

Question #3: Why was Jesus baptized?

This is a very interesting question. I often use it in personal Bible study to get people thinking. When speaking of the motives of others, even Jesus, we must necessarily enter the area of hypothesizing/theorizing—unless the reasons are specifically stated.

This also reminds me of a statement made to me by the man who first disciplined me in the Lord years ago. He made a statement that went something like this: “These are my convictions. You can’t have them; for I cannot give them to you. Instead, I’ll show you the Scriptures, evidences, and reasons for my convictions. Then you can build your own.” This is certainly true of basic Biblical salvation issues, and is even more so in the areas of theorizing as with this question!

As you may recall, in Matthew 3:14 John “*tried to prevent*” Jesus from being baptized, saying “*I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?*” So obviously John felt unworthy to baptize Jesus. Note that John’s baptism was a “*baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin*” (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3). Jesus did not need to repent, nor did He have any sins to be forgiven, for He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). On the other hand, John had sinned. So, this would probably be the primary reason why John tried to “*prevent*” Jesus from being baptized.

Jesus answered John’s hesitation in Matthew 3:15 by saying: “*Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*” Notice Jesus’ own stated reason for being baptized was “*to fulfill all righteousness.*”

According to the two following verses (Matt. 3:16-17), as Jesus came up out of the water, God the Father sent the Holy Spirit down to Jesus in the likeness of a dove. Then, in verse 17 the Father audibly states: “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.*”

I understand the Spirit being sent to Jesus as God’s provision for Jesus to “*fulfill all righteousness*,” which entails a whole lot more than just not sinning. After being baptized by John, Jesus began His ministry as a Rabbi (teacher) and preacher of the good news. Before His baptism, Jesus was a construction worker, as was His dad. Note the Gospel according to Mark even starts with Jesus being baptized, and indicates this was the “*beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ...*” (Mark 1:1).

But also notice, in Matthew 3:15 Jesus does **not** say “In this way it is fitting for Me to fulfill all righteousness.” Instead He states, “*In this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*” I think this is very significant, and teaches that Jesus’ baptism is an example for all of us under His New Testament (NT).

By faith and asking (see Luke 3:21-22 and Luke 11:13) we also can receive the indwelling Holy Spirit when we come up out of the water of baptism. In this way “we” (the application of “us” of Matt. 3:15) also can potentially “*fulfill all righteousness.*” Jesus paved the way for us by exemplifying how the Holy Spirit would be received by men in baptism under the NT. After Jesus paid the price for us by dying on the cross (John 14:16&17, 15:7, 26), He went to Heaven and

asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit for mankind. This process of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit started on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38-41.

The baptism of Jesus provides the example for us as we follow Him. John's baptism, which Jesus submitted to, promised forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3, see also the prophesy of this—Luke 1:76&77). Jesus didn't need the forgiveness of sins—but we do! Once our sin has been removed in the water (i.e. Acts 22:16), then we are clean enough to receive the indwelling Holy Spirit as we come up out of the water.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit empowers us, if we are willing, to “*fulfill all righteousness.*” The Holy Spirit is discussed by Jesus (i.e. John chapters 14-16) as being the Comforter and powerful Helper. Also, the book of Acts and many of the N.T. letters speak of the Holy Spirit as empowering the Christian to live a victorious life and overcome the world (i.e. Romans 8:13b, I John 2:1, 3:9, 4:4).

Also note that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption for us—Romans 8:15-16 and Galatians 4:5-7. This also is exemplified by Jesus' baptism in Matt. 3:17 when the Father announced Jesus was His son: We also can receive the Holy Spirit as we come up out of the water of our baptism by faith. Although the Spirit is not visible like a dove, nor is the Father's voice audible now at our immersion—we can “hear” our Father in heaven declare: “*This is My beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased.*” But we must hear this by faith if we have “ears to hear” as Jesus would say!

In conclusion then... Why was Jesus baptized? I would say there are at least 3 possible reasons:

1. to fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:15),
2. to start His ministry (Luke 3:21-23), and
3. to give us an example of how we can start to follow Him (Matt. 4:19, I Peter 2:21, I Cor. 11:1).

In these ways, Jesus' baptism serves as a model and prototype for NT water baptism.

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