

Other than the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, very few stories or teachings are present in all four Gospels. The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist stands apart as one of the few passages shared among all the Gospels in one form or another (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34), highlighting its major significance. Several questions should be answered after realizing the significance of this event:

- *Why was Jesus baptized?*
- *What did his baptism accomplish?*
- *What does baptism mean for me?*

### **Why was Jesus baptized?**

Within the Jewish tradition, baptism occurred for varying reasons. Some historical evidence defines baptism as a ceremony necessary for a gentile to convert to Judaism. In addition, the Bible reports that John the Baptist used baptism as an outward sign of a repentant heart. But Jesus, being already a Jew and perfect and sinless, had no need to convert or repent and subsequently baptized – or so one might think. Jesus answers the “why” question for us in Matthew 3:15: “But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’”

By submitting himself to be baptized, Jesus publicly announced the beginning of his ministry – a ministry which would ultimately bring righteousness to his followers through his death on the cross. This is the sense in which Jesus’ baptism “fulfill[ed] all righteousness.”

### **What did his baptism accomplish?**

Some might view this question as a rewording of the first; it is quite different. The reasoning to be baptized was to announce his ministry, but the act itself proved to be even more significant. Jesus’ baptism so pleased the heart of the Father that the Father used this as an opportunity to reveal to the world who this seemingly simple, solitary figure from Galilee truly was. He was not simple carpenter’s son but was the Son of God. This baptism testified to the identity of Jesus as the Christ, God’s anointed one.

### **What does baptism mean for me?**

As followers of Christ, you participate in water baptism just as Jesus did. In being immersed in water, you proclaim to the world your true identity now found in Jesus, just as Jesus proclaimed to the world who he was. This is an initiatory act. Certainly someone could be baptized without being a true follower of Jesus since at its core this act is purely symbolic. However, the reason to be baptized is to proclaim to everyone that God has given you a new heart and a new life; faith

and your adoption into the family of God is presupposed.

Additionally, just as John's baptism of Jesus ultimately pointed to Jesus' death and resurrection, so your baptism points to his death and resurrection. Paul tells us in Romans 6:1-11 that baptism represents how Jesus descended into the grave with our sin and rose to new life. And we get to participate in this! And not just in this symbolic experience, but in reality!

So even though Jesus commands that Christians should be baptized (Matt. 28:19), you should rejoice at this opportunity rather than see it as a duty. In baptism you have the privilege of obeying Christ, participating in a representation of his death and resurrection, and proclaiming to all that God saved you!