

Moody Bible Institute

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST

MATTHEW 3:13-17

An Exegetical Paper
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BI383 New Testament Greek Exegesis

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INTRODUCTION

The baptism of Jesus simultaneously marks the inauguration of Jesus' earthly ministry as well as marking the beginning of the decline of John the Baptist's ministry. MacArthur is among many who consider the baptism of Jesus to be little more than an example for us to follow.¹ Yet it is in fact so much more. It is at the baptism that those who are most prone to responding to their Messiah are gathered in repentance.

Many in Israel wondered if John might be the Messiah. Yet the last prophet declares with assurance that he is not even worthy to untie the laces of the Messiah's sandals (Matthew 3:11). John, the official herald of the coming king was waiting for the Christ to be revealed. The baptism of Jesus fulfills that need as the Messiah is identified to John by a special theophany of the Holy Spirit. It is this identification which enables the Baptist to complete his task as herald (John 1:29-34). But the herald must wait his turn to announce the king's arrival; the first public announcement is made by God the Father himself.

Here at his baptism the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is first prefigured. It is here at his baptism that the perfect one intentionally identifies himself with repentant sinners,

¹ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians, Includes Indexes*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, c1984), p. 266.

and demonstrates his full humility. It is at his baptism where the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ begins.

Each gospel contains an analogous passage which serves to clarify certain aspects of the Matthew narrative. Mark 1:9-11 identifies the geographic origin of Jesus more accurately as Nazareth. Luke 3:21-22 informs us that Jesus was praying as the heavens were opened, and further clarifies that the Holy Spirit which descended on Jesus was in the bodily form of a dove rather than simply flying down the way a dove would. Both Mark and Luke have the heavenly voice speaking directly to Jesus as in, “you are my beloved son...” which raises significant questions concerning Matthew's purpose in changing it. John's addition to the baptismal story (John 1:31-34) is more contextual in nature. It is from John 1:32 that we discover the baptizer did not know for certain that Jesus was the Messiah until after he saw the dove come upon him. Therefore there was something else about the nature and character of Jesus which caused John to seek baptism from his cousin. These collective hints, together with Matthew's account combine to display and explain the baptism of Jesus Christ.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

TRANSLATION

^{3:13} Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan *River* in order to be baptized by him. ^{3:14} But John attempted to prevent him by saying, “I am the one who has a need to be baptized by you and yet you come to me?” ^{3:15} But answering, Jesus said to him, “right now you *must* permit it, for it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness in this way.” Then he permitted him. ^{3:16} Now, when Jesus had been baptized, he immediately came out of the water. And behold! The heavens were opened for him and he saw the Spirit of God as a dove, coming down and landing on him. ^{3:17} And behold! There was a voice out of the heavens saying “this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” - Matthew 3:13-17

CONTEXT

The baptism of Jesus is the first appearance of Jesus since he was 12 years old in the temple and marks the beginning of his ministry. Dr. Harold Hoehner convincingly marks the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry as “sometime in AD 29” with Jesus' ministry beginning very shortly after the beginning of John the Baptist's; most likely during summer or autumn of that year.² The baptism of the people of Israel stands as a sudden and dramatic shift of God's people towards him in a new and generally unexpected way. Concerning this move of Jewish baptism Barclay wrote:

“It is the fact that never in all history before this had any Jew submitted to being baptized. The Jews knew and used baptism, but only for proselytes who came into Judaism from some other faith. It was natural that the sin-stained, polluted proselyte should be baptized, but no Jew had ever conceived that he, a member of the chosen people, a son of Abraham, assured of God's salvation, could ever need baptism. Baptism was for sinners, and no Jew ever conceived of himself as a sinner shut out from God. Now for the first time in their national history the Jews realized their own sin and their own claimant need of God,. Never before had there been such a unique national movement of penitence and of search for God.”³

Yet for perhaps months the people of Israel had been coming from great distances to be baptized by John the Baptist whose prophetic garb and powerful preaching had shamelessly confronted sin and yet graciously accepted the repentant sinners. As John labors in anticipation and watches (John 1:31) for the revelation of Messiah, Jesus comes to him.

2 Dr. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Academic Books, 1975), pp. 37, 44.

3 The Gospel of Matthew : Volume, ed. William Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975), p. 59.

TEXTUAL VARIANTS

In the following section from the UBS4⁴ there are a number of textual variants. Those which will be discussed are set apart in bold.

Mat. 3:13 Τότε παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην πρὸς τὸν **Ἰωάννην** τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. ¹⁴ ὁ δὲ **Ἰωάννης** διεκώλυεν αὐτὸν λέγων, Ἐγὼ χρεῖαν ἔχω ὑπὸ σοῦ βαπτισθῆναι, καὶ σὺ ἔρχῃ πρὸς με; ¹⁵ ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς **εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν**, Ἄφες ἄρτι, **οὕτως** γὰρ πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην. τότε ἀφίησιν αὐτόν. ¹⁶ βαπτισθεὶς **δὲ** ὁ Ἰησοῦς **εὐθὺς ἀνέβη** ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος· καὶ ἰδοὺ **ἠνεώχθησαν [αὐτῷ]** οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ **εἶδεν [τὸ]** πνεῦμα **[τοῦ]** θεοῦ καταβαῖνον ὡσεὶ περιστερὰν **[καὶ]** ἐρχόμενον ἐπ' αὐτόν. ¹⁷ καὶ **ἰδοὺ** φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν λέγουσα, Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα.

The thirteenth verse is textually stable. The Swanson Westcott-Hort⁵ (WHO) has Ἰωάννην instead of Ἰωάννην. The change in spelling is textually unimportant there is no impact on meaning.

4 James Swanson, Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland et al., The Swanson New Testament Greek Morphology : United Bible Societies' Fourth Edition, 4th ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2003), Mt 3:13.

5 James Swanson, Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, The Swanson New Testament Greek Morphology : Westcott-Hort Edition (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2003), Mt 3:13.

Concerning the fourteenth verse neither the Tischendorf⁶ (TIS) nor the WHO include Ἰωάννης, however this does not change the meaning of the verse but merely permits the initial ὁ in the rest of the versions to function as a pronoun to which John from the prior verse serves as the antecedent.

More variants come to play in the fifteenth verse. Scriveners TR⁷ (SCR) has εἶπε instead of εἶπεν. The presence or absence of the movable ν does not change the meaning. Additionally the WHO exchanges the prepositional phrase from πρὸς αὐτόν (to him) for the dative αὐτῷ (to him). The meaning here is also the same.

Whereas UBS4/NA27⁸/ Robinson-Pierpoint Majority text⁹ and others use the adverb οὕτως, SCR uses οὕτω which is merely a variant spelling. The Bibleworks¹⁰ WHO which has combined with the NA26¹¹/27 variants reflects the common spelling while the Logos¹² version¹³ includes the variant. Finally there is no difference in the extant portion from P67.¹⁴ None of the variants present a difference in meaning.

6 Tischendorf New Testament. Lobegott Friedrich Konstantin von Tischendorf (1815-1874) GNT 8th Edition, 1869-1872.

7 Scrivener's 1881 Textus Receptus . electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1995)

8 Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Matthew Black et al., The Greek New Testament, 4th ed. (Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1993, c1979), p 6.

9 William G. Pierpont and Maurice A. Robinson, The New Testament in the Original Greek : According to the Byzantine/Majority Textform (Roswell, GA: The Original Word Publishers, 1995, c1991)

10 BibleWorks 7.0™ Copyright © 1992-2005 BibleWorks, LLC.

11 Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger and Allen Wikgren, The Greek New Testament (Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1997, c1982), Mt 3:13.

12 Logos Digital Library System v3.0. Copyright ©2000-2006 Libronix Corporation.

13 Swanson, James, Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. The Swanson New Testament Greek Morphology : Westcott-Hort Edition. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2003.

14 Philip Wesley Comfort and David P. Barrett, The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts, A corrected, enlarged ed. of The complete text of the earliest New Testament manuscripts (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2001), 70.

In the sixteenth verse still more variants surface. Yet only one would have a significant impact on meaning. The Byzantine Majority Textform¹⁵ (BYZ) as well as SCR drops the δὲ and adds a καὶ to the start of the verse. Because both conjunctions are essentially there to keep the storyline moving there is no significant impact on meaning. The BYZ and SCR both transpose ἀνέβη εὐθὺς verses the εὐθὺς ἀνέβη of the UBS4. Aside from a negligible impact on potential emphasis there is no impact on meaning.

The most notable variant concerns the presence or absence of αὐτῷ which is bracketed in the UBS4 indicating that the committee had a difficult time determining its authenticity. The strength of witness in favor of the variant reading resulted in the uncertainty. Concerning this Bruce Metzger wrote:

“The joining of ⋈* B, the Old Syriac, and Irenaeus^{lat} in support of the shorter reading makes a very strong combination, which might well be regarded as the original text. On the other hand, however, it is possible that copyists, not understanding the force of αὐτῷ, omitted the word as unnecessary. In order to show this balance of possibilities the Committee enclosed αὐτῷ within square brackets.”¹⁶

Inclusion of the pronoun could lead one to believe that when the skies were opened “to Jesus” they were opened to him alone; which is to say that no-one else could see what Jesus saw.

If, however, the dative is translated as a dative of advantage (“for Jesus”) it could indicate that

15 The New Testament in the Original Greek : Byzantine Textform 2005, With Morphology. (Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, 2006), Mt 3:13.

16 Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), p 9.

the heavenly events serve both as an introduction to the voice that comes next as well as providing some confirmation for Jesus' benefit. The fact that John appears to have seen the dove, and considering the likelihood that the voice was in fact heard by Jesus, John and the crowds¹⁷ it seems probable that the pronoun if originally present serves as a dative of advantage.

The NA27/UBS4 text has placed the neuter article τὸ and the genitive article τοῦ in brackets to indicate that the text is uncertain. The articles are represented in the BYZ and in SCR. Because the substantives are translated anarthrously in English, the presence or absence of the article does not significantly change the translation or meaning of the text.

The NA27/UBS4 text has περιστερὰν καὶ ἐρχόμενον while the BYZ omits the καὶ (περιστερὰν ἐρχόμενον). Metzger comments:

“No transcriptional or dogmatic considerations seem to have been at work here, and the parallels offer no assistance in deciding between the readings with or without καὶ. On the strength of the diversity of textual groups that support καὶ ἐρχόμενον, the Committee retained the words in the text, but, in order to reflect the possibility that καὶ, being absent from early representatives of both Alexandrian and Western text-types (ⲛ* B ita, b, c, h Irenaeus^{lat} al), may not have been part of the text originally, enclosed it within square brackets.”¹⁸

No difference in translation is caused either by SCR dropping the movable ν on εἶδεν nor by the NA27/UBS4 text which augments ἤνεώχθησαν while the Majority Texts have ἀνεώχθησαν.

Finally, verse seventeen reveals only one very minor difference from the UBS4 text.

¹⁷ See the discussion on αὐτῷ p. 27

¹⁸ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 9.

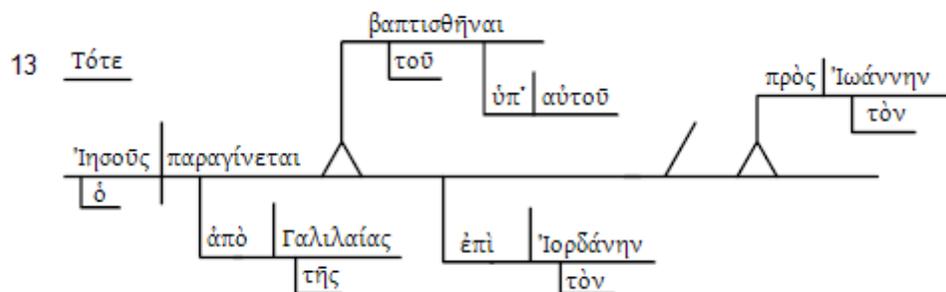
The BYZ has a grave accent on the interjection ἰδοῦ as opposed to the acute accent in the NA27/UBS4 (ἰδοὺ) while P101¹⁹ has the diaeresis thus: ἰδοῦ. The accent change has no impact on meaning.

Textually the section is theologically certain. While there are variants, only the presence or absence of αὐτῶ in the sixteenth verse would significantly impact translation or meaning, yet no major doctrine would be affected by either the omission or inclusion of the pronoun.

19 Philip Wesley Comfort and David P. Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, A corrected, enlarged ed. of *The complete text of the earliest New Testament manuscripts* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2001), p. 638.

SYNTAX AND EXEGESIS

MATTHEW 3:13



Grammatically the passage is introduced by the temporal adverb Τότε which serves to connect these events to the introduction of the then unknown Messiah which John delivers in Matthew 3:11-12. It also demonstrates that the current passage occurs not long after John's announcement. Of the eighty-nine times Matthew uses τότε, more than half of the time its use is to draw a close chronological connection or to point out a response to the prior section. As

has already been noted²⁰ Dr. Hoehner dates the coming of John the Baptist to the year 29AD and the resultant baptism of Jesus during the summer or fall of the same year.²¹

The appearance of Jesus is significant in this passage because it is his first autonomous activity. As far as Matthew's gospel is concerned we have only seen him as a secondary participant up to this point. His birth, move to Egypt and subsequent move to Nazareth have all been actions centered in his mother and Joseph. Now for the first time, Jesus becomes the central actor. By tying the introduction of Jesus then to the activity of John the Baptist, Matthew effectively demonstrates for his Jewish readers that Jesus is fulfilling the Messianic prophecies of scripture (Matthew 3:3, Isaiah 40:3).

The reader is drawn into the scene by the same historical present verb (παράγινεται) which is used in the first verse of the chapter concerning John. So that as John came dramatically onto the scene with a distinctive purpose, so also does Jesus.

While Matthew informs that Jesus came from Galilee, the parallel passage in Mark 1:9 is more specific concerning Jesus' geographic origin as being from the town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee. The three day²² journey would have been about sixty miles,²³ no doubt entirely

20 See under *CONTEXT* above. p4.

21 Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects* pp. 37, 44.

22 Based on an average traveling speed of two to three miles per hour for an adult.

23 William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995), Mt 3:13.

on foot. He ultimately arrived ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην. Perschbacher²⁴ calls this an accusative of motion towards. However Brooks and Winbery demonstrate that the preposition ἐπὶ with an accusative is likely to be functioning as an adverbial accusative of measure²⁵ marking the termination of Jesus' journey at the Jordan. While the NET²⁶ adds the word “river” for clarity, it also renders the accusative Jordan as though it were locative, “...to be baptized by him in the Jordan river.”

The NLT²⁷ similarly renders the accusative Ἰωάννην and its associated prepositional phrase πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην as though it were an adverbial accusative of manner, “to be baptized by John.” While needlessly clarifying the role of John as the baptizer it also conceals the fact that Jesus came to him; which is probably intended to parallel the coming of all the people to John (πρὸς αὐτὸν) in verse 5. “The use of the preposition πρὸς with the accusative case ... sometimes comes close to the dative of indirect object...”²⁸ This is in keeping with the normal

24 Wesley J. Perschbacher D.MIN. *New Testament Greek Exegesis: BI 383 Study Guide*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1992), p. 112.

25 James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery. *Syntax of New Testament Greek*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1979), pp. 53,66

26 Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006; 2006), Mt 3:13.

27 Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible : New Living Translation., “Text Edition”--Spine., 2nd ed.* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), Mt 3:13.

28 Brooks and Winbery p. 157-158

use of the preposition as described by ANLEX²⁹ and Zodhiates.³⁰ Thus the prepositional phrase $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma \tau\acute{\omicron}\nu \text{ Ἰωάννην}$ functions as the indirect object of the verb $\pi\rho\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\gamma\iota\nu\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ indicating that Jesus came to John who was at the Jordan. The full force of Jesus coming “to John at the Jordan” is reflected in the HCSB³¹, NASB95³² and the NKJV.³³

The reason that he came is expressed in the purpose clause $\tau\omicron\upsilon \beta\alpha\pi\tau\iota\sigma\theta\eta\grave{\nu}\alpha\iota \acute{\upsilon}\pi\prime \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$. The genitive article stands before the infinitive as a genitive of purpose.³⁴ Barclay mentions an unnamed early writer³⁵ who, “suggested that Jesus came to be baptized only to please his mother and his brothers, and that it was in answer to their entreaties that he was almost

29 “literally, to show motion toward a person or thing *to, toward*; after verbs of going...”

Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament, Baker's Greek New Testament library* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), p 330.

30 “With the acc., marking the object toward or to which something moves or is directed. ...Of place, thing, or person meaning toward, to, unto, as if in answer to the question “Whither?” With the acc. of place, thing, person: ... Particularly of motion or direction after verbs of going, coming, departing, returning...”

Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament, electronic ed.* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000, c1992, c1993), G4314.

31 *The Holy Bible : Holman Christian Standard Version.* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), Matthew 3:13.

32 *New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update.* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Matthew 3:13.

33 *The New King James Version.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Matthew 3:13.

34 Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach.* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers. 1994), p. 168.

35 It is possible that the writer in question is Jerome: “Gospel according to the Hebrews (in Jerome, Against Pelagius III.2). — The mother of the Lord and his brothers said to him, “John the Baptist baptizes for the forgiveness of sins; let us go and be baptized by him.” But he said to them, “In what way have I sinned that I should go and be baptized by him? Unless, perhaps, what I have just said is a sin of ignorance.”

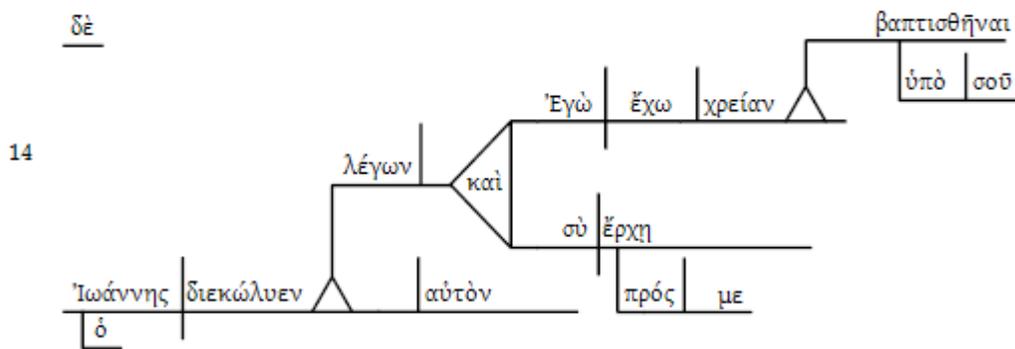
Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr, *Gospel Parallels-NRSV : A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels, With Alternative Readings from the Manuscripts and Noncanonical Parallels.; Text Used Is the New Revised Standard Version, 1989.; The Arrangement Follows the Huck-Lietzmann Synopsis, Ninth Edition, 1936.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1992). footnote from §6.

compelled to let this thing to be done.”³⁶ However the next verse offers its own reasons.

Righteousness is at stake and fulfilling it requires the lesser to baptize the greater. That is a move which John will try to prevent.

³⁶ *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume*, ed. William Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, *The Daily study Bible series*, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975), p. 59.

MATTHEW 3:14



The conjunction δὲ serves to move the reader off of the main event of the baptism onto a dialog between Jesus and John.³⁷ The article ὁ begins the sentence and in the case of ἰωάννης not being part of the text as discussed in “Textual Variants” above (p6) would function as a pronoun . The force of δὲ as an adversative conjunction would then become a “switch-reference device”³⁸ indicating that the speaker indicated by the article is no longer Jesus requesting baptism but rather has become John trying to prevent Jesus. Either way it is clear that John is now the speaker whose actions and speech exhibit a misunderstanding of what exactly Jesus is coming for. The baptizer rightly perceived a moral mismatch between himself and Jesus and thus when Jesus came to him, he tried unsuccessfully to stop him from being baptized.

³⁷ Young, Intermediate New Testament Greek. p. 183.

³⁸ Young, Intermediate New Testament Greek. p. 59.

Matthew is the only synoptic writer to comment on this discussion. Some commentators seem to think Matthew inserted the discussion to protect against the opinion that Jesus had sins to repent of. The verb διεκώλυεν is a tendential imperfect³⁹ indicating that John's attempt at prevention was at least vocal. Most modern versions adequately capture the incomplete and unsuccessful nature of John's attempt by saying in some way that John “tried” to stop Jesus. The KJV however simply translates it almost as an historic aorist using the archaic “forbad”.

The adverbial complimentary participle λέγων describes how it was that John tried to prevent Jesus' baptism. There is no indication either in favor of or against John pushing Jesus away or otherwise physically attempting to stop his cousin. Nevertheless it was a passionate speech which John must have begun with Jesus. The personal pronoun ἐγὼ intensifies the contrast⁴⁰ between John (ἐγὼ) and Jesus (σοῦ); and effectively demonstrates John's apparent dismay that Jesus would come to him.

While it seems evident that his argument is based on Jesus not needing baptism, the first reason given is John's personal acknowledgment of sin. “I have need...,” John says, placing the noun χρεῖαν⁴¹ in the forward position for emphasis. Keener argues that John was seeking a

39 Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek* . p 114. Compare Brooks and Winbery p. 93.

40 A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Logos, 1919; 2006), p 677.

41 Robertson calls this an accusative absolute (*Grammar* p. 1392.)

baptism which is different in kind than that which John had been offering “...John recognized that Jesus had come to bestow the Spirit in fuller measure than even he as a prophet had received, and he desired this baptism...”⁴² But John 1:33 indicates that John the Baptist was not fully aware of Jesus' identity until after the baptism. Therefore it could not have been his knowledge of Jesus being the Christ which motivated this statement. John must have had some other knowledge of Jesus.

Considering that John and Jesus were cousins it is more than likely that they had been exposed one to the other over the prior 30 years. It could be argued that Elizabeth would surely have told John repeatedly about the unique birth of Jesus and thus pointed to his identity. But the greater weight must be given to the Johanine indication that the Baptist remained uncertain concerning the Messiah's identity until he saw the dove.

While they were separated by many miles we could at the very least consider that from the time of 12 years and beyond, Jesus and John would have accompanied their parents to the Holy City for the three pilgrimage feasts which were required of every male in Israel. It is hard to comprehend that at such festive times, extended family would remain separated by what had become minimal distance. Thus at least sporadically John had been exposed to the character of Jesus. He was not therefore at this point seeking the Spirit and fire baptism which he personally

⁴² Craig S. Keener, *A commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 132.

announced in Matthew 3:11. Standing in the Jordan river with his cousin, John saw his own need for baptism as he presented his own confession,⁴³ and subsequently requested to be baptized (βαπτισθήναι). Young identifies this as an exegetical use of the infinitive explaining what is meant by the noun χρεία.⁴⁴

In the second half of his protest John registers his awe with Jesus with the question:

“Καὶ σὺ ἔρχῃ πρὸς με?” The καὶ is not merely connective but serves (contrary to Young⁴⁵) to provide a contrastive sense translated best as “and yet.”⁴⁶ The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), NAB and the NET, bring out the full contrast of the καὶ translating it properly. Both personal pronouns σὺ and με are emphatic⁴⁷ which helps to illuminate the contrastive sense of the καί. The verb ἔρχῃ is a perfective present indicating that Jesus came and at the time still remained in front of John. The brief prepositional phrase πρὸς με simply indicates that Jesus came to John for the understood purpose of baptism.

It is almost impossible to miss the irony of the Baptist needing to be baptized. That fact alone however does give the reader a sufficient reason to pause and consider just who this Jesus

43 Fredric W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1874, 1875, 1999), p. 111.

44 *Intermediate New Testament Greek* p. 175. Compare Brooks and Winbery p. 141.

45 Young classifies this use of καὶ as “conclusion” preferring the translation “Since I have need to be baptized by you, then [καὶ] why do you come to me?” Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek* p. 189.

46 Confer L.S. καί, and Robertson-Grammar: “The context gives other turns to καί that are sometimes rather startling. It is common to find καί where it has to bear the content ‘and yet.’ ... Cf. also Mt. 3:14, καὶ σὺ ἔρχῃ πρὸς με;”

Robertson, *Grammar* p. 1182.

47 Robertson, *Grammar* p. 234.

might be to create such a response. In a literary sense the reader is now leaning forward in his seat in order to hear what comes next. The reader will not be disappointed.

in the prior verse but still he will not be dissuaded. Something greater than John's righteousness is at stake in this baptism. Indeed it might be said that John's righteousness was at stake in a far more significant manner than he imagined.

The second part of Christ's answer to John is the reason, expressed by the conjunction γὰρ, which John must allow the baptism. The adverb of manner οὕτως points back to the preceding mention of baptism and prepares us for the predicate adjectival participle πρέπον⁵¹ which together with ἐστὶν serves as a periphrastic present⁵² providing an emphasis on the propriety of the baptism in question and its effects concerning Jesus Christ. The effects of the baptism are described as “πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην.” The infinitive of purpose πληρῶσαι functions as the subject⁵³ of the verb phrase πρέπον ἐστὶν. The adjectival phrase πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην functions as the direct object. Thus, it is proper for John and Jesus to fulfill all righteousness by means of this baptism.

How exactly the baptism fulfills all righteousness is the question which is not inherently answered in the grammar of the New Testament. As Hare notes, that question has plagued interpreters from the church fathers and forward.⁵⁴ Jesus did not need to be forgiven. So what is

51 Participle functioning as a predicate adjective to the dative pronoun ἡμῖν. (compare Brooks and Winbery p. 145.)

52 Robertson, *Grammar* p. 880.

53 Brooks and Winbery p. 139.

Compare: Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1898), p. 153.

54 Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching*. (Louisville: John

it that makes this “proper”? Robertson improperly speculates⁵⁵ that Jesus would have appeared aloof from John and his ministry if he had not been baptized. There were certainly other ways, however, that he could be seen with John or introduced by the Baptist without bringing the *appearance* of prior guilt upon himself by partaking in a baptism of repentance. John recognized that Jesus had no prior sin and balked at his request at least in part because perceived that Jesus had no sins to repent of. Further, the forerunner did not need to baptize Jesus in order to recognize him, but had only to see the Spirit land on him in order to identify him (John 1:33). This anointing could easily have happened apart from a water baptism. Therefore it was the baptism itself which fulfilled all righteousness rather than some merely visible attempt to join their ministries in the minds of the Jews.

It must be understood that righteousness is not a legal term as though Jesus was under Mosaic Law code compulsion to be baptized, else John would have known the Mosaic text in question and would not have tried to prevent him. Matthew's normal use of the term righteousness “describes the natural and inevitable response to God by his people.”⁵⁶ It is possible then that Jesus must have understood the Father's will to be that he undergo baptism.

Knox Press, 1993), p. 20.

55 A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention*. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Mt 3:15.

56 Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew, Originally Published: A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew, c1988., UBS helps for translators; UBS handbook series*. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), p. 73.

Since the nature of baptism is primarily one of identification; the revealed will of the Father to Jesus was very likely that by partaking in Baptism, the sinless one would be identified with sinners.⁵⁷

The baptism of repentance which John was performing was for the identification of the righteous with the old testament law for it was the breeches in the law which were being confessed. And it was a renewed commitment to live in righteousness which the crowds were committing to. This is why John could order the Pharisees to start producing fruit in keeping with the repentance they were claiming to have at the baptism (Mat. 3:8). In this manner when Jesus was baptized in the same baptism, though he had no sins of his own to confess he was identified with the transgressors (Isa. 53:12; Lk. 22:37). “...in his baptism he identified himself with the men, he came to save...”⁵⁸

The baptism of Jesus is the beginning of the exchange of his life for the sinner. It is in this way, as the sinless one is baptized on our behalf that all righteousness is fulfilled. It is our righteousness being fulfilled in Christ our substitute, rather than Jesus being made righteous in the baptism. Regarding the sinlessness of Christ and the substitution occurring here Kistmaker wrote: “The objection may be raised that the water of baptism symbolized the removal of filth, that is, sin; and that, since Jesus was sinless, he did not need to be, and could not properly be,

⁵⁷ Hare, *Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching*. p. 21.

⁵⁸ Barclay, *Daily study Bible series* p. 60.

baptized. The answer is that he did, after all, have sin, namely ours.”⁵⁹

Having been convinced by Jesus' reply, Matthew summarizes John's response with a succinct, “τότε ἀφίησιν αὐτόν.” Keener notes that the same language is used in Matthew 4:11 to describe Satan's departure. Thus, according to Keener, Matthew hints that John had unwittingly taken the devil's side in trying to deter Jesus' baptism.⁶⁰ But that would be inconsistent with Matthew's overall positive picture of John as the announcer of the redeemer. Due to the order in which the events are presented it is more likely that the former event would shed light on the latter. Thus hinting that the Devil was convinced of his inability to stop Jesus at least on the occasion of the desert temptations and accordingly left Jesus to himself for the time being.

The KJV⁶¹ translation “suffer” is archaic and in the modern usage renders an unfortunate concept of grudging compliance which is not indicated by the text. Whether or not John fully understood the reason, or as is more likely he simply trusted Jesus, he obeyed.

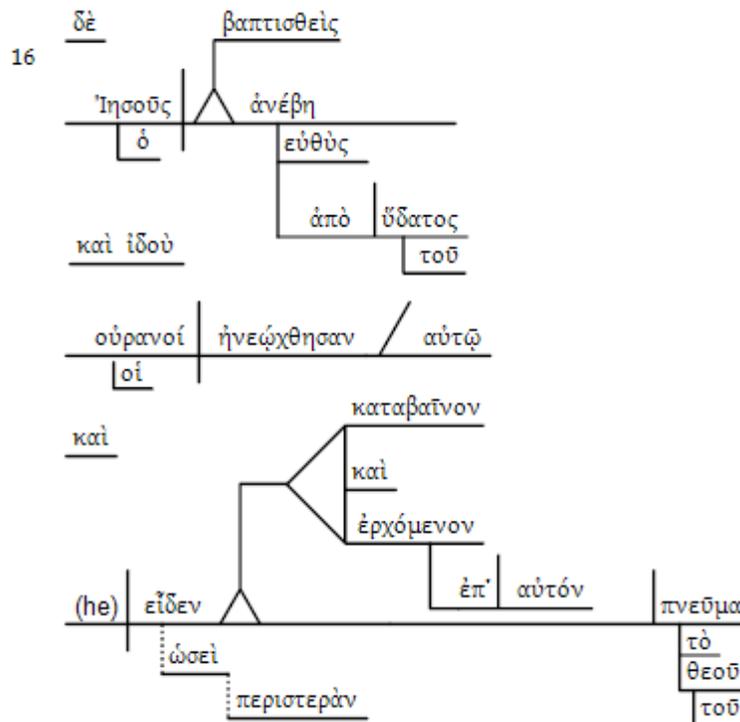
59 William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *vol. 9, New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew, Accompanying Biblical Text Is Author's Translation.*, *New Testament Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), p. 213.

60 Craig S. Keener, *A commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 132. (See footnote 172 on the same page.)
It appears that Keener is quoting Blomberg 1992a but I was unable to confirm the reference in the electronic edition.

Blomberg, Craig. Vol. 22, *Matthew. electronic ed. Logos Library System; The New American Commentary*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992)

61 *The Holy Bible : King James Version., electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version*. (Bellingham WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995), Mt 3:16.

MATTHEW 3:16



Apart from the fact that Jesus confessed no personal sin as he was being baptized, the process of baptism probably did not vary from the several which John had already performed. As Jesus came up out of the water however, all heaven broke loose.

The conjunction δὲ functions transitionally to introduce a new development and serves to return us to the main focus from the conversation initiated by the δὲ in 3:14.⁶² The temporal

⁶² Compare the introduction to 3:14 above p. 15.

adverbial participle βαπτισθεῖς qualifies the main verb ἀνέβη as does the temporal adverb εὐθὺς. The combined double qualifier together with the culminative aorist ἀνέβη serves to picture the departure of Jesus from the water as completed. There could be some question as to whether the timing is in reference to Jesus standing up after going under the water or if it refers to him walking out of the water after the entire baptismal ceremony. The temporal adjectival adverb εὐθὺς seems to indicate that the descent of the Spirit began to happen as soon as Jesus had finished standing up to complete the cycle of baptism.

The adjunctive καὶ⁶³ introduces the exclamatory interjection ἰδοὺ. This construction is repeated in v17. In fact the phrase is used 28 times⁶⁴ in the book of Matthew. In almost every instance it serves to draw the reader's attention to a new and often unexpected development.⁶⁵

Luke 3:21 reveals that Jesus was praying as he came out of the water and it was as he prayed that the heavens were opened (ἤνεώχθησαν) meaning that visibly either the crowd, John, Jesus or a mixture of any of the three were enabled to see into the realm of glory. Else it could graphically indicate that the interaction between God and Mankind was about to take on a completely new venue in the person of Jesus (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2). From a visual standpoint it is nearly impossible to determine what was seen. The dramatic aorist however probably points

63 Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*. p. 188.

64 Matt. 2:9; 3:16f; 4:11; 7:4; 8:2, 24, 29, 32, 34; 9:2f, 10, 20; 12:10, 41f; 15:22; 17:3, 5; 19:16; 20:30; 26:51; 27:51; 28:2, 7, 9, 20

65 Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*. p. 199.

Matthew's Jewish readers to the opening of Ezekiel in which the heavens are opened to the prophet in preparation for his ministry.

As discussed in Textual Variants⁶⁶ the pronoun αὐτῷ is uncertain in the text. Initially it is not entirely clear if everyone else was able to see what Jesus saw. The HCSB translates the questionable αὐτῷ as a dative of advantage “...the heavens suddenly opened for Him...” This is also done in parenthesis in the New American Bible. The KJV and ESV, NRSV, Darby (1890) translate it as a dative of indirect object “...the heavens were opened unto / to him...” The NIV and NASB95 both opt to discard the personal pronoun omitting it altogether from the translation. If the pronoun belongs in the text however, it is likely functioning as a dative of advantage.

While the opening of the heavens would be for the benefit of Jesus as indicated by the usage of the personal pronoun σὺ in the divine pronouncement of Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22;⁶⁷ that would permit the others present, at least John (cf John 3:13) to see and hear both the audible (v17) and visual event which Jesus saw and heard.

Jesus saw (εἶδεν) [τὸ] πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ. The genitive of description indicates that the Spirit in question is God's Spirit in particular. The days of Jesus and John the Baptist were not marked by a deep sense of the Spirit's involvement. Keener expresses the Jewish mindset:

“Many believed that the Spirit was no longer available in their time; others believed that the Spirit simply did not work as forcefully as in the days of the prophets, until the time of the end.

⁶⁶ See above p. 7.

⁶⁷ See discussion on οὐτός at verse 17 p. 31.

That the Spirit comes on Jesus indicates the inauguration of the messianic era and marks Jesus out as the Spirit-bearer and hence Messiah (3:11).”⁶⁸

The Spirit came down ὡσεὶ περιστερὰν. The adverb of manner ὡσεὶ could be demonstrating that the Spirit descended the way a dove would. However, Luke's gospel (3:22) clarifies with an adjective (σωματικῶ) that the Spirit came in the form of a dove's body. The Spirit-dove came down and ἐρχόμενον ἐπ’ αὐτόν.

The Spirit in theophany as a dove is significant. More often the Father or Son is visually seen in various physical forms throughout the Old Testament. Symbolically the dove was the only bird permitted as a sacrifice under the Levitical sacrificial system.⁶⁹ The dove was typically reserved for the most poverty stricken members of Israelite society. It is conceivable that Matthew's audience would have recognized this and recognized Jesus as the sacrifice for all including the poor. In addition to the Levitical sacrifice connection the dove has two major parallel symbolisms.

First, the image of the Spirit as dove recalls the other significant appearance of the Holy Spirit at least in dove like language from the opening words of Genesis. There the Spirit hovers over the surface of the waters in preparation for the new work about to be initiated. Second, the dove is symbolic of the end of judgment as the dove returns to Noah with the olive leaf at the end

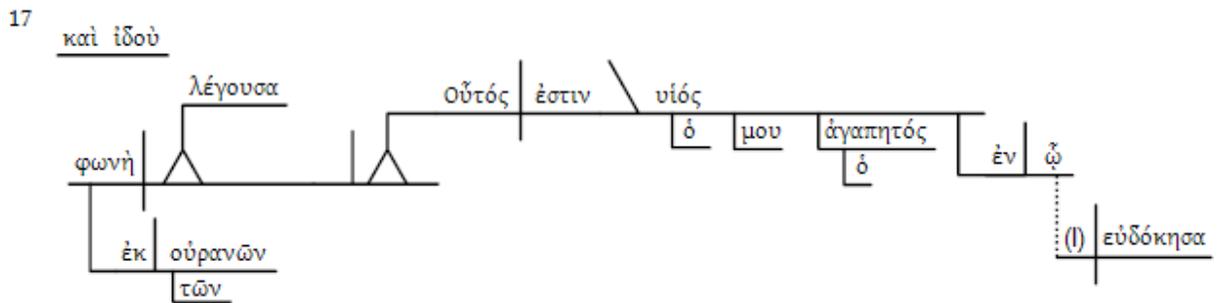
68 Craig S. Keener and InterVarsity Press, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Mt 3:16.

69 Marvin Richardson Vincent. *Word Studies in the New Testament*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002), Matthew 1:26.

of the flood⁷⁰ initiating an image of peace which endures to this day. All three of these symbolic connections to the dove come to fullness in Christ. He is the creator through and for whom all things are made as well as the herald of the end of judgment which he himself has absorbed as the all encompassing sacrifice.

70 Donald A. Hagner. *vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 1-13, Word Biblical Commentary.* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), p. 58.

MATTHEW 3:17



When the crowds came to John for baptism they confessed their sins (Mat. 3:6). But Jesus makes no confession, he is praying (Luke 3:21). The only voice heard at Jesus' baptism is indeed a confession but it is the Father's confession of Jesus' identity. There is a sense in which this baptism is the inauguration of the king. The exclamatory phrase καὶ ἰδοὺ again turns the reader's attention to another new and unexpected event.⁷¹ The prior event was visible, this second event is auditory. A voice is heard coming out of the heavens. The anarthrous φωνὴ most likely focuses on the character of the voice rather than trying to classify it in other ways.⁷² The prepositional phrase ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν concludes with the ablative of source.⁷³ The verbal participle λέγουσα functions as an indicative verb and reveals the content of the voice's

71 See also the prior discussion on καὶ ἰδοὺ p. 26.

72 Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*. p. 68.

73 compare Brooks and Winbery p25

statement.

The content of the message is primarily that of identification. This announcement identifies for the reader, and presumably for those standing by, just exactly who Jesus is. The demonstrative pronoun οὗτός referring to Jesus plays a crucial role in revealing Matthew's intent concerning the disputed dative pronoun αὐτῷ⁷⁴ as well as helping to discern whether or not the crowds and even John the Baptist were able to hear and see these miracles as opposed to them being merely subjectively experienced by Jesus alone. Both Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22 use the definite pronouns σὺ and σοὶ where Matthew uses οὗτός and the relative pronoun ᾧ. This would appear to indicate in Mark and Luke that the Father was speaking directly to Jesus. While in the similar occurrence of a voice from heaven speaking in John 12:28-ff the people did not understand the voice, there is no indication in either of the other synoptic gospels whether the people surrounding the area understood this voice or not. Matthew apparently opted to change the pronouns in order to clarify that the identification was for the benefit of the people. The voice declares to all who are gathered that, “This one is my beloved son”.

The NIV, CJB⁷⁵ and NJB⁷⁶ are unique in translating ὁ ἀγαπητός as a compound predicate nominative with ὁ υἱός, treating the nominative article as a pronoun. The classic

74 See discussion p. 27.

75 David H. Stern. *Complete Jewish Bible*. (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc. 1998), Matthew 3:16.

76 *The New Jerusalem Bible*. Edited by Henry Wansbrough. (New York: Doubleday, 1985)

second attributive position however should take precedent here so that ὁ ἀγαπητός modifies ὁ υἱός μου. The description of Jesus as the beloved son of God is particularly important in view of Jesus' mission as expressed in John 3:16. Jesus came to die for the world of people whom God loved. The fact that God loved the son elevates the sacrifice made to an even higher plain. The transaction of salvation is not the trading of one barely liked individual (the Son) for a multitude of that which is beloved. This is an undeserved exchange of one super-precious being for another loved group of beings.

The phrase, “my beloved son,” is a direct quotation from the Messianic Psalm 2:7 which is called a royal enthronement Psalm by Blomberg⁷⁷ It was here that God the Father commissions Jesus as the king of the Jews. Even as David was anointed years before he could assume the throne and endured suffering beforehand, so also Jesus was anointed and suffered prior to his yet pending and final enthronement. The identity of the voice is now certain. With a fuller knowledge of Christology it becomes immediately evident that the voice is none less than God the Father. It is certainly not an angel as the bystanders of John 12:28-~~ff~~ thought that voice might be.

The second phrase ἐν ᾧ ἐυδόκησα is a direct quotation from Isaiah 42:1. Hagner considers both quotations as allusions to the Isaiah passage which is a statement concerning the

⁷⁷ Blomberg, Craig. vol. 22, *Matthew, electronic ed., Logos Library System; The New American Commentary.* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992), p. 82.

anointing of the servant of God with the Spirit in order to enable the servant to accomplish his task.⁷⁸ The preposition ἐν with the dative of interest ᾧ⁷⁹ functions with the gnomic aorist εὐδόκησα to express that God has always approved of Jesus and thus of course continues to do so. There is a great deal of dispute regarding the classification of this term.

A.T Robertson debates whether this is gnomic or timeless aorist stating that the gnomic is not clear.⁸⁰ Brooks and Winbery describe it as a dramatic aorist believing that it puts a greater emphasis on “recent attainment.”⁸¹ However, there is more in view than simply the baptism of Christ. As the introduction to his ministry the statement of God's pleasure in Jesus establishes that the life and person-hood of Jesus up until this point have been acceptable.

When a lamb is selected for slaughter it must first be deemed acceptable by the offerer. Thereupon it is then separated from the flock and set apart for ministry. Here at the outset of Jesus' ministry he is being set apart for slaughter. This baptism serves as a ceremonial selection of the lamb of God - thus God's statement declaring that Jesus has achieved and retains the Father's pleasure. Jesus will repeatedly refer to the Father's love and pleasure for him throughout his ministry.⁸²

78 Hagner, *WBC* p. 59.

79 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 Edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 Compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 2:740.

80 Robertson, *Grammar* p. 837.

81 Brooks and Winbery p. 102-103

82 See for instance John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9

Burton argues against this is functioning as a culminative aorist, preferring to call it a comprehensive historical aorist. He writes, “But against this is the absence of any adverbial phrase meaning up to this time, which usually accompanies an Aorist verb used in this sense.”⁸³

The term “usually” however does not mean “always.” Burton's main argument seems to be a problem with the aorist in some way indicating that Jesus at one point *became* acceptable to God thus suggesting in some way that there might be a point when he was not. He therefore argues against interpretations which would refer to Jesus becoming acceptable during his life on earth or during his eternity. He finally chooses to refer to this as “an Inceptive Aorist equivalent to an English Perfect. [which] judges the existing result to be only suggested by the affirmation of the past fact.”⁸⁴

However the gnomic aorist appears to best fit the requirement that Jesus is not really described as “becoming acceptable” but rather emphasizes that Jesus simply *is* acceptable and pleasing to the Father and always has been.⁸⁵ The term εὐδόκησα expresses a fullness of approval. It is not that the Father looked down and approved just then of Jesus. But there is a full and complete approval of all that Jesus is and has been which is communicated.

Both phrases are also repeated in the transfiguration narrative in Matthew 17:5 with the

83 Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1898), p. 29.

84 Burton, *Syntax* p. 29.

85 Hagner, *WBC* p. 59.

addition of ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ, “listen to him.” Both instances, the transfiguration as well as the baptism, form a different aspect of the end goal of Christ's earthly ministry. The baptism symbolizes his death, burial and resurrection (compare Rom. 6:3-4). While the transfiguration prefigures his glorification after the resurrection. In each instance the Father proclaims the identity of and his love for his son.

One can hardly miss the baptism of Jesus Christ as a significant theological event marking one of the few locations in the gospels where the Trinity is uniquely present and active. Davies and Allison speculate that this text is responsible for the proliferation of Trinitarian baptismal texts throughout the New Testament. To which purpose they write:

“Mt 3:16–17, which was interpreted by later Christian theology as depicting the supreme manifestation of the Trinity, is only one of several NT baptismal texts in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are present; see Mt 28:16–20; Jn 1:33–4; Acts 2:38–9; 10:38; 1 Cor 6:11; Tit 3:4–6; 1 Pet 1:2 ... Why the NT should contain so many triadic baptismal texts is far from obvious. But the ultimate cause could be the story of Jesus baptism by John, in which God the Father speaks to his Son and the Holy Spirit comes upon him.”⁸⁶

As all three persons of the Trinity are represented in these last two verses of the passage. So too at the close of his gospel Matthew records the baptismal formula which mandates disciples be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and the Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Indeed it seems quite intentional on Matthew's part to set the entire earthly ministry of Jesus within the inclusio of a Trinitarian baptismal event.

⁸⁶ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. (London; New York: T&T Clark International. 2004), p. 340.

EXPLANATION

The last time we saw Jesus he was in Galilee. We might have been wondering where he was and why sudden attention had been given to John the Baptist. But it was necessary that we meet John for two reasons, First so that we could see him calling the people of Israel to repentance and baptizing them as they responded (Matthew 3:1-2, 5-6). Secondly, we needed to hear John announce the coming of the Messiah (Matthew 3:11-12). It was, in a manner of speaking, immediately after his announcement that Jesus comes to John who was at the Jordan (Mat. 3:6) in order to be baptized by him. Like all the crowds before him, Jesus walked into the Jordan river where John was, expressing his desire to be baptized. Keener stands alone in noting the inherent humility displayed by Jesus at his baptism, “In a traditional Mediterranean culture where society stressed honor and shame, Jesus relinquishes his rightful honor to embrace other's shame. After Jesus' public act of humility, God publicly identified Jesus as his own son...”⁸⁷

John was aware, to a certain extent, who Jesus was at least in his character. It is doubtful that his mother Elizabeth would have kept the nature of Jesus' birth a secret from John who himself was a miraculous baby. Those are the kinds of stories which are told repeatedly to

⁸⁷ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 131.

children as they grow up. John grew up in the hill country of Judah (Luke 1:39) while Jesus was growing up in Galilee. Nevertheless they very likely had some exposure to each other growing up despite the distance even if only at the yearly feasts in Jerusalem. Even today it is common among extended families to know something of the character of other children. John surely would have at least heard stories about “what a good boy” Jesus was and coupled those stories with those of his birth.

Before John was even born the fullness of the Spirit of God led him to know Jesus for who he was (cf Luke 1:15). This does not mean that John knew for certain in adulthood that Jesus was the Messiah however. John 1:32-34 reveals that the Baptist did not recognize Jesus as the one who “baptizes in the Holy Spirit” until after he saw the Holy Spirit come on Jesus in the form of a dove. He may have suspected it prior to this moment but confirmation of his identity was needed - not only now, but also later in Matthew 11:3.

Against this backdrop of knowledge John the Baptist came preaching repentance and spent a good part of his days baptizing and preaching to the crowds that came out to him. He would baptize them as they confessed their sins (Matthew 3:6). As far as John knew however, Jesus had no sins to confess. For this apparent reason, John started to prevent Jesus from going through with the baptism. A certain amount of shock or awe is evident in the emphatic use of the personal pronouns as John declares his own sin by implying that he is more sinful than Jesus and

suggesting that they switch places. Jesus however understood more than did John. The Lord responds to his stunned cousin that he must permit the baptism because it is proper for them to fulfill all righteousness in this manner.

Baptism is not a means to repentance but rather a symbol of it. If it were a means to repentance or rather a means to salvation than it would indeed have been inappropriate for Jesus to be baptized by John. For in the baptism the sinless one would have been making a false claim to sin. Rather he was making a definite identification with sinners. It is in this sense that the baptism of Jesus is the beginning of our redemption.

As Jesus came out of the water the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit - in the form of a dove - came down and landed upon Jesus anointing him for ministry. A voice also came from the heavens. God the Father proclaiming the identity of Jesus as his son.

APPLICATION

Even as John suddenly saw his own need for baptism in the presence of Christ, we too might think we are good enough until we come into the presence of perfection. The bright lights of holiness cause what we might consider to be a “minor stain” to be displayed for what it is, a blood red indelible mark. Even today the leaders and shepherds who would guide others to God have need themselves to be cleansed by Christ.

Once Jesus replied, John simply obeyed even if he did not fully understand. This too serves as a model for us. Obedience is not contingent upon understanding, but merely upon hearing the command and trusting the Lord who commands.

The very same Spirit of God which fills, directs and empowers believers today is the very Spirit of God which filled, directed and empowered the Son of God. When the Spirit came upon Jesus his ministry began. That is where ministry begins for every believer. If you have been baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, than you are baptized by the Spirit into service.

Some of the enormity of God's love for us is seen in the fact that he loved Jesus as well

and described him in the very intimate terms of “beloved son”. One of the most common verses committed to memory is John 3:16, telling us that “God so loved the world...” That God loved the world is not contrastive to the love he had for Jesus but rather ascensive. Because he loved the son, the sacrifice for you and I is even greater than we might have thought.

A key requirement of salvation is acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord (Rom. 10:9).

This passage, which marks the inauguration of Jesus into ministry is a definitive statement concerning his identity as deity. God the Father has set his seal on Jesus - it behooves us therefore to listen to him (Mat. 17:5). It is in our favor now to watch the rest of this gospel unfold with a full knowledge that Jesus is the King of Glory.

CONCLUSION

In the scheme of Matthew, Jesus is presented to Israel as her king. The baptism of Jesus identifies the humble Messiah with his people. The visible anointing by the Holy Spirit empowers him and the coronation speech given by the Father establishes his identity. God's multiplied promises to send a Savior have been fulfilled and now proclaimed to the repentant ones of Israel.

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