Bible Translator*. vol. 28, no. 1. January, 1977. p. 104ff.) However, the idea of election is also in Isaiah 42:1, so Dodd’s decision is specious.

Dr. Benjamin W. Bacon, using a translation similar to mine, draws an encouraging parallel between the Father’s voice at Jesus’ baptism and Paul’s doxological discussion of predestination in Ephesians 1:4-9: “I do not think that the collocation of these terms ευδοκία and Ηγαπημένος employed

I *do* need to be baptized by you, because I need you to wash off of me all the sins of the world.” He said the baptism was “fitting,” not needed.

Another view is that this was mostly just Jesus’ public “installation” into the ministry, or where he received his external call to ministry. This was another point Luther made: “There Christ begins to be a Christ, there he is inaugurated, enters his ministry.”<sup>121</sup> We are certainly meant to take the second half of that statement of Luther as explaining the first. That is, Luther did not mean to say that Jesus was not the Christ until his baptism, only that up to this point he was a Christ in private. Among others, Joel Gerlach espouses this view: “Jesus’ baptism was . . . an inaugural ceremony which marked the beginning of his public ministry.”<sup>122</sup> But was this inauguration for the public’s sake? We don’t even know that they saw or heard the theophanies. Or was it an inauguration for Jesus’ sake? If so, he benefited from his baptism somehow. He received something he didn’t have before. For is not an external call to public gospel ministry a spiritual benefit to the person who receives it and ministers under it?

In his state of humiliation, Jesus sought encouragement just like other people do. The voice at the Jordan was a great encouragement for him. When Satan or wicked men would challenge Jesus, saying, “If you are God’s Son . . .,” he could look back at his baptism and say to himself, “I am God’s Son: he said so at my baptism.” We also are called

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in the Voice from heaven to Jesus in the Baptismal Vision, and repeated in Eph. 1<sup>4-9</sup>, can be accidental. Paul is simply applying the doctrine of the foreordination (preexistence) of Messiah and his people to that fundamental narrative of the gospel. God chose (εὐδόκησεν) Christ as his Son, the Beloved, before the foundation of the world. But he also chose us Jews and Gentiles together, as a περιποίησις, a υιοθεσία, with and in him. We εκλεκτοί, who were chosen and preordained by God together with his Εκλεκτός, whose names are written in his register of citizenship kept in heaven, are the ἄνθρωποι εὐδοκίας as he is the Ἄνθρωπος εὐδοκίας.” (“Supplementary Note on the Aorist εὐδόκησα, Mark i. 11.” *Journal of Biblical Literature*. vol. 20, no. 1. 1901. pp. 29-30.)

<sup>121</sup> Ein Sermon von der Taufe Christi, 1526. “Dr. Martin Luthers Kirchen-Postille. Evangelien-Theil.” Walch, op. cit. vol. 11. p.2130. Later in the sermon Luther applies this, “*hier Christus hat mit seinem Exempel gelehret, daß man zum Predigtamt nicht soll unberufen treten.*” (p. 2134—by his example, Christ has here taught that you should not enter the preaching ministry without a call.)

<sup>122</sup> op.cit., p.32.

God's beloved children in our baptism and are told that God is pleased with us. Cp. Gal. 3:26-27: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."<sup>123</sup> In challenging times of life, we also are meant to look back at our baptisms as a source of confidence and remind ourselves: "We are God's sons: he said so at our baptisms."

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<sup>123</sup> In this connection, De Maris adds also Romans 8:14-16. (op. cit., p. 17)

**Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism—Part Four: Luke’s description of the actions and words of Jesus after his baptism says so.<sup>124</sup>**

The Spirit who descended upon Jesus at baptism then led him into the wilderness to be tempted for forty days. Luke 4:1 emphasizes this by mentioning the Spirit twice: “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert.”<sup>125</sup> Why the repetition? Luke doesn’t want us to miss his point: here is why the Spirit descended upon Jesus, to lead him and fill him for his ministry!

Upon his return to Galilee, Jesus did many miracles by the power of the Spirit, who had been poured out on him at his baptism (Lu. 4:14): “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.” Please note that Luke used the same nouns here, “Spirit” and “power,” that Peter would use to describe Jesus’ anointing in Acts 10:38, which we’ll look at shortly.

Then, in his Nazareth sermon, Jesus said he was the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1f and that he could preach the good news the way he was doing only because God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit, Luke 4:18:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.”

This anointing happened at his baptism, which Luke had described in the previous chapter.

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<sup>124</sup> Joh. Ph. Koehler says that, because he put the genealogy of Jesus between them, Luke does not indicate any connection between Jesus’ baptism and his temptation. This is an exaggeration on Koehler’s part. (op. cit., p. 20.) He tempered this remark on the previous page, there only saying that Luke has “somewhat (*etwas*) lost the inner connectedness” between the events.

<sup>125</sup> Lorenz Wunderlich comments on this verse, “It should be noted that the use of the imperfect tense of the verb in this passage shows that this was not merely a momentary act on the part of the Spirit but that it continued during the entire wilderness temptation. The clear implication then is that the Holy Spirit was with Jesus throughout the Satanic testing, guiding and assisting Him in overcoming the temptations.” (*The Half-Known God: the Lord and Giver of Life*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963. p. 68)

Luke 4, then, mentions in three different verses that now Jesus had special help from the Holy Spirit, who had descended to him at his baptism. The Spirit gave Jesus special guidance for how to live, gave him power to do miracles, and gave him good news to preach to the poor. Truly the Spirit he had received at his baptism was helping him to “fulfill,” or live up to, “all righteousness.”

## Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism—Part Five: John the Baptizer

would later explicitly say so.

As I have already said, perhaps too many times, John is the only other person that we know for sure saw the descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism.

God had told him beforehand that he would see it,<sup>126</sup> but apparently not that he would have to baptize Jesus in order to see it. This would explain why John was so surprised when Jesus came to be baptized by him.

Later, more than a month after the baptism, John described what he had seen. It is a very important description, as far as concerns my thesis: "And John testified, saying, 'I have seen the Spirit descending out of heaven like a dove and it remained on him.'"<sup>127</sup> The word for "it remained" is ἐμεινεν. It is a very common verb in both the gospel of John and 1 John. The evangelist used this verb again in this same chapter, for example:

They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying (μένεις)?"

"Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying (μένει), and spent (ἐμειναν) that day with him.<sup>128</sup>

The sixty-five times that John uses this verb,<sup>129</sup> it always means "remain" or "stay," never just "appear to remain." Try the translation "appear to remain" in the section just

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<sup>126</sup> John 1:33.

<sup>127</sup> John 1:32.

<sup>128</sup> John 1:38-39.

<sup>129</sup> J. Daryl Charles calls it "The johannine μένω." ("Will the Court Please Call in the Prime Witness?": John 1:29-34 and the 'Witness'-Motif." *Trinity Journal*. vol. 10 NS, no. 1. Spring, 1989. p. 79.)—The last paragraph of Charles' article (p. 83) reminded me that John the Apostle had presumably been John the Baptizer's disciple, thus hearing the sermon in John 1:29-34 with his own ears and then meeting Jesus personally the next day. Therefore, the Apostle was not recording this testimony of the Baptizer's dispassionately, but rather would have been recalling the sermon in which he was first taught that Jesus was his Savior, a sermon of the Baptizer that he could therefore never forget. It is no wonder, then, that the Spirit led him to record the events of Jesus' baptism in this unique way.

quoted. It's just strange: "So they went and saw where he appeared to be remaining, and appeared to remain that day with him."

John the Baptized clearly testified, then, that the Spirit did not just "appear" to remain on Jesus, did not fly down merely to "mark" Jesus as the Messiah or merely to be a "sign" of divine authorization his ministry: rather the Spirit flew down to remain on Jesus, to have lasting influence upon him.<sup>130</sup> I am convinced that Schaller did not make himself clear enough that he was giving this testimony of the Baptizer its due, when, in his eagerness to refute the idea that before his baptism Jesus was not "qualified" to be the Savior, he denied that Jesus received "additional spiritual endowments" from what happened at his baptism.

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<sup>130</sup> F. Hauck: "The abiding of the Spirit on Christ in Jn. 1:32 lifts Him above the prophets, who are honored only with temporary inspiration. It also lifts His filling with the Spirit . . . above the passing ecstatic states of pagans." ("μένω" *TDNT*. Kittel, op. cit. vol. IV. p. 575f.)



**Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism—Part Six: Simon Peter the Apostle would later explicitly say so.**

In Acts 1:22, Peter defined “the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us” as “beginning from John’s baptism.” Thus we are to see Jesus’ baptism by John as a decisive event.

But how decisive was it? In Acts 10:37-38, Peter says it was at Jesus’ baptism that God anointed him “with the Holy Spirit and power.”<sup>131</sup> Here is the NIV1984 translation:

You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

There are three details to note in Peter’s testimony, two of which are decisive for my thesis and which Schaller seems to have given insufficient attention.

While Schaller, as I will show in quotations from him later, makes it sound like Jesus had received already at his conception all the gifts he would ever receive from the Holy Spirit, Peter spoke differently here in Cornelius’ house. Peter said that Jesus’ anointing with the Spirit’s power was part of what began “after the baptism that John preached.” The phrase “how God anointed him” (ὡς ἐχρίσεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεὸς) is appositive to the earlier phrase “what has happened” (τὸ γενόμενον ρῆμα). And when did “what has happened” happen?—“beginning . . . after the baptism that John preached” (μετὰ τὸ βάπτισμα).<sup>132</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Walter Grundmann shows from the context why Peter referred to Jesus’ anointing on this occasion (although we would substitute “Peter” for “Luke” and “Gentiles” for “Hellenistic churches” in applying his quote specifically to the sermon at Cornelius’ house): “Whereas for most Jews Messiah was now a fixed term and there was little sense of the relation to ‘anointing,’ ‘to anoint,’ Lk., who is introducing the concept to Hellen. churches in which it would be unintelligible, is forced to elucidate the term.” (“Χριστὸς κτλ.: The Christ-Statements of the New Testament.” *TDNT*. Kittel, op. cit. vol. IX, p. 534, fn.281.)

<sup>132</sup> Lenski takes this differently (in contrast to Bauer, p. 735, who takes ρῆμα here in the sense of “thing, object, matter”), as referring to the utterance or talk about Jesus that started during the time of John’s preaching. (*The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*. Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1944.

Note also that Luke borrowed from Peter's vocabulary here for Jesus beginning (αρχάμενος) his ministry, for his own gospel's description of Jesus' beginning (αρχόμενος—doesn't specifically say there *what* he was beginning) at age 30 in Luke 3:23, the verse after his account of the baptism.<sup>133</sup>

Peter said it was “Jesus, the one from Nazareth” (Ἰησοῦν τὸν ἀπὸ Ναζαρέθ) whom God anointed. Does this imply that the anointing did not take place till *after* Jesus had lived in Nazareth? It is at least a detail worth observing.

Also, Peter explained what Jesus was able to do as a result of this anointing: “he went around doing good” (εὐεργετῶν). In other word, the Spirit's power, received at his baptism, enabled Jesus to “fulfill all righteousness,” to do all the good he was supposed to, just as he had told John the Baptizer the benefit of his baptism would be. Peter shows how fitting it is for us in our preaching to say that, in his state of humiliation, Jesus generally depended on the Holy Spirit for his ability to pursue a holy life and depended on the powerful Spirit for his power to deliver others from the devil. Jesus himself spoke this way, for example in Mt.12:28, “I cast out devils by the Spirit of God.”

Acts 10:37-38 is a key passage to point us away from the tendency of some dogmatists to say that the “anointing” that makes Jesus the “Christ” is his having the divine nature. For example, Martin Chemnitz:

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p. 422.) On the next page, however, he agrees with me that the anointing took place at the Jordan River.

Christoph Burchard uses Luke 2:15 (“the only [other] instance in the NT . . . of a participle of γίνεσθαι being associated with ρῆμα.”) and an apocryphal reference to show that ρῆμα means “thing” here. (“A Note on ρῆμα in JosAs 17:1f; Luke 2:15,17; Acts 10:37.” *Novum Testamentum*. vol. XXVII, fasc. 4. October, 1985. p. 290.) He agrees with me that acc. to v.37 the “ρῆμα did not begin until after Jesus' baptism by John.” (ibid., p. 292)

<sup>133</sup> Pointed out by Wilckens. (op. cit., p.231) In the footnote he notes other times Luke used a form of this participle. However, Wilckens' position is that in Acts 10 Luke is not reporting what Peter actually said, which he “proves” from the “fact” that the things Peter says in 10:37 that Cornelius already knew (ὁμοῖς οἶδατε) were things Cornelius could not have already known. Acc. to Wilckens, Luke was just using this account as an opportunity to present his own summary of the Christian message. (same idea from Wm. Baird in *One-Volume Commentary*, op. cit., p. 742.)

Christ, was anointed according to his human nature “above all his fellows” (Ps 45:7), not only with infused gifts of the Spirit, nor only with the indwelling of the Spirit through grace in order that the Spirit might accomplish certain or numerous or great works in Christ, but also because the divine nature of the Logos with its total substantial fullness dwells personally in his assumed nature.<sup>134</sup>

John Gerhard:

It is one and the same anointing with which the Father anointed Christ according to his human nature and with which Christ anointed his own flesh with the oil of the Deity and the fullness of his own Spirit.<sup>135</sup>

Adolf Hoenecke even tries to use Acts 10:38 to prove this view. To do so, he makes the logical jump that here “power to do miracles” must equal “divine majesty.” Even if it does equal that, is it the Son’s divine majesty or the Spirit’s?

[Psalm 45:7] also testifies to the sharing of the divine majesty with the human nature of Jesus, for Acts 10:38 shows that what was shared is the divine majesty; according to this passage, what was shared by the anointing is the power to do miracles, thus the divine majesty.<sup>136</sup>

The Bible doesn’t talk that way about Jesus’ anointing. There is no Bible passage that uses the word “anointing” with “Christ” or “the Logos” as the subject or with an object like “divinity” or “divine nature” or “divine majesty” or “oil of the Deity” or “Godhood” or “fullness of God” to describe what Jesus was anointed with. On the contrary, what does the Bible say the Anointed One was anointed with? We have it here in Peter’s Caesarea sermon. We should use the clearer passages to interpret the less clear. We should use this clear passage, Acts 10:38, to explain Psalm 45:7’s metaphorical “oil of gladness,” not just come up with our own solutions to the metaphor, however Christologically correct they may be. Not only here, but also in Isaiah 61:1, which I

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<sup>134</sup> *The Two Natures in Christ*. p. 328. cf. first note on next page. (cp. also John of Damascus, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, bk. III, ch. 3, and in ch. 17 he quotes Gregory of Nazianzus along the same lines.)

<sup>135</sup> *Loci*. Tom. 1, loc. IV, cap. I, par. 14. p. 452. cf. first note on next page.—Schaller cites this same quote and agrees with it. (op. cit., p. 118.)

<sup>136</sup> op. cit., p.87.

quoted above in discussing Luke 4:18, the anointing is defined as (or at the very least connected to it in Hebrew parallelism) Jesus' receiving of the powerful Holy Spirit.

You can see from the Chemnitz quote that dogmaticians liked to use Psalm 45:7 (45:8 in the masoretic text) to make their point that Jesus was anointed with the divine nature at his incarnation. But consider what Psalm 45:7 actually says: "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." The Sons of Korah used the word "therefore" in this verse (על־כן). It is a cause-and-effect statement. What is the cause?—the way Jesus had loved righteousness (צדק) before he was anointed. What is the effect?—God would show that he was disposed to anoint Jesus. Psalm 45:7, then, presents Jesus' anointing as a *result* of his preceding righteous life. It is not, then, talking about an anointing that his human nature received at conception, that is, at the moment of incarnation, before he had a chance to show that he had subjected himself to the law.<sup>137</sup> Rather, after Jesus lived thirty years of perfection and holiness in the obscurity of a Nazareth carpenter shop, God responded with approval by giving him the anointing at the Jordan as a reward.

It is instructive also to note in the quote from Chemnitz how he admits that the Holy Spirit helped Christ in his saving work: "the Spirit, dwelling in Him by grace, wrought

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<sup>137</sup> cp. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Holy Trinity*, bk. XI, par. 19, where he makes the very same point about Psalm 45:7. Also, Gottfried Hoffmann clearly says that Psalm 45 is talking about Jesus being anointed with the Holy Spirit: "For since he was anointed with the oil of gladness, that is the Holy Spirit, by God the Father, therefore also he was called Christ. And, indeed, he was anointed not as God, but as man; although he administers the office for which he was anointed not only according to his human nature, but also according to his divine nature. For he is said to have been anointed above his companions (Ps 45:8); but according to his divine nature he does not have companions." (*Synopsis. de offic. Christi*, par.I, ecches. p. 513. Received in an e-mail from Prof. John Brug of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, along with the quotes on the preceding page from Chemnitz and Gerhard, Mon., Nov. 14, 2011.) Hoenecke uses this Hoffmann quote to explain his own statement that Jesus' anointing with the Holy Spirit "occurred at the instant of the incarnation." (op. cit., p. 165f.) However, I don't see where the Hoffmann quote says anything about the instant of the incarnation!

An alternate view of Psalm 45:7 would be that it is talking about Christ's exaltation. This view at least takes into account the word "therefore." Several writers have pointed to Acts 2:33 to say that Jesus received a special outpouring of the Spirit three times: at conception, baptism, and exaltation.

many and great powers in Christ.”<sup>138</sup> This is, of course, in line with Peter’s words in Acts 10:37-38.

We also depend on the Spirit for what Peter here said that Jesus depended on him for: we depend on him for help to go around doing good and for power against the devil.

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<sup>138</sup> as cited in F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, II, p. 331.

**Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism—Part Seven: It is in line with other incidents in Jesus’ life for us to say so. That is, other incidents where he seems to have received gospel assurance or spiritual benefits.**

It is not in controversy to say that, in order to grow physically or to find and maintain his physical strength, Jesus employed the normal, God-ordained means that other human beings must employ. To say so is not seen as a denial that Jesus all along retained his divine omnipotence.

Nor should it be in controversy to say that, in order to find spiritual knowledge, encouragement, and strength, Jesus employed the God-ordained means of grace that others who seek God must employ—that is, prayer, the means of grace, and the fellowship of other believers. To say so should not be seen as a denial that Jesus all along retained (but did not constantly use) his immutable and self-sustaining divine holiness, his identity as the Savior, or his omniscience in spiritual matters.

In several passages in the Gospels, a specific benefit is mentioned for Jesus from his use of prayer, the means of grace, or Christian fellowship.

- ✓ “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men,” Luke 2:52. This must have included growth in spiritual wisdom, not just growth in worldly wisdom. For true wisdom only begins with the fear of the Lord.
- ✓ He used God’s Word to fight off temptation during the forty days in the wilderness.

- ✓ Obeying God's Word nourished him and was his "food," John 4:34. Ylvisaker comments on that verse: it "brought true refreshment and true restoration to His soul."<sup>139</sup>
- ✓ He learned from the Father what works to do, John 5:19-20; 14:31; and what doctrines to teach, John 7:16; 8:28,38,40; 12:49-50; 14:24; 15:15; 17:8.<sup>140</sup>
- ✓ In answer to his prayer, Moses and Elijah came to earth to talk with him, Luke 9:28ff.
- ✓ He found great satisfaction in celebrating the Passover with his disciples before his suffering, Luke 22:15.
- ✓ When the disciples deserted him, he took comfort that the Father was still with him, John 16:32.
- ✓ In time of sorrow he longed for the companionship and prayers of his closest apostles, Matthew 26:37-38 (cp. Mk. 14:32-34).
- ✓ In answer to his prayer, an angel came to Gethsemane to help him then pray even more earnestly, Luke 22:43-44.
- ✓ At the point of death, he prayed that God the Father would shelter his spirit in his hands, Luke 23:46, and the Father did.

In many other instances, Jesus is simply reported as praying or using the means of grace, without mention of a specific benefit for him. Yes, Jesus did these things as part

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<sup>139</sup> op.cit., p. 155.

<sup>140</sup> Admittedly, in Jesus' case there is not the traditional formula, "The word of the Lord came to . . .," that we find with other prophets, even John the Baptizer (Lk. 3:2). G. Kittel speculates as to why this is, saying, "such an idea was felt to be inappropriate and inadequate to describe the relationship of Jesus with God," but in view of the passages I have cited, he seems to have overstated his case at least somewhat. cp. Jn. 8:28, e.g., "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." ("λέγω: Word and Speech in the New Testament." *TDNT*. op. cit. vol. IV, p. 114.)

Bennema has a less extensive list along the same lines as mine under this bullet point, but he adds also John 3:34, "which indicates that Jesus can speak the words of God, i.e., bring God's revelation, *because* God gives Jesus the Spirit without measure." Here, then, Jesus is said to get his teaching from God and to speak it by the Spirit received at the Jordan. (op. cit., p. 50.)

of being perfect in our place, for we do not pray or use the means of grace as faithfully as we should. But there is no reason to assume that he did these things *only* in order to observe God's laws concerning prayer or the Third Commandment or Deuteronomy 6:6-7. Nor is there reason to assume that what are gospel-related activities for us were *only* legal burdens for Jesus. Again, there is no reason to assume that, even according to his human nature, he received no benefit, spiritual strength, or encouragement in these activities.

- ✓ Jesus was circumcised, Luke 2:21. Circumcision was included in the Mosaic laws, but before Moses it was already a means of grace. Jesus did not need forgiveness of sins from it. He did not need circumcision to convert him from original sin, like other infant Hebrew boys did. However, circumcision would have assured Jesus throughout his life that he was part of God's chosen people and that God was his God—things it would have been hard for him to cling to when he was mocked and forsaken on the cross, for example.<sup>141</sup>
- ✓ Jesus attended the religious festivals of the Jews, Matthew 26:18 (and parallels); Luke 2:41-42; John 2:13; 5:1; 7:10; 10:22-23; 12:1. He did not need the forgiveness offered in the temple sacrifices. But the festivals would have reminded Jesus that in the past his Father had taken care to keep his covenant with his people and he would take the same care in Jesus' case.
- ✓ Jesus listened to the teachers and had questions for them, Luke 2:46. We can assume he learned new spiritual truths from their answers, that this was part of his growth in wisdom, Luke 2:52.

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<sup>141</sup> Hoenecke seems to disagree with me, implying that Jesus' circumcision was only "subjection to the law . . . for our sakes" (op. cit., p. 118.), as well as his "commitment to his ministry and the solemn, public installation into it. (ibid., p. 166.) This is not surprising, as it consistent with his position on Jesus' baptism (ibid.). Was circumcision obedience to the law? For those who were born under Moses' law, yes, it was, but it was more than that for Jewish boys and it was more than that for Jesus, too: it was also gospel encouragement for Jesus in his state of humiliation.



- ✓ Jesus spent time a lot of time praying, Matthew 14:23 (cp. Mk. 6:46); Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12, “all night in prayer”; 11:1; John 17:1-5.
- ✓ It was his “custom” to go to the synagogue on every Sabbath day, Luke 4:16.
- ✓ He sang hymns with his disciples, Matthew 26:30 (cp. Mk.14:26).
- ✓ On the cross, several Scripture passages were on his mind and in his mouth.

In view of these other events in Jesus’ spiritual life, it should not surprise us that he received spiritual benefits also in connection with the glorious sacrament of Baptism.

**Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism—Part Eight: Many teachers  
in the history of the church have said so.**

This section of the paper is included in line with the reasoning that lay behind Martin Chemnitz’s statement, “We also hold that no dogma that is new in the churches and in conflict with all of antiquity should be accepted.”<sup>142</sup> The quotations below prove that I am certainly not the first or most prominent pastor ever to suggest that Jesus received spiritual benefits at his baptism.<sup>143</sup>

I will not hide from you that several of the following quotes seem to separate the descent of the Spirit from the baptism of Jesus. As you will see, some of the men quoted below with correct views of the Spirit’s descent were quoted in other parts of the paper with off-kilter interpretations of Jesus’ baptism itself. They are willing to say the Spirit’s descent benefited Jesus, but not that baptism did. Scripture gives them leeway to separate the two, in that, as I have admitted above (Part Three), the evangelists do not explicitly say, “The Spirit and voice were results of the baptism.” However, I cannot think of a scriptural reason that requires us to separate the two.<sup>144</sup> I think they do this because they are only thinking of baptism as a means of forgiveness, which of course Jesus did not

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<sup>142</sup> *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part One.* transl., F. Kramer. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971. p. 258.—This is in contrast to P. Joseph Knackstedt’s reason for using patristic sources in his discussion of Jesus’ baptism, a reason which he says he got from the Council of Trent: “The Fathers and ecclesiastical writers should be consulted not only in matters of faith and morals, where their consensus furnishes the rule of faith and discipline, but they can also assist us in a complete explanation of the sacred pages.” (op. cit., p. 77.) Knackstedt calls it his “most pressing concern,” in answering a question about Jesus’ baptism, to determine what the church fathers said about it. In contrast, my entire paper is an effort respectfully to judge the church (and synodical) fathers on the basis of what the Bible says. This is the opposite of Knackstedt’s stated method. Our “rule of faith and discipline” has to be and remain the Bible, not the “consensus” of the fathers.

<sup>143</sup> There are more I could have quoted: e.g., Fritz, op. cit., p. 92, although only cursorily; Lenski, *Interp. Acts*, op.cit., p. 423, where he specifically says Acts 10:38’s anointing “does not refer to the Incarnation”; *ibid.*, *Interp. Luke*, op. cit., p. 211; Schramm, op. cit., p. 56; Sheatsley, op. cit., pp. 78-79, who makes many of the same points I have made in this paper; John G. Sohn, *Christ and the Christian: Sketches for Sermons Arranged According to the Church Year*, No publisher or date given, vol. 1, p. 97; Wunderlich, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

<sup>144</sup> Lenski gives one, but I think he is reading too much into the significance of the aorist participle in Lu. 3:21, saying, “The aorist participle βαπτισθέντος marks the baptismal act as it was performed upon Jesus as being complete; all else that follows is something else.” (*Interp. Luke.* op. cit., p.209.)

need, when in fact baptism is also a means of pouring out the Spirit and empowering a person for sanctification. But the fact remains, each of the quotations below clearly says that the descent of the Spirit, which occurred in direct connection with Jesus' baptism, benefited him upon whom the Spirit not only descended, but also remained.

First, here are testimonies from the ancient church:

Ca. 185, Irenaeus of Lyons clearly taught that Jesus received his anointing at his baptism:

And then, [speaking of His] baptism, Matthew says, "The heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God, as a dove, coming upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." For Christ did not at that time descend upon Jesus, neither was Christ one and Jesus another: but the Word of God—who is the Saviour of all, and the ruler of heaven and earth, who is Jesus, as I have already pointed out, who did also take upon Him flesh, and was anointed by the Spirit from the Father—was made Jesus Christ, as Esaias also says, "There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise from his root; and the Spirit of God shall rest upon Him." . . . And again Esaias, pointing out beforehand His unction, and the reason why He was anointed, does himself say, "The Spirit of God is upon Me, because He has anointed Me: He has sent Me to preach the Gospel to the lowly, to heal the broken up in heart, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and sight to the blind; to announce the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance; to comfort all that mourn." For inasmuch as the Word of God was man from the root of Jesse, and son of Abraham, in this respect did the Spirit of God rest upon Him, and anoint Him to preach the Gospel to the lowly.<sup>145</sup>

Between 216 and 230, Origen taught that after the baptism the Spirit came to Jesus "to work with Him for the salvation of men":

The Father therefore, the principal, sends the Son, but the Holy Spirit also sends Him and directs Him to go before, promising to descend, when the time comes, to the Son of God, and to work with Him for the salvation of men. This He did, when, in a bodily shape like a dove, He flew to Him after the baptism. He remained on Him, and did not pass Him by, as He might have done with men not able continuously to bear His glory. Thus

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<sup>145</sup> *Against Heresies*. bk. III, ch. 9, par. 3 [cp. also ch. 17, par. 1]. Accessed online Nov. 21, 2011, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103309.htm>

John, when explaining how he knew who Christ was, spoke not only of the descent of the Spirit on Jesus, but also of its remaining upon him.”<sup>146</sup>

Ca. 347-348, Cyril of Jerusalem said that with the Spirit’s descent “the primacy and first-fruits of the Holy Spirit” were “conferred upon the manhood of the Saviour”:

But see what says the Gospel; the heavens were opened; they were opened because of the dignity of Him who descended; for, lo, he says, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and lighting upon Him: that is, with voluntary motion in His descent. For it was fit, as some have interpreted, that the primacy and first-fruits of the Holy Spirit promised to the baptized should be conferred upon the manhood of the Saviour, who is the giver of such grace.<sup>147</sup>

Ca. 359-360, Hilary of Poitiers (who was the so-called “Hammer of the Arians”) wrote that at the Jordan Jesus’ flesh was sanctified

when He came up out of the Jordan . . . Thus is testified the sanctification of His flesh, and in this testimony we must recognise His anointing with the power of the Spirit.<sup>148</sup>

Ca. 380, Ambrose connected the inspiration and activity the Spirit worked in Jesus to the fact that after the Spirit descended at the Jordan he remained on Jesus:

And he said fittingly, “abiding upon Him,” because the Spirit inspired a saying or acted upon the prophets as often as He would, but abode always in Christ. Nor, again, let it move you that he said “upon Him,” for he was speaking of the Son of Man, because he was baptized as the Son of Man.<sup>149</sup>

After 431, Cyril of Alexandria said that the descent of the Spirit at the Jordan gave worthiness to the “nature of man” in Jesus:

The Son was thus anointed in human fashion like us, as I have said, for our sake, in the praises of innocence, and in him the nature of man was

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<sup>146</sup> “Commentary on John.” bk. II, ch. 6. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. vol. X. p. 329.—However, only a few sentences later, Origen made the egregious error of saying that the Spirit had been created by the Son!

<sup>147</sup> *Catechetical Lectures*. no. 17, par. 9.—Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310117.htm>

<sup>148</sup> *On the Trinity*. bk. XI, par. 18.—Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/330211.htm>

<sup>149</sup> *On the Holy Spirit*. bk. III, par. 5-6.—Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/34023.htm>

made radiant so that it now became worthy to participate in the Holy Spirit. No longer was the Spirit absent from that nature, as in former times, but now he loved to dwell within it. And so it is written: “The Spirit came down upon Christ and rested on him” (cf *Jn. 1.32*). This is why the Word of God is called Christ, since he became man like us, for our sake, in the form of a servant. As man he was anointed in the flesh, but as God he has anointed those who believe in him with his own Spirit.<sup>150</sup>

Next, here are testimonies from modern-era Lutherans:

In 1884, George Stoeckhardt (at whose 1913 funeral John Schaller was one of the speakers)<sup>151</sup> not only wrote that Jesus was anointed with the Spirit at his baptism, but also understood “fulfill all righteousness” the same way as I have explained it here. That is, the Spirit he received at his baptism helped Jesus thereafter to live a fully righteous life in our place, starting right away in the wilderness temptations:

After Jesus was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit so he could carry out his ministry (*zur Ausrichtung seines Amtes mit dem Heiligen Geist gesalbt war*), he was first led by the Spirit into the wilderness, in order to be tempted by the devil. Right from the start Satan sought to hinder the blessed path and saving work of the LORD. But Christ withstood him, in the power of the Spirit, with the word of God. Even in that way (*Auch damit*) he fulfilled all righteousness.<sup>152</sup>

Writing from 1905-1907, J. Ylvisaker was quite clear on this point in a few different places in his commentary, *The Gospels*:

[F]or this mission He must be anointed and consecrated by the Father, through the baptism of John.<sup>153</sup>

His baptism is not simply the *acceptance* of the office as our Prophet, High Priest, and King with the pledge that He will perform properly the duties of the office—it is also His divine *preparation* for His exalted mission as the Messiah . . . He had the Spirit, for He was conceived of the

<sup>150</sup> John A. McGuckin, ed. “Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten.” transl., Marius Mercator. *St. Cyril of Alexandria, The Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology, and Texts*. New York, NY: E. J. Brill, 1994. pp. 294-295.

<sup>151</sup> Philip Hunter. “George Stoeckhardt.” Accessed online Dec. 13, 2011, at <http://www.studiumexcitare.com/content/112>.

<sup>152</sup> “Weissagung und Erfüllung: Jes. 8, 23. 9, 1. und Matth. 4, 12-16.” *Lehre und Wehre*. vol. 30, nos. 7 & 8. July / August, 1884. p. 256.

<sup>153</sup> op. cit., p. 116.

Spirit; and the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily. But nevertheless He is now made recipient of the Spirit.<sup>154</sup> (*italics his*)

At His baptism, He was endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit for His work. In the temptation, He employs this power, and shows that He will use it in the work of His calling.<sup>155</sup>

In 1908, Joh. Ph. Koehler (a colleague of Schaller on the Seminary faculty) wrote that Jesus' baptism itself was part of the "righteousness" Jesus had to fulfill<sup>156</sup> and was his special way of publicly entering the ranks of sinners.<sup>157</sup> But as to the miracles after the baptism, he wrote:

God says this for John, that he might recognize him for whom he was preparing the way, John 1:33. He says it also for Christ, in order to give the incarnate Son, during his existence in the humiliation, through a tangible and perceptible sign, a guarantee to assure him of his calling. Therein were strength and comfort that he needed in the ministry and in his humiliation.<sup>158</sup>

According to the way of speaking elsewhere in Scripture, it is understood that we should consider the proceedings as Christ being endowed with the Holy Spirit. But what for? Was he not already before this the Messiah, interceding for us from his birth on? Did not his poverty and persecution belong to the sufferings by which he redeemed us? Was he not put under the law through circumcision, and did he not show himself already as a twelve-year-old lad to be his heavenly Father's only-begotten Son?—Well, yes, but right there in the accounts of his youth the remark recurs that he increased in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and men—he, the God-Man, whom we cannot imagine would ever lack the divine nature and therefore the full possession of all divine majesty and all the gifts of the Spirit. But from the beginning on, he is the God-Man in renunciation, in the humiliation. How his human development would have taken shape if he had not been in the humiliation, is a moot point. We know of the incarnation of Christ only as a step taken for our redemption. Connected to it *eo ipso* and from the first moment on is the humiliation, and everything told us about him is seen from this vantage point. As, then, his entire development as a boy looks like the growth of someone who is under continuous limitations, so also here, when as a mature man he steps forward

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<sup>154</sup> op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>155</sup> op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>156</sup> op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

and when as such he intends to take up his position as Redeemer, it is necessary that he be endowed with the Holy Spirit.<sup>159</sup>

In 1914, Wm. Dallmann wrote concerning the events at the Jordan:

[H]ere Jesus was christened to be the Christ, our Prophet, Priest, and King, with the oil of gladness, with the Holy Ghost and with power. . . . Here was fulfilled the prophecy that the Spirit of God should rest on the rod out of the stem of Jesse, Is. 11, 1, 2; 42, 1.<sup>160</sup>

In 1919, our Seminary's own August Pieper (another colleague of John Schaller!) said regarding Isaiah 61:1's promise that the Savior would be anointed by the Spirit: "The events here foretold are those that follow immediately after Matthew 3:16."<sup>161</sup>

In 1936, a pastor from the American Lutheran Church wrote in a family devotion on Jesus' baptism:

Here we think of Jesus as a Man, as the sinner's Substitute. As such Jesus needed power for the great task which He was beginning. And that was given Him when the Holy Spirit was here poured out upon Him.<sup>162</sup>

In 1939, W. Arndt wrote for the Missouri Synod, "At the same time the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus for His ministry."<sup>163</sup>

In 1986, NPH's *Sermon Studies* commented on Acts 10:37-38:

Orthodox Lutherans have always maintained that the anointing took place simultaneously with the Jesus' incarnation. There are good reasons for this. . . . It is also proper to say that this refers to Jesus' baptism. In our Savior's state of exinanition, he put himself in the position of needing the Spirit for his ministry, even as he put himself in the position of needing to commune with his heavenly Father in prayer.<sup>164</sup>

In 1989, W. Franzmann chimed in, confirming several of the points that I have covered earlier in this paper:

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<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23f.—my own translation.

<sup>160</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>161</sup> *Isaiah II.* transl., Erwin E. Kowalke. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979. p. 601.

<sup>162</sup> Schramm, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>163</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>164</sup> Trapp, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

This anointing of Jesus with the Spirit had been prophesied. Psalm 45:7.<sup>165</sup>

The prophets received *some* of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but Jesus received *all* the gifts and powers of the Spirit of God. . . . Of course, Jesus as the Son of God is one in power and majesty with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and as such he could not *receive* the Spirit. But his human nature was endowed with the fullness of the Spirit, to equip him for his awesome task of redeeming sinners, a work Jesus undertook publicly at his baptism. One more point to be observed is that the Holy Spirit was a permanent gift for Jesus, for John tells us that not only did the Spirit descend on Jesus, but he also ‘remained on him,’ Jesus. (John 1:32,33)<sup>166</sup>

Sometime before his death in 1992, G. Jerome Albrecht wrote for NPH’s *People’s*

*Bible* on Matthew:

Jesus was not without the Holy Spirit before this. After all, he had been conceived by the Holy Spirit before he was born of the virgin Mary. At this time the Holy Spirit bestowed upon Jesus the special gifts he would need to carry out the responsibilities of his office as the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah had foretold what these gifts would include.<sup>167</sup>

And in 1997, W. Kessel wrote for the ELS, “Through baptism He formally accepted His mission as the Savior, and received special power from the Holy Spirit to accomplish His task.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> op. cit., p. 43f.

<sup>168</sup> op. cit., p. 11.



**Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism—Part Nine: J. Schaller seems to forbid us to say so, but his lines of argument involve unclear over-statements.**

Schaller has two main lines of argument.

Here is the first:

Since from birth the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily, baptism could not, and did not, bring him additional spiritual endowments.<sup>169</sup>

Inasmuch as he was the Son of God, he needed no special endowment for this function; in his human nature, however, he was anointed as our Prophet in the moment of incarnation. *By virtue of the hypostatic union*, which was established by his conception, his human nature received the anointment of the Spirit without measure (compare Col 1:19; 2:3,9; John 1:4f,9,14; 3:34, compare 1 Cor 1:30).<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> op. cit., p.119.

<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*, pp.129-130. Here Schaller has Justin Martyr on his side, who wrote in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, par.88, “Now, we know that he did not go to the river because He stood in need of baptism, or of the descent of the Spirit like a dove; even as He submitted to be born and to be crucified, not because He needed such things, but because of the human race, which from Adam had fallen under the power of death and the guile of the serpent, and each one of which had committed personal transgression. For God, wishing both angels and men, who were endowed with free-will, and at their own disposal, to do whatever He had strengthened each to do, made them so, that if they chose the things acceptable to Himself, He would keep them free from death and from punishment; but that if they did evil, He would punish each as He sees fit. For it was not His entrance into Jerusalem sitting on an ass, which we have showed was prophesied, that empowered Him to be Christ, but it furnished men with a proof that He is the Christ; just as it was necessary in the time of John that men have proof, that they might know who is Christ.” (Cited by P. Joseph Knackstedt, op. cit., p. 78.—Accessed online Dec. 14, 2011, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/01286.htm>.)

Here he also has St. Augustine on his side: “And in the Acts of the Apostles it is more plainly written of Him, ‘Because God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit.’ Certainly not with visible oil but with the gift of grace which is signified by the visible ointment wherewith the Church anoints the baptized. And Christ was certainly not then anointed with the Holy Spirit, when He, as a dove, descended upon Him at His baptism. For at that time He deigned to prefigure His body, *i.e.* His Church, in which especially the baptized receive the Holy Spirit. But He is to be understood to have been then anointed with that mystical and invisible unction, when the Word of God was made flesh, *i.e.* when human nature, without any precedent merits of good works, was joined to God the Word in the womb of the Virgin, so that with it it became one person. Therefore it is that we confess Him to have been born of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary. For it is most absurd to believe Him to have received the Holy Spirit when He was near thirty years old: for at that age He was baptized by John; but that He came to baptism as without any sin at all, so not without the Holy Spirit.” (Cited by P. Joseph Knackstedt, op. cit., pp.83-84. *On the Holy Trinity*. bk. 15, ch. 26, par. 46. Accessed online Dec. 14, 2011, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130115.htm>.)

cp. also P. Joseph Knackstedt’s conclusion: “Therefore, we conclude with Knabenbauer (Mt p. 150): ‘For he had every fullness in himself from the very first moment **even as a man**. Accordingly the visible sending of the Holy Spirit does not indicate a new effect in him, but it was only declaring and exhibiting to others the presence of the Holy Spirit in Christ.’” (op. cit., p. 89.)

Here is the second:

Modern theologians almost without exception assume that Christ was anointed for his Messiahship at his baptism. This necessarily implies that Jesus was not actively and in the full sense our Savior from his birth, and is in direct contradiction of the Christmas message of the angel (Lk 2:11).<sup>171</sup>

On the one hand, we should applaud John Schaller's opposition to kenoticist views of Jesus' baptism.<sup>172</sup> Which of us gives thanks to the Lord as much as we should for the strong theological footings on which our synod and seminary have stood for some 150 years now, largely due to God's gracious work through our early leaders like John Schaller? I do not want my paper to detract from that thanksgiving at all.

Schaller is right to use Luke 2:11 as a proof passage the way he does, in which the angel announcing Jesus' birth says, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." The angels told the shepherds and tells us that, already at his birth, Jesus had in some way been anointed with the Holy Spirit. That is what the title "Christ" means: anointed. Already at his birth Jesus was omnipotent, omniscient God. That is what the name "the Lord" means. The angel did not say "he *will be* Christ the Lord, when he gets anointed or exalted sometime later." He said, "he *is* (ὅς ἐστιν) Christ the Lord." Schaller could also have cited Matthew 1:18, which calls the Nativity "the birth of Jesus Christ." Even wicked Herod the Great knew enough to talk this way, ask-

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<sup>171</sup> *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>172</sup> Some writers can denounce kenoticism and still view Jesus' baptism in a kenoticist way. For example, Arthur W. Pink quotes approvingly one G. Smeaton, "No warrant exists for anything akin to the *Kenotic* or depotentiation theory, which denudes Him of the essential attributes of His Godhead, and puts His humanity on a mere level with that of other men. And as little warrant exists for denying the Spirit's work on Christ's humanity in every mediatorial act which He performed on earth or performs in Heaven. The unction of the Spirit must be traced in all His personal and official gifts." (Pink, *op. cit.*, p. 29f.)—He is saying, then, that whenever Jesus did or said something supernatural, it is to be traced back to the Holy Spirit's work in him, because this is all his humanity could handle. He even talks this way about Jesus' mediatorial work now in heaven! This is not scriptural teaching. Rather, Scripture teaches that Jesus' humanity is capable of having divine attributes communicated to it and that on occasion Jesus used his divine attributes even in his state of humiliation.

ing the priests and Bible teachers “where the Christ was to be born.”<sup>173</sup> Jesus was the Anointed One, the Christ, even from birth.

Schaller is also right to include complete unity with the Holy Spirit—complete, in that it could not at all be increased—as one of the divine attributes that was communicated to Jesus’ human nature in the incarnation. How could one say that Colossians 1:19, which Schaller cites here, does not include this? “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”<sup>174</sup> The idea that complete communion with the Holy Spirit was a divine attribute that Christ did not relinquish, but had possession of throughout his life was also testified to by the 9<sup>th</sup> Anathema of Cyril of Alexandria:

If anyone says that the one Lord, Jesus Christ, was glorified by the Spirit, as though the power which He exercised was Another’s, received through the Spirit, and not His own, and that He received from the Spirit the power of countervailing unclean spirits, and of working Divine miracles upon men, and does not rather say that it was His own Spirit by Whom He wrought Divine miracles, be he anathema.<sup>175</sup>

Schaller is also right to say that if Christ was not in full possession of his divine attributes, including the fullness of the Spirit, from conception till his baptism, then during that time he would not have fully been our Savior, which would in turn call into question the substitutionary merits of his thirty years of active obedience under his mother Mary. His obedience merits salvation for us only because it is the obedience of one who is true God and who was not at all obliged to fulfill the law for his own sake.

On the other hand, both lines of argument of our sainted synodical father involve unclear overstatements, prone to be misunderstood.

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<sup>173</sup> Matthew 2:4.

<sup>174</sup> Note here the use of the same verb as the voice at the Jordan used, εὐδόκησεν.

<sup>175</sup> Cited by Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124, as adopted “at least by the fourth if not also by the third Ecumenical Council.”

Consider Schaller's first line of argument. Does it follow that because Christ's human nature was endowed with the fullness of the Spirit from conception, then baptism "could not bring him additional spiritual endowments"? It does not follow. This is not the way we are taught to think and speak about Jesus' other divine attributes during his state of humiliation.

- ✓ Christ's human nature was endowed with *omniscience* from conception, but Nazareth schooling brought him "additional" knowledge, because in his state of humiliation he did not make constant use of his omniscience.
- ✓ His human nature was endowed with *omnipotence* from conception, but sleep in the stern of a boat, even during a squall, gave him "additional" refreshment and strength, because in his state of humiliation he did not make constant use of his omnipotence.
- ✓ His human nature was endowed with *omnipresence* from conception, but by movement of his feet he could go up to Jerusalem or go down from the Sermon on the Mount, because in his humiliation he did not make constant use of his omnipresence.
- ✓ His human nature was given *divine glory* at conception, for this is also a divine attribute, but he prayed for glory from his Father in the upper room, because in his humiliation he did not make constant use of his divine glory.
- ✓ His human nature was given the divine attribute of *independent life* at conception. That is, Jesus could say, "as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself."<sup>176</sup> But what happened Easter morning? His Father gave him life, raising him from the dead, because in Jesus'

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<sup>176</sup> John 5:26.—See Robert D. Preus' discussion of this divine attribute, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

state of humiliation he did not make constant use of his divinely independent, self-sustaining life.

I could list several more divine attributes this way. Is Jesus' *endowment with the Holy Spirit* a totally different thing? The unity of the Persons of the Trinity is a divine attribute.<sup>177</sup> Thus complete unity with the Spirit and, thereby, complete sharing in the Spirit's power are also attributes that were communicated to Jesus' human nature. Why should we not say that in his state of humiliation he did not make constant use of his divine unity with the Holy Spirit, that is, constant use of the Spirit's powers and graces, so that consequently the means of grace could bring him "additional spiritual endowments"? Schaller does not explain what would make these divine attribute different from the others. I'm not sure how he *would* explain that.

As to his second line of argument, Schaller says that Luke 2:11 "directly contradicts" the teaching that "Christ was anointed for his Messiahship at his baptism." Acts 10:38 cannot contradict Luke 2:11 either directly or indirectly, because they are both God's inerrant, inspired Word. But Acts 10:38 says God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power *after* Jesus had come from Nazareth to the baptism preached by John. How do we reconcile these two passages? Several of the pastors quoted in the previous section of this paper already answered that question. They saw a mystery, perhaps, but not a "direct contradiction." The answer is as simple as to say Jesus received the Spirit in a different way at his conception than at his baptism. Schaller's statements give the impression that he would counter this by saying, "If Jesus had the Spirit in all fullness at his conception, what other 'different way' was left for him to receive the Spirit at his baptism"? Schaller's contemporary Johannes Ylvisaker specifically addressed this question, while also

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<sup>177</sup> "Unity of God" is the first divine attributed listed and discussed by Preus, op. cit., p. 64.

explaining what some of the adoptionist false teachings of the time were that Schaller was trying to combat:

The fact that Jesus now received the Spirit, and that Luke states that He was conceived by the Spirit and already from His birth must have the Spirit, does not imply that there is a discrepancy or contradiction. Strauss and his fellows believe that this narrative of the baptism supports the unchristian view that Jesus received the Holy Ghost for the first time at His baptism. The report of His conception by the Holy Ghost is then a later interpolation, because the first was not entirely satisfactory. In this way a contradiction may be easily read into the Gospel account; for, if Jesus had the Spirit, He did not require the Spirit. But the one does not exclude the other. This passage refers to the Spirit of the office or the call.<sup>178</sup>

I am not sure, however, that Ylvisaker's argument would completely address Schaller's concern. Wouldn't Schaller respond, "Jesus had the Spirit *in his fullness* and *without measure* at conception: that means he also had the 'Spirit of the office or the call,' whatever that might be, as well as the Spirit of power, and the Spirit connected with any other attribute listed in Is. 11:2f"? A more satisfactory explanation is to say that at his conception, according to his human nature, Jesus received his complete communion with the Spirit in a similar way to how he received his other divine attributes, that is, in such a way that he did not constantly make use of the Spirit's power in his state of humiliation; and then later, at his baptism, he received the Spirit in a way that was "fitting" (*πρέπον*, cp. the discussion of Mt. 3:15 above) for him to make constant use of in his humiliation. I am convinced this explanation is scriptural and is how Schaller should have written.

It is helpful, as well as curious, to note that Schaller's final position is also attributed to the heretic Mani in Archelaus' "The Disputation with Manes," a disputation alleged to have occurred in the third century between a local bishop and the arch-heretic.<sup>179</sup> Archelaus, the local bishop, doesn't come off all that well in this

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<sup>178</sup> op. cit., p.117.

<sup>179</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. vol. VI. pp. 226-7.

part of the alleged disputation. In his effort to emphasize to Mani that Christ was a real man born of Mary, he dared to say that Christ's flesh was not "perfect" and needed "purification" in baptism. At this point, the editor of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* appended a comment by patristic scholar Martin Routh, which, by the way, agrees with my thesis:

I am afraid that Archelaus has not expressed with sufficient correctness the mystery of the Divine Incarnation . . . For at the time of the Saviour's baptism the Holy Spirit was not given in His first communication with the Word of God . . . but was only received by the Christ ἀνθρωπίνως and οικονομικῶς, and for the sake of men.<sup>180</sup>

Mani allegedly went to the other extreme from Archelaus, to the point of denying even that Christ needed a human mother, but also denying that he received any benefit from his baptism:

For to me it seems but pious to say that the Son of God stood in need of nothing whatsoever in the way of making good His advent upon earth; and that He in no sense required either the dove, or baptism, or mother, or brethren, or even mayhap a father.

[I]f you say that He was only man as born of Mary, and that He received the Spirit at His baptism, it will follow that He will be made out to be Son by increase and not by nature.

Here is a paraphrase of Mani's argument: to say that Jesus received the Spirit at his baptism implies that he didn't completely have the Spirit beforehand, in which case he was not completely God or the Savior. Sound familiar? To be sure, Mani started with a very different premise (namely, denying Christ's man-

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<sup>180</sup> Lactantius made the same error as Archelaus—cp. his "The Divine Institutes," ch. XV. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. vol. VII. p. 115.

hood), but he ended up at the same point as Schaller: if Jesus was God from conception, then his baptism did not and could not have benefited him at all.<sup>181</sup>

At this point, I want to recommend caution concerning one last alternative interpretation of Jesus' baptism. It is this, that by being baptized Jesus made baptism salutary.<sup>182</sup> We certainly must not deny that Jesus' public journey to the cross and his death thereon, which all began at his baptism, is what gives saving power to the gospel in word and sacrament. But where in the scriptural accounts of Jesus' baptism does it say or imply anything like, "Here Jesus gave baptism its power"? It doesn't.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, this interpretation of Jesus' baptism seems to ignore the valid point Schaller was making by his arguments: the holy life that Jesus had lived for 30 yrs. before his baptism served to give baptism its saving power just as much as Jesus' act of being baptized did. One could say, "Because Jesus received the Spirit at his baptism, he was strengthened to continue carrying out his saving work, which in turn gives our baptism power to save us."<sup>184</sup> But that isn't generally what commentators who hold to this interpretation seem to mean.

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<sup>181</sup> Along the same lines, it is striking how F. W. Wenzel, in refuting those ancient false teachers who embraced Cerinthus' late-first-century adoptionist views of Jesus' baptism, seems like he could just as well have been refuting the position of Schaller: "these people cannot unite the two doctrines of Scripture, that Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost and that the Holy Ghost descended and remained on Christ immediately after His baptism. They say, if Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost, He had the Spirit from the very beginning, and the Holy Ghost could not have come upon Him at His baptism once more; and if the Holy Ghost came upon Him at His baptism, He evidently was not there before, and consequently Christ was nothing but a mere man before His baptism. . . . These men fail to see that a man may receive the Spirit of God in more than one way." (op. cit., p. 75)—But please note that I am not at all accusing Schaller of adoptionism or Cerinthianism or Mani's heresy.

<sup>182</sup> Another slant on this is Bengel's statement that "den heil. Geist hat er empfangen, um uns mit demselbigen zu taufen." (op. cit., p. 37—the Holy Ghost has he received in order to baptize us with the same.)

<sup>183</sup> Lenski cites Luther's *Large Catechism* as evidence that "Jesus intended to sanctify the water for this sacrament which he would afterward send out to all the world." (*Interp. Luke*, op. cit., p. 209) But par. 21 of Luther's sermon on Baptism in the *Lg. Cat.* doesn't say anything about Jesus sanctifying the water, just honoring the sacrament. (*Triglot*, op. cit., pp. 736-737.)

<sup>184</sup> Ylvisaker is an example of a commentator speaking correctly in this way. op. cit., p. 118.



## **Jesus Received Benefits at His Baptism (And We Did at Ours, Too!)—**

### **Part Ten: Great joy will be ours to say so to our people.**

We have a great and joyful opportunity to combat kenoticism. We get to teach our people that Jesus did not receive the Spirit for the first time at his baptism. He was the Christ, the Savior, and the Lord from his conception on, for thirty years working out our salvation in private life, saving us from our many sins in private life.

We have a great and joyful opportunity to combat legalistic and merely symbolic views of baptism. We tell our people that something really happened to Jesus at his baptism: “something really happened to you at your baptism, too.” He wasn’t just obeying a divine ordinance: “neither are you just doing that at your baptism.” Baptism is gospel, not a demand or burden of the law. Jesus wasn’t just symbolically committing himself to live for God and for his neighbor: “neither are you just doing that at your baptism.” Baptism is God serving us, not something we act out for God.

It is a great and joyful opportunity to encourage esteem for baptism. We rightly say: If even Jesus benefited from his baptism, who are we to take for granted the benefits of our baptism? The church fathers spoke this way about Jesus’ baptism. For example, Hippolytus paraphrased Christ as saying:

Baptize me, John, in order that no one may despise baptism. I am baptized by you, the servant, that no one among kings or dignitaries may scorn to be baptized by the hand of a poor priest.<sup>185</sup>

Or Augustine imagined what Jesus himself might have said about this:

I know that there will be proud ones in my future people; I know that some men then will be eminent in some grace, so that when they see ordinary persons baptized, they, because they consider themselves better, whether in continence, or in almsgiving, or in doctrine, will perhaps not deign to receive what has been received by their inferiors. It was needful

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<sup>185</sup> *The Discourse on the Holy Theophany.* par. 5.—Accessed online Nov. 21, 2011, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0523.htm>

that I should heal them, so that they should not disdain to come to the baptism of the Lord, because I came to the baptism of the servant.<sup>186</sup>

Luther said:

The Son of God had himself baptized, how can you then be so arrogant, yes, so blind and foolish, that you despise holy baptism? Even if baptism was of no other use or benefit to you, should you not give it all honor simply because you hear that the Son of God had himself baptized?<sup>187</sup>

J. Sheatsley says it powerfully (although with maybe too much emphasis on Jesus' baptism as an "act of humble obedience"):

What can water do for the soul, even though some Word of God be used in connection therewith? What can baptism do for the little child which does not even know what is being done? So men will reason in their self-conceit and prate in their folly, with the result that baptism is at best regarded as a mere ceremony and the christening of a child as worse than silly. But here we see Jesus the very Son of God and the mighty Savior of the world, who stilled the tempest with a word and raised the dead with His voice, who shed His blood upon Calvary that you and I and all the world might live, who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven in a cloud of glory—here we find Him going down to Jordan to seek baptism, declaring that it must needs be in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled; and upon Him in His act of humble obedience to His heavenly Father the Holy Spirit descends in all His fullness to fit Him for His work. Who of us, then, in the light of these facts, will think lightly of his baptism? Should it not be a source of comfort to us daily that even in our very infancy we were started in the way of righteousness through baptism?<sup>188</sup>

Here we can especially highlight the positive effects of baptism: that is, baptism doesn't just *take away* sin and *take away* death and *take away* the devil's power over us, but it also *gives* us power for righteous living, *gives* us the Holy Spirit,<sup>189</sup> *gives* us God's

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<sup>186</sup> *5<sup>th</sup> Tractate on the Gospel of John*. par. 8.—Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701005.htm>

<sup>187</sup> "1534 House Sermon." op. cit., p. 1576.

<sup>188</sup> op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>189</sup> Fritz says that when preaching on Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:13-17, "we should not try to prove from the text that the Holy Spirit has been given us when we were baptized. While this is true, the text does not say this; for the Spirit was given to Christ *after* His baptism and for the very specific purpose of His Messianic office." (op. cit., p. 94) He has a worthwhile point about the baptism account not being a *proof text* for our reception of the Spirit at our baptisms. Titus 3:5-6 would be a good proof text for that. However, Prof. Fritz goes too far when he forbids us to make any connection between the two in our preaching, as I think I have already shown above. He goes even further out of line when on the

favor, and *gives* us sonship with all its rights. Wm. Dallmann gives us an appealing sample of the kind of teaching I am talking about (I have modified points two and three from the points that Dallmann had, in order to make them reflect the thoughts in my paper more):<sup>190</sup>

The baptism of Jesus is an illustration of my baptism.

1. At the baptism of Jesus we found the Holy Trinity; at my baptism there was the Holy Trinity. I was baptized into the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
2. At the baptism of Jesus he received strength to live a holy life that fulfilled all righteousness; at my baptism Jesus covered me with the robe of his righteousness and also filled me with strength to thank him for that robe by living a righteous life myself.
3. At the baptism of Jesus the heavens opened, and the Holy Ghost came down upon Jesus so he could resist temptation, answer the prayers of the sick, and preach the good news to the poor; at my baptism I was born into God's kingdom by water and the Spirit, and I was renewed by that same Spirit so that I might resist temptation, pray in the Spirit on all occasions,<sup>191</sup> and share the good news with my neighbors in the words that the Spirit will give me to speak or sing.<sup>192</sup>

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next page he says, "This text should not be used to speak of Baptism as such; there are other texts that explicitly speak of that. This text speaks of Christ's baptism and not of our baptism." I found it striking that a Missouri Synod Seminary professor would talk that way, when even a rationalist like Joel Marcus can see the connection between the two baptisms. (op. cit., p. 513.) Jesus received the same baptism as we receive: that means it *is* legitimate to preach here about "Baptism as such."

S. Lewis Johnson Jr. goes even further, calling it an "almost absurd statement" to say something like "'follow the Lord in baptism,' as if our baptism is a carbon copy of His. It is doubtful if there is a single passage in the New Testament in which a Biblical writer connects the baptism of Christ with Christian baptism." ("The Baptism of Christ." *Bibliotheca Sacra*. vol. 123, no. 491. July-September, 1966. p. 227.)

Luther would respond, "*Du mußt mit deiner Taufe in die Taufe Christi kommen, also daß Christi Taufe deine Taufe, und deine Taufe Christi Taufe, und allerdings Eine Taufe sei.*" ("Kirchen-Postille, Episteln." op. cit. vol. 12. p. 1136—You must use your baptism to enter into the baptism of Christ, so that Christ's baptism might be your baptism and your baptism Christ's and, to be sure, you will have one baptism altogether.) I hope that in this paper I have demonstrated clearly that I agree with Luther on this point (even if not on some of the other things he has said about Jesus' baptism).

<sup>190</sup> Another example of this would be the family devotion on Matthew 3:13-17, "Your Baptismal Certificate." (Harry N. Huxhold, ed. *Adventures with God: Devotions for Families with Older Children*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1966. pp. 91-92.) Or consider Walther's beautiful statement, "Every Christian may apply to himself the declaration of God: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Matt. 3,17." (op. cit., p. 320)

<sup>191</sup> Ephesians 6:18.

<sup>192</sup> Luke 12:12; Ephesians 4:18-19.

4. At the baptism of Jesus the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”; at my baptism the Father said similar words to me—“He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.”<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Dallmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

**Closing Prayer**<sup>194</sup>

Let it be so now.

Let it be so, Lord.

As you were endowed

Climbing Jordan's shore,

Help us use the pow'r

Baptism affords.

Help us preach that pow'r

All in one accord.

Let it be so now.

Let it be so, Lord.

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<sup>194</sup> An original poem.

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## Appendix: Excerpts from Two Dozen Recent WELS Sermons on Jesus' Baptism

I started at the beginning of the “congregations” section of my 2010 WELS Yearbook, looking for churches which had sermons about Jesus’ baptism on their websites. These are the first two dozen that I found: here I copied down the lines from each sermon that most related to my paper.

My purpose here is not to embarrass anyone. Rather I use these sermon excerpts (1) to confirm at least with these few examples the claims in my paper that this or that interpretation of Jesus’ baptism is popular or has currency in the WELS; and (2) to show there is not great unanimity in the way we present Jesus’ baptism to our people.

If you skim through these excerpts you will find most of the interpretations that I attempted to refute in my paper (not counting the three heresies mentioned in Part One).

I was glad to find that a few of my fellow pastors joined me in ascribing some benefit to Jesus from his baptism.

Several pastors gave only one reason for Jesus’ baptism itself: it was his way of identifying with sinners. But then they did concede that after the baptism he received power from the Spirit and/or encouragement from the voice:

- ✓ There at the river, by being baptized along with all those sinners, baptized with a baptism meant for sinners, Jesus identified himself as the one who would take the blame. Call him the Somebody Else, or the scapegoat or whipping boy or fall guy. Here, the Son of Man rolled up his sleeves, ready to go to work as our Somebody Else. But first, following the baptism, there was an anointing. Jesus truly and officially became the “Anointed One,” the “Messiah,” the “Christ.” Luke relates, “As he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.” God anointed Jesus, as Peter said in Acts 10, with the Holy Spirit and power. God fully equipped him for the monumentally difficult task that lay ahead of him.<sup>195</sup>
- ✓ Jesus was baptized in order that He might join the mass of sinners that stood condemned before God. . . . After His baptism Jesus prayed. We don’t have the words to this prayer but one could surmise He was asking for help in order to complete the awesome mission that lay before Him. Here we see something that you and I cannot understand... Jesus is true God., He has all power and He knows all things. Yet, He prays for God’s help. This is possible because at His birth Jesus took upon Himself a human nature. Because of that human nature He could be weak and dependant upon His Heavenly Father and so pray for help and strength. . . . Here at Jordan Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power to begin His public office as the Christ.<sup>196</sup>
- ✓ What’s he doing in the baptism line? He doesn’t belong there! But by that reasoning, Jesus didn’t belong in most of the places we find him during his earthly ministry. He didn’t belong in a manger. He’s the Word of God, through whom the universe was made. He certainly didn’t belong on a cross, dying like a common thief. Yet time and again we find Jesus lined up with us

<sup>195</sup> Name not given on website. “Jesus Stepped Forward to Take Your Place.” Sermon on Luke 3:21-22, Jan. 10, 2010. Faith Luth., Anchorage, AK. Accessed Nov. 10, 2011 at <http://www.faithalaska.com/home/180003241/180003241/180019925/January%2010-%202010.pdf>

<sup>196</sup> Gene Ahlswede. “Jesus Becomes Christ.” Sermon on Luke 3:15-17,21-22, Jan. 10, 2010. Peace Luth., Boulder, CO. Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at <http://peacelutheranboulder.org/Documents/ser20100110.pdf>

sinner. It's for a reason: "This man is Christ, our substitute." . . . Luke doesn't say what Jesus was praying about, but we can guess. Jesus was just beginning his public ministry. This was in a sense his installation into his office as our Prophet, Priest and King. It's natural that he would praise his Father for giving him this mission and seek his Father's help in carrying it out. . . . Jesus' title, Christ, means "the anointed one." Here he was anointed with the Holy Spirit in unlimited measure so that he could perfectly carry out his mission of saving us.<sup>197</sup>

- ✓ This morning rejoice in Jesus' baptism. It wasn't just an empty action, but a statement on his part—a statement that he was aligning himself with sinners. . . . . Jesus would need to remember this statement during the next 3 years of his life, starting immediately after his baptism as he went out into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil. Jesus would need to remember that his goal was to please his Father—and not give in to the devil's temptations. He would need to remember that he was the Son of God—and not a son of the world. He would need that encouragement to live like one who bears the name Son of God rather than living like a son of the world. And when Jesus suffered during his ministry, he would need to remember that not only was he God's Son, but that God had said, "*You are my Son, whom I love.*" What comfort, what encouragement, what certainty Jesus must have taken from his baptism!<sup>198</sup>
- ✓ What better way to start his ministry than coming up out of the water and saying to the world, "I am one of you"? Since you need to be baptized and I want to completely take your place, I'll be baptized, too. Anointing made it clear to the crowd, "This individual is the one fit for the task at hand." The voice gave assurance to Jesus, John, and the crowd.<sup>199</sup>

Slightly different from those, one pastor ascribed two purposes to Jesus' baptism, he identified with sinners and in the baptism (not just after it as a separate thing) he was anointed with the Spirit's power to do good in our place:

- ✓ Peter, in fact, says that in a way Jesus *began* to do it all at his baptism, when the Holy Spirit came down and anointed him for his work as our Savior. Not that Jesus was not obedient to his Father before then, but beginning at the Jordan River Jesus emerged from obscurity and began to let everybody in Israel know who he was. He began to do all the miracles that Peter mentions here: healing people, casting demons out of people, or as Peter summarizes it, doing good for people. Do you see how good that is for us? Jesus was doing good for us, too. Every time Jesus healed someone he was keeping God's commandment to care for others and help them in every bodily need. All the time Jesus was doing good he was being pure in our place. He was being perfect in

<sup>197</sup> Paul Janke. "Epiphany at the Jordan River." Sermon on Luke 3:15-17,21-22, Jan. 10, 2010. St. Peter Luth., Modesto, CA. Accessed Nov. 14, 2011, at <http://www.stpetermodesto.org/resources/sermons/2010/sermon-pdf/1-10-2010.pdf>

<sup>198</sup> Paul Rutschow. "Have You Ever Seen Anything like Jesus' Baptism? Absolutely!" Sermon on Luke 3:21-22, Jan. 7, 2007. Peace Luth., Cottonwood, AZ. Accessed Nov. 10, 2011 at <http://www.peacecottonwood.com/home/140000678/140000678/docs/Sermon%201-7-07.doc>

<sup>199</sup> Scott Wolfram. "What Was Jesus' Thinking?" Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17, Jan. 9, 2011. Christ Luth., Juneau, AK. Accessed Nov. 10, 2011, at <http://www.screencast.com/users/SearchMasterMan/folders/CELC/media/42329d80-2cb3-4b5b-aa23-11476e0a3642>



our place. He was making us not just sort of okay with his Father, but totally clean and holy in God's sight. And since at his baptism Jesus was clearly designated as the Son of God himself, with the Father's voice booming down from the skies, "This is my Son, whom I love" (Matthew 3:17)—since this is no ordinary man obeying God in our place, but God himself, what he does counts for us all. The other thing about Jesus' baptism that is such good news for all is what else began there: Jesus' path to pain, his course to the cross. Think about it. What was the holy Son of God doing down there in the water, getting baptized? John the Baptist asked Jesus the same question. Jesus answered that it was "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15), but not until some three years later when Jesus died on the cross did he really answer and show what his answer to John really meant. When Jesus was baptized he was showing that he wanted to fulfill what his Father sent him to earth to do in every detail. He was showing that he intended to identify with us all in every way. If he was to save all sinners, he must be all sinners in the world, wrapped up into one man. Do you know what I mean? So Jesus gets baptized as if he were a sinner, because on the cross God was going to treat him as if he were the world's one and only sinner.<sup>200</sup>

One pastor said that Jesus was baptized to give baptism its power. But, as far as the miracles after the baptism, they were a benefit and encouragement for Jesus:

- ✓ This was Jesus' anointing. [At the temptation] Jesus could look back at his baptism and hear those words of his heavenly Father that said, "This is my beloved Son, in him I am well-pleased." . . . Jesus was saying to John, "John, we need to do this, not because I need to be baptized. I don't need to take righteousness for myself out of baptism, but I need to put my righteousness into baptism."<sup>201</sup>

One pastor seemed to say that Jesus received power from the Spirit at his baptism, but it isn't clear how this benefited Jesus. He says the purpose of that power was to reveal Jesus to us as the Son of God:

- ✓ Peter wanted to get right to the point of their eternal life. And so to do that he focused their attention on what happened at and after the baptism of Christ. Because that is where Jesus began his public ministry on our behalf. That is when he was revealed to this world as the Son of God by his anointing with the Holy Spirit and power.<sup>202</sup>

I found one pastor who gave these two reasons for Jesus' baptism: to wash away the sins of the world, which he had already taken upon himself (ala Luther's reason for Jesus' baptism), and to be empowered by the Spirit for his holy, saving work:

- ✓ In other words, God sent his Son to rescue us by being our substitute, our human stand-in, taking into himself all of our guilt and giving us his righteousness in exchange. Here in his baptism we see most clearly that he is just that

<sup>200</sup> Daniel Witte. "Good News for All." Sermon on Acts 10:34-48, Jan. 13, 2008. Risen Savior Luth., Lakewood Ranch, FL. Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at <http://www.rsavior.com/home/140000131/140000131/docs/ACT10-34.rtf>

<sup>201</sup> John Vogt. Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17, Jan. 9, 2011. Ascension Luth. Church, Escondido, CA. Accessed Nov. 14, 2011 at [www.myascension.org/ALC-SERMON-2011-1-9.mp3](http://www.myascension.org/ALC-SERMON-2011-1-9.mp3)

<sup>202</sup> Matthew P. Frey. "Salvation Summarized." Sermon on Acts 10:34-38, Jan. 9, 2011. Living Word Luth., Montrose, CO. Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at <http://livingwordmontrose.blogspot.com/2011/01/1910-baptism-of-christ-acts-1034-38.html>

beautiful Savior, because, when we see the sinless Son of God confessing “I am by nature sinful and I have sinned,” and then receiving through John’s baptism the washing away of sin that he would, actually, accomplish by his sacrifice on Calvary, this says to our souls loud and clear, “Ooh! Ooh! There he is! There is your God standing in your place as your substitute! Look! See how completely your God has taken on himself the burden of your sin! He confesses your guilt as his very own and receives forgiveness for it!” . . . Matthew . . . makes it pretty much impossible not to think about Isaiah’s words in the First Lesson: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.” The minute we make that connection of the Spirit’s descent on Jesus at his baptism to this ancient prophecy of Isaiah, we are instantly reminded of the awesome power of baptism! It is power for the Savior to accomplish his work of justification. In the words of the First Lesson God is promising to give his Son in human flesh all the power necessary to successfully carry out his mission to acquit the whole world of sin. By the anointing of the Spirit, the Father would, as he said through Isaiah, “take hold of” (Is 42:6) his Son’s hand, so that he would “not falter or be discouraged” (Is 42:4) on his march to a perfect life and innocent suffering and death on the cross, bringing about God’s verdict: Not guilty! Jesus’ obvious success, as you well know, shows how powerful the Spirit made him to accomplish his goal through baptism.<sup>203</sup>

One pastor, who happens to be my Seminary classmate, preached it just the way I have it in my paper!

- ✓ Now, don’t misunderstand the inauguration idea here. When a president is inaugurated that doesn’t mean the president is first doing what it takes to be president. . . . God the Holy Spirit . . . poured into Jesus at his baptism with extra measure . . . was always there with Jesus strengthening him to stand up to the religious leaders. God the Holy Spirit was always there with Jesus to help him cast out demons and heal diseases. God the Holy Spirit was always there with Jesus giving him patience with his disciples, and in his death was there with him to breathe the first wisps of air when he came to life. Baptism is a powerful act of God for Jesus. It is an act when God did something to him and a binding, effective promise that God continues to do everything with him. Your baptism does the same. . . . The difference between Jesus’ baptism and yours lies not in the effect but in the need. Jesus was baptized because he needed to save. You are baptized because you need to be saved.<sup>204</sup>

However, most of the pastors did not mention that Jesus received any benefit from his baptism, with a few not mentioning the miracles of the dove and the voice at all.

Several pastors only gave as the reason for Jesus’ baptism that he was identifying with sinners. They did not mention any benefit for Jesus. Rather the miracles after the baptism were for the purpose of making sure we know Jesus is the Christ:

<sup>203</sup> David Salinas. “Baptism: Don’t Leave Home without It!” Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17, Jan. 9, 2011. St. John Luth., Victorville, CA. Accessed Nov. 22, 2011 at <http://www.stjohnvictorville.com/home/140000648/140000648/140094242/Matthew%203-13-17-%20Baptism-Don't%20Leave%20Home%20Without%20It.pdf>

<sup>204</sup> Brian Pechmann. “A Powerful Act of God.” Sermon on Acts 10:37-38, Jan. 9, 2011. Mount Calvary Luth., Redding, CA. Accessed Nov. 14, 2011, at [http://mtcalvaryredding.org/home/140003967/140003967/docs/010911.pdf?sec\\_id=140003967](http://mtcalvaryredding.org/home/140003967/140003967/docs/010911.pdf?sec_id=140003967)

- ✓ At his baptism, the Father and the Holy Spirit proclaimed loud and clear that Jesus was the Christ. But it was Jesus' baptism itself that proclaimed what kind of Christ Jesus came to be. . . . Jesus' baptism is the sinless Son of God connecting himself with sinful human beings, connecting himself with us, to save us from our sin.<sup>205</sup>
- ✓ Up to this point, at the age of 30, Jesus has done everything right. He has lived the perfect life in his childhood, his teen years, and now adult years that we could never live. He is about to enter into his public ministry, a ministry that will eventually lead to the cross. He will do everything right. He even wants to step into the waters of the Jordan River to join sinners who need baptism and identify with them. . . . This is a miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit to let the world know that the Holy Spirit would support Jesus in the work that he would do.<sup>206</sup>
- ✓ In his baptism, our Jesus accepts his role as the one who would bring sinners back to God. He invites his own baptism, so that he could stand where sinners were to stand. . . . He showed himself to be Substitute, Savior, and Friend of sinners. But Jesus' baptism is about more than just Jesus accepting his work of atonement, it's about the Father who accepts Jesus, the Worker of atonement. . . . God the Father takes and opportunity to talk up his Son. He wants the world to hear how proud he is of Jesus. That's why he says, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."<sup>207</sup>
- ✓ Already at his baptism, he was numbered with the transgressors. . . . God the Holy Spirit is here declaring Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ.<sup>208</sup>
- ✓ At his baptism Jesus stood among sinners and allowed himself to be counted among the sinful. At his baptism Jesus was publicly declaring that he was willing to become the worst sinner of all time. . . . As the sinless Son of God sets out to offer himself as our sacrifice, to fill our cup of salvation with his blood, God the Father announces that he is pleased. Jesus often pointed to his baptism when he faced unbelief by the Jews. They would ask him "*by what authority do you do these things?*" Or "*who gave you this authority?*" or they would criticize Jesus for acting like his own witness. Jesus defended himself by pointing back to this baptism and the public approval of his father to fulfill this work.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>205</sup> Jonathan Bauer. "No Need to Wonder, No Need to Wait." Sermon on Luke. 3:15-17,21-22, Jan. 17, 2010. Emmanuel Luth., Tempe, AZ. Accessed Nov. 10, 2011 at [http://www.elctempe.org/site/db/page.asp?page\\_id=180004255&sec\\_id=180001623](http://www.elctempe.org/site/db/page.asp?page_id=180004255&sec_id=180001623)

<sup>206</sup> Steven Degner. "Jesus Shows He Is the Christ at His Baptism." Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17, Jan. 9, 2011. Star of Bethlehem Luth., Santa Maria, CA. Accessed Nov. 14, 2011, at [http://www.starlutheran.org/home/180004860/180004860/docs/11\\_0109.pdf](http://www.starlutheran.org/home/180004860/180004860/docs/11_0109.pdf)

<sup>207</sup> Brian Hackmann. "The Accepted Time." Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17, Jan. 9, 2011. Peace Luth., Eagle River, AK. Accessed Dec. 19, 2011, at <http://www.peacethroughjesus.com/home/180000455/180000455/180030493/The%20Accepted%20Time.pdf>

<sup>208</sup> William Leerssen. "Jesus Is Declared to Be the Christ." Sermon on Luke 3:21-22, Jan. 20, 2008. Our Savior Luth., Longmont, CO. Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at [http://www.oursaviorson17th.org/sermons/2008/January20\\_2008.m3u](http://www.oursaviorson17th.org/sermons/2008/January20_2008.m3u)

<sup>209</sup> Harmon Lewis. "Why Was the Son of God Baptized?" Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17, Jan. 9, 2011. Saving Grace Luth., Mobile, AL. Accessed Nov. 10, 2011 at [http://www.savinggracemobile.org/home/140005410/140005410/docs/Why%20was%20the%20sinless%20son%20of%20God%20baptized-%20sermon.pdf?sec\\_id=140005410](http://www.savinggracemobile.org/home/140005410/140005410/docs/Why%20was%20the%20sinless%20son%20of%20God%20baptized-%20sermon.pdf?sec_id=140005410)

- ✓ Jesus is standing with a whole lot of people who were sinners. . . . because those are the people he came to save. . . . And all the people who were there saw that Jesus' baptism was more than just an application of water. Jesus was designated as the Messiah and all those people should have known it.<sup>210</sup>
- ✓ So let's think about Jesus as marked by water and ourselves marked by water as well. . . . Jesus "joined all of humankind in the water of baptism." Jesus was saying, "It's proper for me to be joining myself to sinful people, because I'm going to stand with them under the judgment of God." So the Savior stands in our place. Think of it.<sup>211</sup>

Another pastor said Jesus was baptized to identify himself with sinners, and then he didn't mention the miracles after the baptism at all:

- ✓ Is he saying he had to obey God's command to be baptized to follow the law and maintain that righteousness? Well, at this point there had been no command to be baptized. Jesus himself would later give the command. And besides the command to be baptized isn't a law, like "You shall not kill," "You shall not commit adultery," "You must be baptized." It's a gospel imperative, "Receive the blessings I offer. Be baptized and have your sins washed away." So if baptism is receiving forgiveness, the question remains why did Jesus need to be baptized? The answer lies in the work that Jesus came to do. He had been righteous with perfect obedience to the Father up to this point in his life already, but now the focus of his ministry was changing. Now he would enter his public ministry and begin the rest of his work of taking mankind's place. Now he would fulfill that part of God's plan to give his righteousness to mankind as their substitute, their pinch hitter, their Messiah who would take the fall for their sin. John was right: Jesus didn't need to be baptized—not for himself. But John *did* need Jesus to be baptized. That's what Jesus was doing: stepping in to take John's place, acting as if he were a sinner in need of God's forgiveness, getting right down in the muck and mire of sin, right there in the river in line with real sinners to take their place.<sup>212</sup>

One pastor said the reason for Jesus' baptism was twofold: identifying with sinners and giving baptism its power. He allowed that Jesus was anointed after his baptism, but only mentions it as a sign of public approval:

- ✓ What was going on? Jesus was baptized just like us, but his heavenly Father followed up that Baptism by "anointing" or setting him apart from all others. God himself gave Jesus his public approval as the promised Savior and Son of God. the final stage of his substitution would begin with this baptism by John. . . . Basically by insisting to be baptized, as our sinless Substitute Jesus put himself in our place as God the Father had sent him to do. Jesus put himself where we deserve to be—in the place where sinners ought to be—under the waters of baptism for forgiveness. By putting himself in our place, our sinless

<sup>210</sup> H. Curtis Lyon. "Jesus' Friends Are Sinners." Sermon on Luke 3:15-17,21-22, Jan. 10, 2010. Christ the Vine Luth., Temecula, CA. Accessed Nov. 14, 2011, at [http://www.christthevine.com/site/audio/downloads.asp?sec\\_id=140000754&index=60](http://www.christthevine.com/site/audio/downloads.asp?sec_id=140000754&index=60)

<sup>211</sup> Ronald Waterstradt. Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17, Jan. 9, 2011. St. Mark's Luth., Citrus Heights, CA. Accessed Nov. 13, 2011 at [https://reformation.stmarkslutheran.com/audiostreams\\_services.php](https://reformation.stmarkslutheran.com/audiostreams_services.php)

<sup>212</sup> Rob Guenther. "Jesus Says, 'Let It Go!'" Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17, Jan. 9, 2011. Grace Luth., Kenai, AK. Accessed Nov. 10, 2011, at [http://gracelutherankenai.blogspot.com/2011\\_01\\_01\\_archive.html](http://gracelutherankenai.blogspot.com/2011_01_01_archive.html)

Substitute willingly associated with sinful wretches like you and me. He put himself in our shoes so he could one day stand in our place on the cross to suffer the punishment we deserve, to lay lifeless in the tomb where you and I deserve to be for our sins. By putting himself in your place and mine, Jesus gave power to those waters of Holy Baptism through which he brings us into his forgiveness.<sup>213</sup>

Another pastor gave two reasons for Jesus's baptism: identifying with sinners and giving baptism its power. He didn't mention the miracles after the baptism at all:

- ✓ Today Christ, who needed no Baptism, was baptized for you. He who had no sin received a sinner's Baptism in order, by His Baptism, to fill yours with mercy and grace. He stepped into the muddy waters of the Jordan to wash you clean—heart, mind, and soul—again and again as you stumble back to His cross and empty tomb through repentance.<sup>214</sup>

Two pastors gave as the reason for the baptism Jesus identifying with sinners. Then they only talked about the miracles afterward as testimony to what happens to us at our baptism:

- ✓ There he is, standing shoulder to shoulder with all sorts of sinners. He's going to be sin. He embodies our sin in his body. The whole world's sin was put upon him and he was baptized. . . . See, at that very moment in time, at that place, God made it visible. He made it tangible. You could sense it. The heavens opened. They saw it. He made it audible, for all the world to see when you and I were baptized heaven's opened, the Spirit descends on you, the Father smiles approvingly.<sup>215</sup>
- ✓ In his baptism, Jesus was united to us. . . . You are in God's Son, by adoption. And his Son is in you, as the hope of glory. Therefore God almighty declares to you: "You are my beloved son; you are my beloved daughter. With you I am well pleased."<sup>216</sup>

Finally, I found two examples of pastors who said that Jesus got baptized because he was obeying God's command:

- ✓ So while it wasn't necessary for Jesus to be baptized "for the forgiveness of sins," it was necessary for him to be baptized. Remember that in order to be the Savior, Jesus had to take our place. He had to be subject to all of the commands from God that we are subject to. And he had to do everything that God requires us to do. That means that he had to be baptized, because God commanded that his people be baptized. According to Matthews account of the baptism, Jesus explained to John who hesitated to baptize him, Let it be so now: it is necessary for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." (Mt. 3:15)

<sup>213</sup> Jeremiah Gumm. "Our Substitute Has Arrived." Sermon on Mark 1:4-11, Jan. 18, 2009. Cross of Christ Luth., Liverpool, NY. Accessed Dec. 19, 2011 at [http://www.nycrossofchrist.org/home/140001589/140001589/docs/011809%20Sermon.pdf?sec\\_id=140001589](http://www.nycrossofchrist.org/home/140001589/140001589/docs/011809%20Sermon.pdf?sec_id=140001589)

<sup>214</sup> Wade Johnston. "Baptism of Our Lord." Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17 & Romans 12:1-5, Jan. 9, 2011. Christ Luth., Saginaw, MI. Accessed Nov. 10, 2011 at <http://www.christsaginaw.com/webdocs/Baptism%20of%20Our%20Lord%202011.pdf>

<sup>215</sup> John Maasch. Sermon on Matthew 3:13-17, Jan. 13, 2008. Peace Luth., Bradenton, FL. Accessed Dec. 19, 2011, at [http://www.peacebradenton.org/site/audidownloads.asp?sec\\_id=140000319](http://www.peacebradenton.org/site/audidownloads.asp?sec_id=140000319)

<sup>216</sup> David Webber. Sermon on Luke 3:15-22, Jan. 10, 2010. Redeemer Luth., Scottsdale, AZ. Accessed Nov. 10, 2011 at <http://www.angelfire.com/ny4/djw/redeemer.sermons2010jan.html>

Jesus accepted his role as our Savior. He came from his throne in heaven willing to do everything that he had to do in order to save us.<sup>217</sup>

- ✓ Why do the heavens open up over such a small thing?—because obeying God is not a small thing. Doing what God says, no matter how it appears to be, is never insignificant and unimportant.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Roger Rockhoff. “What Does Jesus’ Baptism Mean?” Sermon on Mark 1:9-11, Jan. 11, 2009. Zion Luth., Gainesville, FL. Accessed Nov. 22, 2011, at [http://www.ziongainesville.com/home/140002459/140002459/docs/1-11-2009.doc?sec\\_id=140002459](http://www.ziongainesville.com/home/140002459/140002459/docs/1-11-2009.doc?sec_id=140002459)

<sup>218</sup> Lynn Wiedmann. “Ministry Begins with Baptizing and Teaching.” Sermon on Mark 1:1-11, Jan. 11, 2009. St. Paul’s First Luth., North Hollywood, CA. Accessed Nov. 14, 2011, at [http://www.stpaulsfirst.org/church\\_audio.cfm?track=20090111-sermon.mp3](http://www.stpaulsfirst.org/church_audio.cfm?track=20090111-sermon.mp3)