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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“ONE OF US”**  
**Luke 3:21-22**

■ Luke 3:21: **“When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.”**

? *Why was Jesus baptized?* Maybe you have never asked this question. The statement, **“Jesus was baptized too”** does not draw a lot of attention to itself.

But consider: who is baptizing Jesus? John.

● What kind of baptism does John preach? His is **“A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”** (Luke 3:3).

● And what is John’s mission? It is **“To prepare the way for the Lord”** (Luke 3:4).

Sinners come seeking God’s forgiveness through repentance in anticipation of their Messiah’s coming. John’s baptism is a public confession of guilt and an act of preparation to receive the Christ. All who submit to it are saying, in effect, “I am a sinner. I need to be cleansed. O God, send your Anointed One to save us!”

Now when Luke says that **“the people were being baptized,”** he means Jewish people. Keep in mind that many first century Jews frequently perform ritual washings to maintain religious purity – but almost none have been baptized. Until now, baptism has been reserved for Gentiles who are converting to Judaism (and for Jews who are joining a very small group called “the Essenes”).

Along with an atoning sacrifice and circumcision for the males, baptism is the indispensable ceremony for conclusively shedding one’s Gentile past and taking on Jewish identity. In baptism a convert becomes {Biblical Imagery} **“like a newborn child,’ completely separated from his or her Gentile past.”**

But John is baptizing Jews. The implication is clear: Jews and Gentiles are on equal footing before the Lord! Ethnicity and inherited religion count for nothing: it is by coming to God in humble repentance that we receive his forgiveness and are converted into his people who are ready for his Messiah.

And still, **“When all the people [are] being baptized, Jesus [is] baptized too.”**

Jesus is the Messiah. There is no need for him to prepare to receive himself.

Jesus was, is, and always will be perfectly sinless. He has no iniquity to repent, no wrongdoing to be forgiven, no fallen-ness to be converted.

○ Jesus once said to some people who did not believe in him, {Jn 8:46} **“Who among you can convict me of sin?”** I am not going to ask you that question! But Jesus did. His bold question is proof of a perfectly clear conscience. Their failure to answer is proof that they saw no sin in him.

○ After Judas Iscariot {Mt 27:3-4} **“saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse... returned the...silver coins”** and said, **“I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood”** (a blameless, sinless man).

○ When {Lk 23:39, 41} **“one of the criminals who”** was crucified with Jesus **“hurled insults at him”** **“the other ...rebuked him”** saying, **“We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”**

- Second Corinthians 5:21: he **“had no sin.”**
- Hebrews 4:15: the Son of God **“was without sin.”**
- Hebrews 9:14: **“Christ...through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished”** (unspotted by sin, uncontaminated by corruption) **to God.”**
- First Peter 2:22: **“He committed no sin.”**
- First John 3:5: **“in him is no sin.”**

For Jesus to ask forgiveness would be a false confession, and thus a lie. The very act of repenting would, in a sense, make him a sinner.

● The incongruity of the absolutely righteous, perfectly sinless Son of God seeking *his* baptism is not lost on John. Matthew {3:14} reports that **“John [tries] to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’”**

● Yet Jesus insists. {Mt 3:15} **“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness,”** and he *is* baptized. *Why?*

✪ In baptism Jesus dedicates himself to his mission. Jesus has already been entirely devoted to the LORD YHWH. He has always loved, worshiped, served, and obeyed God – as a private person in an ordinary profession in an unremarkable village. Today, all of that changes. He trades anonymity for fame, peace for tumult, the comforts of home for life on the road, the work of a carpenter for messianic ministry.

Baptism is a turning point from which there will be no turning back. It is an act of complete dedication to his mission.

✪ In baptism the Father fully empowers Jesus for his mission.

■ Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all include the detail that as Jesus {Mk 1:10} **“came up out of the water,”** **“the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove”** (Luke 3:21-22a).

It is not as though the Holy Spirit was absent from the Son’s life prior to this. He conceived Jesus in Mary’s womb {Lk 1:35} and enlightened Jesus about his sonship even in boyhood {Lk 2:49}. He has been with Jesus every step of the way.

Nevertheless, in baptism the Spirit makes himself present in a new way. He endows the Son with a far greater degree of divine knowledge and ability. Jesus is given every power he needs to fulfill his mission.

✪ In baptism the Father reveals that Jesus is the Messiah.

■ Luke 3:22b: **“and a voice came from heaven: You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”**

○ **“You are my Son”** is a direct quotation of Psalm 2:7-8: **“I will proclaim the LORD’s decree: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”**

First century Jews universally interpret this Psalm as a description of the Messiah who will conquer evil,

restore righteousness, and establish the Kingdom of God. There is no room for misunderstanding: Jesus is the Savior.

✪ In baptism Jesus validates John's ministry. Some elements of John's message are bound to his immediate context and are not now relevant; but the call to {Lk 3:8} **"produce fruit in keeping with repentance"** by {Lk 3:11-14} acting righteously in regard to money and power, thereby {Lk 3:4} **"[preparing] the way for the Lord"** in our lives, our homes, and our communities, is directly applicable to us.

Jesus has endorsed it, so we would be foolish to reject it. **"If it is good enough for {Jn 1:29} 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,' it is good enough for me...."**

✪ In baptism Jesus identifies with the sinners whom he has {Lk 19:10} **"come to seek and to save."**

By submitting to a **"baptism of repentance"** Jesus declares: {Wright, par.} **"[I] will"** {Lk 3:9} **"cut down and [throw] into the fire" "every tree that does not produce good fruit." "But... I must do it: by humbly identifying with God's people, by taking their place, sharing their penitence, living their life and ultimately dying their death."**

As Jesus immerses himself in the Jordan's muddy waters, he totally immerses himself in the human condition.

At his conception and birth the Lord obligated himself to the physical limits of creaturehood: locality, hunger, thirst, sweat, fatigue, weakness, pain and, ultimately, mortality.

Now he more completely plunges into less tangible constraints. Jesus will journey with and sleep alongside his disciples. He will rub shoulders with tax collectors and prostitutes. He will teach the crowds, heal the sick, and do battle with enemies who desire his destruction. He will observe and feel a wide range of emotion: certainty and doubt, satisfaction and frustration, conviviality and loneliness, unity and alienation, comfort and suffering, joy and grief.

● He is also opening himself up to temptation. What is the first thing that happens after his baptism? He is {Lk 4:1-2} **"led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he [is] tempted by the devil."** This sequence is not accidental; temptation is part-and-parcel of our experience, and so this episode of intense spiritual warfare immediately follows Christ's identification with us in baptism.

○ Some imagine that the temptations Jesus faced were simpler and more restricted than ours. They are mistaken. Hebrews 4:15: Jesus **"has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin."**

○ Some imagine that Satan's temptations held zero appeal for the Lord and so resisting them was easy and painless. They are wrong. Hebrews 2:18: **"he himself suffered when he was tempted."** How many of us have shed blood, sweat and tears in our struggle not to sin? Jesus endured misunderstanding, rejection, betrayal, denial, slander, torture, and crucifixion to overcome it.

Jesus knows the human condition better than we do. He was more human than any person we will ever meet.

Christ became one of us. That is a Messiah I can trust, a Messiah I can serve, a Messiah I can love.

Not only so, the Son of God became human so that we humans can become the sons and daughters of God! And as little brothers and sisters of Jesus, we are empowered to be like him and to participate in his mission.

Dedication, empowerment, revelation and identification: this is why Jesus was baptized.

This is the Word of the Lord.