



The DAILY JESUS NEWS #029
Jesus' Early Judean Ministry

The Father and Holy Spirit Confirm Jesus' Identity and Ministry at His Immersion
MT. 3.13-16; JN 1.32-34 (Parallel Texts: M 1.9-11; L 3.21-22)

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13 ^LIn those days, when all the people were being immersed, ^MJesus came from Nazareth of ^{MT}Galilee to the Jordan to be immersed by John. 14 But John was trying to deter him, saying, "I myself need to be immersed by you, and you come to me?"

15 Jesus replied, "*I command you to permit it now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.*" Then, John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was immersed, he went up out of the water, ^Land he was praying. ^{MT}At that moment, heaven was ripped opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending ^Lin bodily form ^{MT}like a dove and resting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, "*^MYou are my Son, whom I love; in you I am well pleased.*"

32 ^JJohn gave this testimony: "I have distinctly seen the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove, and abide on him. 33 And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to immerse in water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and abide is the one who will immerse in the Holy Spirit.' 34 I have seen this, and I lay down my irrevocable testimony that this is the Son of God."

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus.*

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Jordan River in the Wilderness of Judea
Time	January of Jesus' 30 th year
Stage of Jesus' Life	Stage III: His Early Judean Ministry
Chapter 6	The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry
Section #029	The Father and Holy Spirit Confirm Jesus Identity and Ministry

Today's reading features both Jesus and the Father's first spoken words of his ministry. The scene is topped off by a visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit. This was an unusually critical event and saying in Jesus' ministry. His immersion was like none other in history.

First and last words are important. Just as the first words of Jesus' human life at age twelve in the Temple were highly significant, these first words of Jesus' ministry set the stage for all that follows. What did he say?

"I command you to permit it now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."

Jesus was consumed with his Father's interests. This meant he lived to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus was no legalist, or mere rule-keeper. Fulfilling what is righteous is so much more than being careful to observe some "do" and "don't" criteria. So what is the pursuit of the utmost righteousness about?

Righteousness according to Jesus is the expression of love. It is the unconditional desire to do what is "right"—in the best interest of those we love. Love cannot be fully satisfied with anything less than perfection for the recipient of its love—what is ultimately "right" in every way, for everyone concerned. Seen like this, fulfilling righteousness is living in constant, unconditional, impartial love. This is what the Trinity does. Righteousness is therefore pricelessly beautiful, thoroughly practical, and eternally beneficial for all concerned.

Jesus had come to John to be immersed, but the prophet refused. This is not surprising, considering the high view of Jesus' greatness that reigned in John's mind. The situation was backward—he should have been immersed by Jesus as an expression of his own repentance. So Jesus had to command the prophet to let it happen. Then Jesus gave his rationale—it was necessary, fitting, or proper for Jesus to be immersed to fulfill all righteousness.

We can see from these words that immersion was not an option for Jesus, it was an imperative. Jesus did it for the same reason he did everything else in his life—to fulfill all righteousness. For Jesus, immersion was the most righteous way to express his love for his Father, and for us sinners at the beginning of his ministry.

Jesus's immersion carried a different meaning from the repentant sinners that entered the Jordan river under John's hand. Jesus had no personal sin to repent of; He was perfect... ***"well pleasing"*** to the Father in every way. Therefore, Jesus' baptism was not about HIS sin; rather it expressed His willingness to identify with *our sin*.

The only way that Jesus could die in our place, as our substitute—the Righteous in exchange for us unrighteous sinners—was if He was willing to be treated in exactly the same way that OUR sins require. This was his identification with us: embracing our situation and circumstances as if they were His own—even though He did not deserve that in any way. This was love, and it was the "right" thing for God to do.

As Paul later explained it: *"God made he who never experienced sin (Jesus), to become sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him."* II Cor. 5:21

Jesus' immersion expressed his willingness to identify with sinners in our behalf for the sake of making us righteous. It pictured his death, burial and resurrection that were to become his central work as the Messiah. It graphically symbolized why he was accurately named "Jesus," the "Lord Who Saves," for his substitutionary death would ***"save his people from their sins."***

It was important for Jesus, and for all who believe in him, to understand from the beginning of his ministry that his central work in saving sinners would be die in our place, rise again, and ascend back to the Father as our representative High Priest. Every other aspect of his ministry on earth would be secondary to the work he would do to remove our sins and establish his perfect righteousness in us by faith.

Jesus also died as an expression of love for his Father. His immersion symbolized the obedience and love for his Father that would be expressed by dying for his Father's interests—for his sake. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus would forever declare to all creation: **"Greater love has no one than this--that they would lay down their life for their friends."** (JN 15.13)

The "friends" Jesus was dying for was his Father and the Spirit. (He also died for us who were his enemies, not his friends.) Therefore Jesus said: **"I am doing this (going to the cross) that the world may know that I love my Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, so I do."** (JN 14. 31)

Because Jesus was willing to die out of love for his Father and for us--portrayed through the symbolism of his death, burial, and resurrection in water immersion--everything else about Jesus' ministry was possible. If you love like this, you will speak the truth, heal the hurting, raise the dead, feed the hungry, deliver the oppressed, reach out to all people unconditionally with grace and mercy, and even die while forgiving your enemies. Thus Jesus' immersion graphically demonstrated the ultimate expression and fulfillment of his ministry--his sacrificial death, that fulfilled all righteousness and was pure love in action.

It made sense that the Father and Spirit publicly confirmed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah at his immersion. They affirmed the centrality of Jesus' death and resurrection as his primary ministry. The Father spoke out His love for His Son in an audible voice. The Holy Spirit revealed his invisible presence through a visible manifestation as a dove, that rested on Jesus. This was a double confirmation that Jesus was truly the Messiah... "the Anointed One." Only Jesus knows how much these twin affirmations meant to him on that glorious day.

The dove-like anointing of the Spirit was the specific sign that John had already been given by God, in order to identify Jesus as the Messiah. This manifestation of the Spirit therefore sealed John's conviction that Jesus was the Son of God...Messiah, just as the Father declared him to be.

For these reasons we have chosen to identify Jesus' immersion as the beginning of his public ministry. This was no mere preparation--the testimony of the Father, Spirit, John, and Scripture is that Jesus was publicly declared to be the Messiah at immersion. He officially inaugurated his messianic ministry. It was a Divine commissioning service for Jesus. As Luke commented immediately after this scene...

"Now Jesus Himself was about 30 years of age when he began his ministry." L 3.23A

APPLICATION:

Just as Jesus highly valued his own immersion in water because of the symbolic meaning it conveyed, he commanded all who believe in him to follow his example by undergoing immersion in water (MT 28.18-20).

The immersion commanded by John was a sign of repentance. Immersion for Jesus, and for those who believe in him has a different meaning. It symbolizes his death, burial, and resurrection--the very heart of the gospel.

Believers testify through immersion in water that they believe Jesus died, was buried, and rose according to the Scriptures for their sake, as their substitute. They also testify that through their faith connection with Jesus, their old life in sin has died, been buried, and they have begun to walk with the risen Jesus in a new life. Finally, they testify that they will be raised from the dead in the future in a resurrection body like Jesus has. This is the meaning of immersion for Jesus, and for those who believe in him and obey his command to receive immersion.

Have you been immersed in water as a testimony to what you believe about Jesus, and the difference he has made in your life?

If not, why not?