

Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus' Mikveh! Matthew's Community and his Gospel audience are Jewish. So the first seven chapters of Matthew's gospel actually relives Israel's story through the narrative of Jesus.

Jesus' history and Israel's history both parallel one another.

Pharaoh sought to kill the male babies of Israel; Herod seeks to kill baby Jesus.

As God protected the babies of Israel from Pharaoh, God protects Jesus from Herod.

As Israel fled to Egypt to escape death; Mary and Joseph flee Israel to escape death by also going to Egypt.

As Israel was called back out of Egypt, Jesus is also called back out of Egypt.

When Israel left Egypt they went through the Red Sea.

When Jesus leaves Egypt he is baptized here in the Jordan River.

After they were liberated through the water they wandered the wilderness for 40 years...and after Jesus is baptized he is led into the wilderness for 40 days.

Israel rises out of the Jordan River into the promised land and Jesus rises out of the River Jordan into the Kingdom of God.

Matthew is presenting Jesus as the promised Messiah sent to Israel... Jesus the one who fulfills all the promises of the Old Testament and God's Laws.

In today's Gospel there is a direct parallel between Israel going through the Red Sea and Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River.

John was at the Jordan announcing that the king, the promised Messiah was soon coming to establish God's kingdom on earth for Israel.

John was baptizing the Israelites; this baptism or Mikveh (a Jewish ritual) was symbolic of their need for cleansing and purifying oneself if they were to once again become God's people in God's kingdom.

When it is time for Jesus to begin establishing this kingdom, the first thing he does is go out to be baptized by John. Jesus' very first act of His ministry is to receive a baptism of purity and repentance.

Now you can understand why John was caught off guard by Jesus' request. John's baptism was a call for cleansing. When John baptized you; you first repented of your sins. And by receiving John's baptism, you were saying, "I have lost my way...I am a sinner who deserves God's judgment." That's why John had an issue with this.

Jesus doesn't need baptism; He was the one to come and judge...remember John said he'd have a winnowing fork in His hand. He would be the one to judge the sinners. And if He came to call Israel back and save sinners...then it would follow that Jesus was "above and beyond" sin.

Jesus would have no need to repent of anything... He was already righteous meaning He was already in right relationship with God!

If anything John needed to Repent... not Jesus!

And Jesus' reply to John is "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting to fulfill all righteousness". So why is Jesus Baptized?

Jesus didn't need to prove he was righteous.

Jesus is not being baptized for Himself; he is being baptized for all of us. This baptism is necessary to fulfill what God requires of us. When the Israelites were baptized, they repented and turned back to God before entering the river.

Jesus was taking on the burden of reconciling God's creation back to God (Tikkun Olam) and He is showing them the way... it was a cultural way that Israel would understand. God entered into their story and showed them a new way forward as Children of God!

He was repenting for all the ways the world had lost its way...and He would be the one that would reconcile God in right relationship with God's creation.

Before Jesus begins His ministry in revealing God's kingdom He first identifies with God's people as a sinner...God as one of us!

Here is your Saviour - God in the flesh, repenting of every sin you ever have or will ever commit...your debt is paid...you are free and clear!

Jesus also comes to the Jordan to be judged... Now you can see the connection between Jesus' baptism and Israel at the Red Sea.

The Red Sea was a place of judgment. In the ancient world water represented chaos and the abyss. Pharaoh and his armies were judged in the Red Sea. And now Israel is placed into the symbolic sea of judgment, Jesus goes down into the waters of judgment. When Jesus goes down into the water, His death on a cross is represented here.

The water Jesus enters is the waters of Chaos. And so Jesus begins his earthly ministry by foreshadowing the end of his earthly ministry... being judged by man and crucified.

If the Lord is going to establish a kingdom of heaven, he must first identify with His people by taking on their sins, and receiving judgment for them...by the way that is the symbolic cup that He asks God to take from Him in the Garden ...it was the cup of sacrifice and death at the Passover seder.

But that is not the end of the story, is it? Unlike the Egyptians or in the days of Noah and the flood...Jesus rises from the water!

Jesus rises from the water and is anointed with God's Holy Spirit.

So if going into the water represented Jesus' death what does rising out of it represent? That's right. Transformation by receiving God's own Spirit...Resurrection! The whole purpose for Jesus' coming to us is pictured right here in this scene at His Baptism.

And as Jesus rises from the waters of judgment and death, we see that our sins, being placed upon Him, will also be washed away. All the ways in which we have strayed from God and one another are forgiven and are gone forever. And what happens when Jesus rises from the water? The heavens open up and the Spirit descends upon Him like a dove.

This imagery is also in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit coming in the form of a dove represents the Spirit, or Ruach of God, and new creation. Jesus goes into the water as a sinner who dies in judgment, but then rises up as a new creation in God's Spirit.

And Jesus as God's son is now given authority over this new creation.

So the Spirit coming in the form of a dove is a picture and a symbol of this new reality.

In the Genesis creation story the Spirit hovers over the waters in the same exact way. The Spirit, God's Breath, The Ruach is pictured as a bird hovering over the surface of the waters...over Chaos.

The waters were keeping the earth from being habitable for God's image-bearers. So God separates the waters, and dry land appears. The Spirit now comes down and forms man from the ground itself (ground/dirt =Adam).

Also consider Noah and the flood story. After the waters of judgment and death had closed in over the Old World, Noah sent out a dove to hover over the waters.

Noah's dove is just like the Spirit at creation, hovering over the waters, looking for dry land and for God's people to once again be reborn.

So the dove sees signs of land, and as a result Noah and his family make it through the waters of judgment and now can live into God's New World.

Do you see this theme playing out in the re-creation of the world? The Holy Spirit hovers as a bird over the first creation until dry land appeared. Noah's dove hovered over the waters until the dry land of the New World appeared. And the Spirit hovered over Israel, taking her through the waters of judgment to a new land...a new kingdom that would be held in contrast to the kingdoms of man...then a kingdom hallmarked then by greed and power in the poster boys of Herod and Cesare...and it's no different today...we too look for a new world.

And it happens once again in our story today... after Jesus rises from the waters of judgment, the Spirit, in the form of a dove, comes down and rests upon Christ.

Jesus is showing us the way to this new creation which He then calls the Kingdom of Heaven!

And where else in the Bible do we see the Spirit of God coming onto the scene to establish something new? Pentecost! Once Jesus leaves... The Spirit of God once again descends down upon God's children. The Spirit now hovers over us and then comes to dwell within us...we are to become that new world – Christ's Church!

So the baptism of Jesus pictures his death and resurrection...taking on our sins and going down into the waters of judgment in our place. Because he himself was sinless, our sins that were placed upon him are washed away.

And as he rises the Holy Spirit makes him a new creation.

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. This voice did not come for Jesus' sake; it came for ours. And as adopted Children of God we too now are beloved of God! This story is now ours to continue! This new world is ours to reveal.

These words do not only apply to Christ. Christ was not baptized for himself; he was baptized for us. Christ did not go into the waters of judgment for himself; he went for us.

Christ did not rise for Himself; he rose for us.

The baptism of Jesus is our baptism...it is our story. These words from the Father are now ours. You are my beloved...with you I am well pleased! This story is now passed onto Jesus' disciples - us!

We are Baptized as Christ' own and are reborn as Children of God... and each Sunday We come here together, and we share our stories.

We repent and turn towards God and are forgiven.

We share in the death and resurrection of Christ each week at that table. And we share in receiving God's Spirit.

We are Blessed and we go out into the kingdom of man...revealing to others God's new Kingdom here and now through our actions in the world!

For you are my beloved... and with you and I am well pleased! You are a new creation. You are a child of God...now go and act like one!

Your faithful servant,

carmen