

The baptism of Jesus Christ...

Matthew 3 and 4

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v 2) – if the kingdom of heaven is near, then we must get ready now. John the Baptist’s mission was to prepare hearts for the Messiah, to bring an awareness of sin among the people of Israel so they could receive the salvation offered by Jesus.

We often fail to appreciate how important the ‘preparing’ work of the Lord is. Any great work of God begins with preparation. John’s message wasn’t so much “You’re a sinner, you need to repent”, but rather, “Jesus is coming!” John’s call to repentance was the *response* to the news that the Messiah was coming...

John the Baptist prepares the way (Matthew 3 v 1 to 12)

- Why do you think John baptised ‘in the desert of Judea’ (v 1)? Why not in the city, or in the market place?
- John the Baptist saw himself as preparing the way for Jesus (v 3). In what ways did he achieve this through his preaching? through his lifestyle? through his baptisms?
- What sort of a person was John the Baptist? How would you describe his character?
- Would he have made a good company employee?
- Would he be a good role model for young men today?
- What do you think provoked John to express his disapproval of the Pharisees and Sadducees in such strong terms (v 7 to 10)?
- In fact he calls them a “brood of vipers” (v 7). How does this link with Jesus’ rebuke in John 8 v 44?

The baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3 v 13 to 17)

- The people were encouraged to be baptised for the forgiveness of their sins. But why did Jesus need to be baptised?
- “For thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness” (v 15) – how is this statement linked to the cross? See 2 Corinthians 5 v 21.

The temptations of Jesus (Matthew 4 v 1 to 11)

Jesus fasted 40 days and nights, and then “he was hungry” (v 2); medics say that when hunger pains return after a long fast, the person is near death.

- (i) First temptation: the devil challenges Jesus to prove his deity by miraculously providing bread. But Jesus answers by quoting Deuteronomy 8 v 3, saying that God’s word is more precious than food.
- (ii) Second temptation: “For it is written” (v 6) – the devil also quotes Scripture, Psalm 91 v 11 to 12, but he takes these verses out of context, as if to say ‘if you throw yourself off the pinnacle of the temple, the Bible promises the angels will rescue you and it will be spectacular self-promotion’. Again, Jesus replies with Scripture, quoting Deuteronomy 6 v 16.

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(iii) Third temptation: the devil invites Jesus to take a shortcut around the cross – Jesus came to win the kingdoms of the world back from Satan’s domain, and Satan offers them to Jesus if he will only worship him. Note that for Satan worship and recognition are more precious than possession of the world’s kingdoms – see Isaiah 14 v 12 to 14. Again Jesus responds with God’s Word (Deuteronomy 6 v 13)...

- These temptations of Jesus were a test of the kind of ministry he was going to exercise.
- What was the special point of appeal in each temptation?
- How do these verses help us to understand the meaning of temptation and the way in which the devil can be defeated?
- Why do you think Jesus was tempted? See Hebrews 2 v 18, 4 v 15.

Jesus preaches, calls the first disciples and heals the sick (Matthew 4 v 12 to 25)

- There is much that happens between verses 11 and 12 (as narrated in John’s Gospel, from 1 v 29 to 4 v 3). Verses 15 and 16 are a quotation from Isaiah 9 v 1 and 2.
- What was Jesus’ first message? What did he demand of the first disciples and why?
- How do these verses show Jesus’ authority – over people, over diseases, over demons, and over all creation?

Prayer – Lord, as we hear your voice and your call, help us to repent of our sins, believe the good news of your forgiveness and salvation, and follow you always. Amen.