

CHRIST'S BAPTISM SETS THE STAGE FOR HIS TEMPTATION

From birth to baptism, Jesus lived on earth for 30 years and was not noticed. He did no miracles. The only signs of his true nature were his unusual understanding, and his favourable testimony with God and people. The reaction to the sermon he preached after his baptism shows that he had never spoken in an unusual way even in the synagogue. What made the difference was his baptism by John and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him, followed by the testing in the wilderness.

Jesus' "repentance" and baptism by John

Jesus submitted to John's water baptism because it was the right thing to do. John protested because he knew that Jesus was without sin. Jesus' obedience reveals two things:

1. It illustrates Matt 3:8: He was already bearing good fruit and His baptism was the seal of his right attitude towards God the Father.
2. It marked the end of Jesus' previous life. He would no longer live at home as head of the household, following an ordinary occupation. Just as he was later to command those who followed him, he himself left all his possessions, family and his own life with its own business.

Jesus had always done the will of God and pleased God. Now his life was to be fully and completely given over to God's direct service. He had been a carpenter, fulfilling people's demands for carpentry. Repentance meant this life was over. Repentance is seen here as its most sublime: the Son of God makes his own "change of mind" concerning the direction of his life. Water baptism is death to the old life (Rom 6). As Jesus came up out of the water to the new life, the Holy Spirit came down as a dove towards him and rested upon him. A voice from heaven said: "This is my Beloved Son, with whom I was well pleased". This "was" confirmed Jesus' prior purity, as did the dove form. A dove will not land on anything unclean.

Jesus tested in the wilderness

Jesus was now full of the Holy Spirit, and this Spirit led him into the wilderness where he was tested by the devil. These tests were to prove that his holiness would not fail under the pressure of his ministry. Paul may also have experienced special testing. All Christians undergo testing for the refining of their faith, some more severely than others. The nature of the testing Jesus endured was unusual. None of these tests would tempt an ordinary sane person, ordinary people do not have the power to turn stones into bread. A fall from a tall building means certain death. The power of the world's armies makes an offer of the kingdoms of this world a lunatic delusion. But for the Spiritual Man, Jesus, such tests were real: they tested his holiness (that is his consecration or separation to God). Satan never bothered to tempt Jesus with ordinary temptations such as covetousness, theft, murder and adultery, which arise from the desires of the corrupt fallen nature, a nature he did not possess. Christians have been raised, in Christ, to a life where they are tempted by the same issues that he was. Jesus shows how to overcome such temptations.)

Following the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him, Jesus now had the power to turn stone into bread. The Devil tempted him to use this new power to satisfy his own (legitimate)

bodily needs, and so prove to himself that he was indeed the son of God. Jesus rejects the temptation by quoting scripture: it is sufficient to rely on what God has said. God had said Jesus was his beloved Son in Matt 3:17.

Similarly, he knew he could be saved from death if he jumped from a Temple pinnacle. The temptation was to prove to others that he was the Son of God by fulfilling Mal 3:1 dramatically, which prophesied that the Messiah would suddenly appear in the Temple. The Devil quoted scripture to justify the temptation, but the “if you are the Son of God” clause reveals the true origin of these ideas. Jesus’ reply, again from scripture, is that you shall not “over tempt” God (ie. God should not be tested beyond what he has commanded). If God really has given someone something he has it. It is unnecessary to engineer its possession or to prove it to others, but the temptation to do so is strong.

The objective of Jesus’ ministry was to bring the peoples of the kingdoms of this world under his own authority and present them back to the Father. The final temptation, in Matthew’s account, was to take a short cut to achieve this, avoiding the suffering of the cross with all that involved. When the devil cannot win any other way he tries to ensnare with the ultimate compromise – worship of himself.

Jesus ministry fulfilled through the power of the Holy Spirit

By overcoming in these tests Jesus received the spiritual power he needed to fulfill his ministry. Ever after, everyone noticed Jesus wherever he went. His ministry was characterized by authority both in works and word. Jesus fulfilled his earthly ministry, not in his power as Son of God – all that glory had been laid aside – but through the power of the Holy Spirit upon him. Jesus’ life on earth is the perfect example of a man operating through the power of the Holy Spirit, doing not his own will, but the will of the God.