

# Then Came Jesus

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



*"The Baptism of Christ" by Raj Soloman*

## Prayer of Illumination

Heavenly Father, at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son.  
As we hear your word this morning, may we recognize him as our Lord and  
know ourselves to be your beloved children,  
through Jesus Christ our Savior.  
Amen.

## Background

It was three decades after the first Christmas.  
A voice could be heard in the Judean wilderness:  
Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is upon you!  
Prepare the way for the Lord—clear a straight path!

So said John the Baptist.  
I baptize with water, but there's one who comes after me.  
He's more powerful than I.  
I'm unworthy to be even his slave.  
I baptize with water,  
but he will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

*Everyone* was going out to this wild-eyed prophet,  
who wore a camel hair robe with a leather belt and  
ate locusts dipped in honey.  
Even Sadducees and Pharisees came for baptism.  
He was the prophet Elijah 2.0.

Then came Jesus.  
This was his first appearance as an adult in Matthew's gospel.  
Jesus walked 70 miles—nearly three marathons—to get here.  
It was his moment.  
And he got in line to be baptized.

*Let's hear the word of the Lord from ...*

### **Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:13-17 (NRSV)**

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

### **SERMON – *Then Came Jesus***

The reality show "*Undercover Boss*" on CBS has been running for over a decade now. The gist of it is that wealthy CEOs go undercover and work blue collar jobs in their own corporation to get a feel for what life's like for the hardworking American.

There was an interesting episode where Larry O'Donnell, the CEO of Waste Management, worked in the assembly-lines, and drove in the garbage trucks for the show. O'Donnell posed as a laid-off construction worker trying to win an entry-level job. After being hired, he's directed to

a conveyor belt where a seasoned co-worker trains the incognito CEO how to pick cardboard and other recyclables off a fast-moving line of trash. Initially, O'Donnell comes across as pretty confident he can do a good job. But as soon as the supervisor steps away, he's totally overwhelmed. Missing a large piece of cardboard that whizzes by, an expensive piece of machinery gets jammed. The CEO is embarrassed and even a bit stressed out at the damage his mistake caused. By the end of the day—he's surprised at how wiped out he is—physically and emotionally.

O'Donnell also learns about a policy on the assembly line—that line-workers are docked two minutes pay for every one minute they clock in late. He also discovers on the garbage truck that drivers are on such a tight schedule that there's no time for bathroom breaks. They have to be creative when nature calls. O'Donnell's horrified by all of this and works to make some much needed changes.

Today is *Baptism of the Lord Sunday*, and we see King Jesus' full identification with us. And this isn't a show—it's for real. The genuine humility of Jesus is on full display. Jesus wasn't a prima donna or into ego trips. We see what Jesus uses his power and authority for: humble obedience to God's will and sacrificial service to the world.

Jesus, conceived of the Holy Spirit, honored as *King of the Jews* by the Wise Men, was now being publicly christened, coronated, and consecrated as King. He was anointed, not with oil, but with the baptismal waters of the Jordan and the power of the Holy Spirit. Power from on High came upon him for humble service, not self-service. Power rested on him not to conquer in battle, but to suffer on our behalf. You see, power doesn't so much corrupt as power reveals true character. And this power revealed Jesus as *Son of God* and *Servant of the Lord*.

For the last thirty years, Jesus was waiting and preparing for this moment. Faithfully performing his simple duties in his home and carpenter shop, it was now time to begin his ministry. With the voice crying out in the wilderness, Jesus was now summoned. His moment had come. His time had arrived.

But for John the Baptist, it was all a little surprising. Embarrassing. He shifted in his sandals. Tried to dissuade Jesus—hesitant and reticent about the request. "Jesus, I need to be baptized by you." You've got it backwards Jesus, upside down. It's not appropriate. John tried to talk Jesus out of it. But Jesus would have none of it. This wasn't a competition. It was cooperation. They were on the same team—not rivals. Jesus doesn't have a superiority complex. He's all in with us. "Let it be." Leave it for the time being, John. It's my Father's will for me to be baptized. It was shocking: Jesus needed John. "It is proper for us—for us—in this way to fulfill all righteousness. I can't do this alone. I need you to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus didn't baptize himself—John needed to. John relented and consented—obeying his superior. Jesus shows us something very important here about leadership and life: We're called into Christ's work together—side by side. For, not against. Collaborate together. Our faith isn't merely individual, it's communal. Relational.

And then we see why Jesus was to be baptized by John. As Jesus broke through the waters of the Jordan, the heavens opened. A dove slipped through the opening in the sky. It alighted upon Jesus. A voice was heard from the heavens: That's my boy!

*"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*

Or as St. Augustine summed it up:

- The *Father* is in the Voice.
- The *Son* is in the Water.
- The *Spirit* is in the Dove.

The Father anoints, the Son is anointed, and the Spirit is the anointing.

Jesus' baptism is so important because it shows us and the world that he's the true king. Jesus does what kings are supposed to do. Jesus represents God to us and us to God. He fully identifies with us, rather than distancing himself from us.

Jesus fully identifies with our human condition.

- Our fallenness.
- Our brokenness.
- Our lostness.

He identifies with sinners, without becoming a sinner. Jesus begins his ministry in a river with sinners, and Jesus ends his ministry on a cross between two thieves. He's not ashamed to identify and associate with us. Jesus gets off his high horse and takes the low road of humility, walking with us every step of the way. And we have that same calling to identify, connect, and reach out to the world, to extend a hand rather than point a finger.

Jesus' baptism is so important because we see his true identity, his character. And we discover our identity and character too. Jesus is the Beloved Son of God.

- He's empowered by the Spirit.
- He has the authority to baptize us with the Spirit.

The power of the Spirit is revealed in a dove—which symbolizes peace, creation, restoration. The Spirit's power is divine. It's *DOVE-ine*. The Spirit's *DOVE-ine* power heals, serves, blesses, and frees. That's how Jesus rolls and that's how we roll. The divinity of humility. Very different from how the world exerts authority.

By God's grace, Jesus has our back. He stands by our side. He's for us. We're counting on Christ and Christ is counting on us. God gives the gift of mutuality here. Christ expects much of us and he mercifully supplies us. He requires the good of us and gives us the goods to do the good. This is the good news: Jesus includes us. Jesus needs us to do his work. He partners with us. Jesus needs what you have to give.

When God sees us, he sees his Son, and he says: "You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter—in whom I am well-pleased." But it's easy to lose touch with that Divine Voice of God. We forget our belovedness, forget the belovedness of others.

We listen to other voices, disparaging voices—and there's a lot of them out there, telling us, "you're an imposter." You're shameful, stupid, worthless, or ugly. Sometimes that voice comes from others, from within. Sometimes we say it to others. Either way—it's not the voice of God. Don't listen. Don't speak those words. Don't look with that tone of voice.

But two times our passage says "SEE" or "LOOK."

- Hear the Voice – some of us are audible learners.
- See the Dove – others of us are visual learners.

God gives us the gift of spiritual sight and sound. This new year ask for the eyes to see and the ears that hear the good news of forgiveness and the power to humbly obey God's will. With Jesus, you won't stay under the waters or in the grave. With Jesus, the windows of heaven are open, not shut. Help is here. Hope is here. God delights in you. His Spirit resides in us, allowing us to bear fruit, the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The Spirit helps us look and act more Jesusy. The Spirit empowers us to face and overcome our trials and temptations.

Albert Einstein is one of the greatest minds in human history. His contributions to physics are revolutionary. I like his quotes. He was funny. This picture of him is on my mouse pad. But he was no "Einstein" when it came to relationships. Walter Isaacson in his biography of Einstein shares about the conditions Einstein laid out for his wife Mileva in 1914 in order for her to stay with him:

1. Keep my clothes and laundry in good order.
2. I will receive three meals a day delivered to my room.
3. My bedroom and study are to be kept neat and my desk is for my use only.
4. You will renounce all personal relations with me insofar as they are not completely necessary for social reasons. Specifically, you will forgo: 1) my sitting at home with you and 2) My going out or travelling with you.
5. You will not expect any intimacy from me, you will not reproach me in any way, you will stop talking to me if I request it, you will leave my bedroom or study immediately without protest if I request it.
6. You will undertake to not belittle me in front of our children, either through words or behavior.

As you can imagine, Einstein's stipulations didn't go over too well. Two months later Albert and Mileva parted ways...

But Jesus. Jesus' leadership style, Jesus' way of dealing with others couldn't be more different than Einstein's conditions. By God's grace we're affirmed. Welcomed. Adopted into God's forever family. We're forgiven, washed clean, and endued with power to serve and bless. We've been gifted with a divine energy and influence to live life abundantly. To create. To be a new creation. To breathe life into dead situations.

Or as Isaiah says:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and the Lord has anointed me to  
Bring good news to the oppressed,  
Heal the broken-hearted,  
Proclaim liberty to the captives,  
Release to the prisoners  
And proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.  
To give beauty for ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of heaviness.*

Jesus' baptism is one of the most beautiful scenes in Scripture.

We see a turning towards—

- God turning to his people.
- God's people turning to God.

Not a turning against, not a turning away, but a turning towards.

Immanuel, come with me, and let us turn to Jesus. Let us be, by God's grace, little Christs, fueled and fired by the Holy Spirit to be healed and to heal. To serve and to bless. To be God's beloved together with Christ.

Amen.

Sermon Art:

*"The Baptism of Christ"* by Raj Soloman

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