

## **Series Gospel of Luke**

### **This Message #4 Jesus is Affirmed as the Messiah**

#### **Luke 3:21-22**

We are studying the history of the earthly life of Jesus. That's what the Gospel of Luke is all about. Dr. Luke's goal is that we will have more and more confidence in the person and work of Jesus. So far, we have thought about the miraculous birth of Jesus, a couple of the events in His early life, and, through the prophetic words of John, we have learned about the authority and activities that would be part of Jesus' ministry.

Today our focus is on the public inauguration ceremony of Jesus. This was the occasion when Jesus was introduced to the people of Israel and when He received affirmation from His heavenly Father and a special anointing for His earthly ministry.

There are only two verses in Luke's Gospel which mention this inauguration event, but it was such an important occasion that I am including the parallel descriptions from the Gospels of Matthew and John.

#### **Read Luke 3:21-22; then Matthew 3:13-17; then John 1:29-34**

Jesus was 30 years old when He was baptized. By Jewish reckoning, a man was considered mature enough at age 30 to have something to contribute to the religious and social life of Judaism. The time had come for Jesus to leave the ordinary life of Nazareth in order to be publicly revealed as the Messiah.

According to the verses we read, Jesus approached John and requested baptism. John insisted instead that he stood in need of baptism by Jesus but he consented to the baptism after Jesus told him, "It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." There are numerous opinions about the meaning of Jesus' words. All commentators agree that Jesus did not need to be baptized because of personal sin. He was not in need of forgiveness. He was, after all, conceived by the Holy Spirit as the perfect God-man, and God the Father said that He was well pleased with Jesus.

Some commentators emphasize that Jesus, in subjecting Himself to baptism, was openly identifying Himself with the sins of mankind, that through His baptism He was offering Himself as the Substitute and Representative of sinful mankind. In this sense, Jesus symbolically entered the same waters that people who had confessed their sins had entered.

Other scholars insist that the baptism of Jesus was His way of showing His acceptance of the work of redemption, that He was publically submitting Himself to the plans of the Father God. Other scholars point to the outcome of the baptism, emphasizing that the descent of the Holy Spirit was the Father's acknowledgement that all the heavenly righteous requirements for Messiah work were fully met in Jesus.

There is truth in all these explanations of the phrase, "fulfill all righteousness." The most basic and most all-inclusive interpretation is that Jesus was submitting Himself in a public way to the will of the Father in heaven, the One who had sent Him to earth.

The Apostle John gave yet another important reason for Jesus' baptism. The baptism was the means whereby the human Jesus was authenticated as "the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world." As John the Baptizer explained, "the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel," and "the One who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'" The descent of the Holy Spirit validated that Jesus was the Messiah.

Several very unusual events followed the baptism of Jesus. As Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended in a visible way, and there was a voice which came from heaven. These happenings were very dramatic and significant. All four of the New Testament Gospel accounts mention the opening of heaven. The writer Mark described it as a violent ripping apart of heaven.

When we put this into the overall context of the Bible, we can discover why this was such a significant event. The Bible indicates that the heavens had been open like this only one other time in human history, immediately after the creation of Adam and Eve. At the time of their creation Adam and Eve were without sin and God could dwell with them in a close relationship, which is what the term "open heaven" represents. Scripture describes in anthropomorphic terms how God

walked with Adam and Eve and communed with them.

Adam and Eve maintained this open, intimate, and spiritual fellowship with God until they disobeyed the command to not eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. At that point in time, the pure, righteous, and holy God could no longer be directly associated with people who were disobedient and contaminated with sin. The pure holy God had to seal Himself off from His creation. God's Spirit could no longer dwell with mankind. Heaven was closed.

After that time God maintained indirect contact with people of faith through sacrifices, the voices of prophets, the Law, covenant promises, miracles, and various object lessons such as circumcision and the tabernacle. In the Old Testament era, the blood of the sacrifices was like a temporary covering over the sins of people because God did not want to immediately punish them because of their guilt. The prophets were given words of warning by God to alert the people of impending judgment. The promises were given to people of faith so that they would have a basis of hope about future glorious conditions. The Law provided moral, physical and spiritual guidance to people, demanding that they "be as holy as Jehovah God was holy." Miracles were supernatural evidence that the Almighty God was in control of the fortunes of His people even in the most desperate of situations, and the object lessons taught the people in practical ways about faith. These were ways in which God maintained indirect contact with people.

Even though the possibility of direct fellowship between God and mankind did not exist throughout the Old Testament period, God was continually reaching out to fallen humanity because He was the God of grace and love. All His actions pointed to the time when heaven could be reopened and fellowship between humanity and Himself could be reestablished. That relationship could only be reestablished through a man who was perfect in all His ways, a man who was sinless.

Jesus was that man. As He "went up out of the water" following His baptism, "the heavens were opened," and the Spirit of God descended on Him. The presence of God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, was once again, like at the time of creation, with mankind. It was confirmation that a pure sinless man was once again on the face of the earth, a human who could relate to the pure, righteous, holy God of heaven.

The purity of Jesus should not surprise us. He was not the offspring of a human father. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and hence He was “the Son of the Most High God.” Through His supernatural birth Jesus bypassed the tainting of sin which was the inheritance of all babies who were conceived through physical and spiritually fallen parents. God was His Father.

There is a great theological lesson in this, which was explained by the Apostle Paul. Let me read, and comment on, some excerpts from Romans chapter 5:

Sin entered the world through one man, (that man was Adam) and death through sin (we are talking here about physical death which is the penalty for sin, and also spiritual death which is separation from God), and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned (sin and death is our inheritance from Adam). ...

If all died by the trespass of the one man (Adam), how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to all! ... (be made available to everyone)

If, by the trespass of the one man (Adam), death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Do you get the picture here? Through the disobedience of Adam, sin and death were passed on to all people. Through the grace of God and the gift of righteousness provided by Jesus Christ, there is the possibility of eternal life.

Paul is comparing the two most important men in human history. In particular, Paul compares the consequences of the choices of the first Adam, which is sin and death passed on to all his descendants, and the blessings for those who accept God’s gift of grace and righteousness provided by the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

There have only been two men in all the history of mankind who have had the experience of a full intimate spiritual relationship with God — the first Adam before he sinned and lost that relationship, and the second Adam, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who left the glories of heaven to come to earth where He lived a perfect sinless life, and was therefore qualified to possess God’s Spirit and to be the substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

John the Baptizer included an attention-grabbing word in his statement quoted in the Gospel of John. He said, "The one who sent me to baptize with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." The first Adam had God's Spirit for a time, but then he lost his spiritual connection through disobedience. This was not the case with Jesus. We know from our reading of the New Testament that God's Spirit could remain on Jesus because He lived His life on earth in perfect obedience to the Father, even unto His death on the cross of Calvary.

Next week we are going to think about the temptations that Jesus faced. In spite of the best efforts of Satan to get Jesus to forsake His calling, Jesus did not follow the example of the first Adam. He never gave in to human temptations.

When the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, it did not mean that He was previously without the Holy Spirit. He had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. After His conception, the Holy Spirit formed and developed His human nature. He had lived sinlessly for 30 years in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Luke wrote that He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." The Holy Spirit did not change Jesus at His baptism. Rather, the descent of the Holy Spirit was the visible public declaration of His Messiahship.

What God made known through the opening of the heavens and the descent of the Spirit was confirmed by the statement, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." The reference to Sonship has a much deeper meaning than the fact that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Sonship here refers to the eternal relationship that Jesus had with the other members of the Godhead, the Father and the Holy Spirit. From all eternity Jesus has been, in an absolute and unique sense, the only-begotten Son of God.

The words "love" and "well pleased" convey the sense of Jesus' special relationship with the Father. "Love" is one of the most outstanding attributes of the Godhead. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in eternal mutual love and holiness. The words, "with you I am well pleased" indicate, in the context of Jesus' earthly life, that He had completely fulfilled the expectations of the Father. For 30 plus years, Jesus had lived as the perfect man, being submissive to the Father's will in every respect.

The opening of heaven, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the voice were the unambiguous confirmation to John the Baptizer that Jesus was truly the promised Messiah, the One greater than himself, the One who would bring salvation to all mankind.

From Jesus' standpoint, the baptism episode represented God's endorsement of His qualifications and was the signal that it was time for His public ministry to begin. Jesus was God's chosen one, unique in his incarnation and calling. Anointed with the Spirit, Jesus was ready to begin His ministry as the promised Messiah. And by the way, the title Messiah, or Christ, literally means "anointed one." Following His anointing, Jesus was ready to carry out His calling as the Savior of the world.

### **My Prayer for You:**

That heaven has been opened for you;  
That the Holy Spirit has descended on you and is remaining with you;  
That after your anointing you will be as submissive to the Father as Jesus was.