

3 Mark 1:9-11 The Baptism of Jesus

Discussion: Can you think of a time that was a transitional moment for you in your life? Was it transformational, a point after which your life took a new course? And did you see God's hand in this (at the time, or later), even if the transition was not an easy one?

Mark 1	Matthew 3	Luke 3
<p>The Baptism and Testing of Jesus 9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.</p>	<p>The Baptism of Jesus 13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.</p>	<p>The Baptism and Genealogy of Jesus 21 When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.</p>
	<p>14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented.</p>	
<p>10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.</p>	<p>16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.</p>	<p>And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.</p>
<p>11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."</p>	<p>17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."</p>	<p>And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."</p>
		<p>23 Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph...</p>

Comparison

- Mark tells us Jesus had just come from his home town, Nazareth. This was such a small, insignificant village (with a population of about 500), it would have been unknown to most hearers, so Matthew and Luke don't mention it.²³

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- Matthew adds how John the Baptist hesitates, recognising who Jesus is.
- The Holy Spirit is, of course, a spirit in nature but Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus saw the Spirit descending “like a dove”, with the additional phrase “alighting on him” in Matthew and “in bodily form” in Luke. It is not clear whether *like a dove* refers to the manner in which it descended (adverb) or how it was seen by Jesus (adjective).²⁴ Nor is it clear whether anyone other than Jesus saw this for themselves.
- Luke goes on to provide the genealogy of Jesus, through the Royal Davidic line (back through 74 generations to Adam, via David and Abraham).

Context

- Jesus now comes into view. He arrives from Nazareth to start his ministry.
- Mark introduces a Trinitarian perspective. All three persons of the Trinity are involved. The Father speaks, the Son is baptised, and the Holy Spirit descends.²⁵
- All through the Old Testament period, only specific people (particularly the prophets) were given the Holy Spirit by God. John belongs to this old era; the “old covenant” comes to an end, and a new covenant begins with Jesus.²⁶ Later, once Jesus has died and returned to heaven, Acts of the Apostles explains how the Holy Spirit is sent at Pentecost, becoming available to everyone that asks (Luke 11:13).²⁷

Key Points

- Jesus does not become the Son of God here at his baptism or later at his transfiguration. He was already the Son.²⁸
- Heaven might have been *torn open*, but in contrast, *like a dove* perhaps symbolises gentleness, innocence and purity of the Holy Spirit, although this is unclear.²⁹
- With the arrival of Jesus, John's time is now coming to an end.³⁰ Jesus' ministry has now commenced - the kingdom has arrived!

Discussion: Although Jesus was divine, and already filled with the Holy Spirit, it was still necessary for him to be baptised in the Holy Spirit by John. What do we think about this? Could it be the formal, public announcement of Jesus as Messiah? Or, the ‘handover’ to the one “more powerful than I” (Mark 1:7)? Does it relate to Jesus' humanity?

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Going Deeper: The humanity of Jesus

In the early church, having acknowledged the *divinity* of Jesus, there was further debate about the degree of his *humanity*. Some of these ideas were later declared to be heresies (i.e. false teaching) as they led people away from a correct understanding; agreed truths are then considered *doctrine*.

Gnosticism was a broader heresy that considered having 'personal spiritual knowledge' to be above the teachings, traditions and authority of the church. Gnostics believed spiritual things to be good, while the material (such as the body) was evil or bad.³¹

Arianism considered that God 'created' Jesus, instead of Jesus being co-eternal alongside the Father. If created, then Jesus would be less in stature than the Father. Arianism was declared a heresy in 325 AD (at the Council of Nicaea); they determined that Jesus was born of Mary, thus taking on his human nature at his conception.

Docetism was another heresy which sought to declare that although Jesus was fully divine, his humanness was either illusory or absent. This would lead to ideas that Jesus would therefore not have suffered pain on the cross, and also denied the Resurrection and Ascension.

The Council of Nicaea agreed that Jesus and the Father were of the same *substance*. This also confirmed the belief that Jesus is both fully 100% divine and simultaneously 100% human (dismissing the notion of half-god, half-man).

Discussion: How difficult a concept do you find it to consider Jesus as simultaneously 100% human and 100% divine, rather than 50-50?

Note: It is possible that this session will lead to a lengthy discussion and if so, you may prefer to pause here and continue with the remainder of Session 3 next time. In that case, this is a good point to hold a concluding discussion about how we each came to faith.

Discussion: What was your own experience of becoming a Christian? Some of us will have been Christians since childhood, while others will remember a particular moment we came to faith. Do we feel something in our lives was *transformed* by this?

Mark 1:12-13 The Temptation of Jesus

Discussion: What is your understanding of *fasting* and how it differs from *dieting*? What is the outcome of each, and who is the person you have in view when fasting or dieting?

Mark 1	Matthew 4	Luke 4
<p>12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.</p>	<p>1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights,</p>	<p>1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.</p>
	<p>he was hungry.</p>	<p>He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.</p>
<p>He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.</p>		

Comparison

- Fasting is not mentioned in Mark's account, nor is Jesus noted as being hungry.³²
- The wilderness was perceived as the dwelling place of Satan (and here, Mark uses the Semitic *satanas*, meaning 'adversary', but is also a proper name; Matthew and Luke prefer the Greek "devil", *diabolos*, meaning 'slanderer').³³ Jesus goes to the heart of the battlefield, but in Mark, he has the angel with him and is filled with Spirit from his baptism.³⁴
- Mark gives us little detail about what actually occurred, and even though we have the Matthew and Luke narratives of Jesus' encounter with the devil, we don't know if this accounts for the entire 40-day period, whether the angels in Mark attended Jesus only at the end, nor to what degree the wild animals were a threat, but again these are details unique to Mark.³⁵

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Going Deeper: The Temptation of Jesus narratives of Matthew and Luke

While not in Mark, an overview is provided (Matt. 4:3-11, Luke 4:3-13, and 1 John 2:16).

The World: to test God and force His hand. Satan is quoting from Psalm 91:11-12 in saying the angels will save Jesus. The temptation is to do things our own way. Satan also questions who Jesus is, saying “if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down” from the highest place of the Temple”, tempting Jesus to prove himself. A technique of the devil is to sow doubt, e.g. “Did God *really* say...?” (Gen. 3:1) to Eve in the Garden. Jesus replied that Satan should not put God to the test (Matt. 4:7).

The Flesh: Satan suggested Jesus should turn stones into bread, to stop fasting, and for Jesus to satisfy his bodily needs. (Jesus quotes Deut. 8:3 in reply).

And the Devil: Satan proposes that Jesus should worship him instead, and the temptation is that Jesus could have anything he wanted, and avoid any suffering.

Discussion: Can you think of a time that doubt undermined your confidence? Or maybe you felt prompted into an act of Christian kindness or to carry out a task that God might have steered to towards, but a voice interrupts with “did God *really* say or mean that?”

For example, someone is begging on the streets: while they would like some money, a voice in your head wonders what they might spend it on, and therefore whether to give. How do you respond?

Context

Going Deeper: The Historic Present tense

Typically, when writing of a past event, we might say something like “*they went into Capernaum*”, but the *historic present* tense makes it sound as if it's happening now, e.g. “*they go into Capernaum*”.

- In addition to employing this tense, Mark also makes regular use of the word “immediately” (Greek εὐθύς, *euthys*) throughout his Gospel, and together they give the narrative a sense of pace and action.³⁶ Of the four Gospels, it would be a good candidate for use as a film screenplay! *Euthys* is used 41 times in Mark alone, yet only ten times throughout the rest of the NT. Here, the word is translated “at once”, offering a greater sense of immediacy than the language of Matthew or Luke.

Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

- All three Synoptic Gospels continue the theme of *wilderness*. It was not felt to be a safe place for people (note Mark's reference to wild animals, e.g. lions).³⁷ It is a place of danger and hostility, an empty place, and therefore considered the dwelling place of evil spirits and of Satan.
- Forty, the number of days Jesus was in the wilderness, has symbolic significance to Jews, a number Mark mentions without developing further. This number appears several times in the OT, and the imagery is reminiscent of both Moses and Elijah, particularly in the context of judgement or testing, and also while in the wilderness.³⁸ These include: The Flood (Gen. 7:12), Moses on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:18), Moses interceding for Israel (Deut. 9:18), Elijah's wanderings through the wilderness to Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19:8), all of which were for 40 days and 40 nights. We also know the Israelites wandered the wilderness for 40 *years* (Deut. 8:2-5).
- However, God is still with his people at these times; they are not abandoned. For example, an angel leads them during those 40 years in the desert (Exodus 23:20,23, 32:34), and they fed manna from Heaven on a daily basis (Ex 16:10-36). The Israelites were being reminded that they are God's chosen people, before he allows them into the Promised Land. Similarly, Jesus is not alone in this conflict with Satan.³⁹ He too is in the wilderness and also accompanied by angels.

Key Points

- *Testing* is actually a better translation, rather than *temptation*.⁴⁰ Jesus is 'put to the test' in this encounter with the devil.
- Notice that the initiative for Jesus' testing is taken by God, not Satan. The Greek word for being "sent out" (Greek *ekballei*, ἐκβάλλει) is better translated as *driven out* or *thrust out*; and it happens *immediately*.⁴¹ The imagery reminds us of the scapegoat, innocent and yet bearing the sins of the nation, driven out into the wilderness. One day, Jesus too will bear the sins of the world.
- Unlike the scapegoat, however, Jesus is victorious when encountering the devil. In his future ministry, Jesus often crosses paths with demons (the agents of the devil's work) and he casts them out into the wilderness, in order to "destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8).⁴²