

**God's Witness to Jesus**  
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Luke 3:21-22  
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Synopsis:

People have anguished over why John baptized Jesus. Does this mean that Jesus was a sinner? Luke is not interested in the baptism but what happens after the baptism: In the baptism God inaugurates Jesus by the Holy Spirit for ministry as the Son of God.

I.

Last week I told you that the baptism of John was coming away from normal life, turning away from sin, and returning to a new life.

Does Jesus need to come away, turn away, and return to a new life?

Obviously Jesus does not need to retreat from his normal life—well, maybe he does to pray and to meditate on God's call. He surely does not need to repent, to turn away from sin. Jesus is after all God in the flesh, in an unbroken relationship with God the Father. Finally, Jesus does not need a new life, because he is already *the* new man or woman. Why then baptism?

II.

If you could read the Greek text, you would see what I saw this week. I hate to make a theological point out of grammar, but grammar is important in this Bible passage. Luke 3:21-22 is one long sentence. The sentence is full of dependent clauses up to the point where the heavens open. Luke turns down the volume to a whisper until the heavens open, at which point he hits the volume button and the bass booster:

The heavens open!

The Holy Spirit descends!

A voice comes from heaven!

Luke isn't interested in the baptism; he is interested in what happens after the baptism. After baptism Jesus launches into ministry; and the same thing that happens to Jesus happens to us. How do I know this? If you'll turn to Acts 1 (Luke as you will remember wrote both Luke and Acts as two parts to one story) you'll see the same elements present. When Jesus calls the disciples into ministry,

The heavens take Jesus up to God  
The Spirit comes upon people  
God's voice in Jesus calls them to go

Let's follow Luke's lead to find our ministry in the ministry of Jesus.

### III.

How do we find our ministry? We find it when the heavens open, when the Holy Spirit descends, and when God's voice comes.

#### The Heavens Open: God gives us vision

E.g. Standing under a tree at Montvale YMCA camp

-stood there and looked up to the stars

-I stood there in the dark waiting for God to speak and to show me something, for the "heavens to open up."

-This was the first time I had asked God to give me a vision for my life.

The Bible tells us that the heavens open at times when people seek vision. Ezekiel, for example, reports that,

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. (Ezek 1:1)

When the heavens open, Ezekiel sees the "wheel within a wheel, way up in the middle of the air."

When Jesus is baptized, God opens the heavens and gives him a vision for his life. In Acts chapter one, God opens the heavens and gives the disciples a vision for their lives.

Have you ever had a Montvale experience or a Chebar experience? Have you ever asked God to give you a vision for your life? If you haven't I suggest you do. When you do, you will find your vision in what Jesus is doing in the world. Here's the right kind of question you ought to ask Jesus: "What are you doing in the world, and how can my life link up with your ministry? Show me!"

#### The Holy Spirit Descends: God gives us power

The heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove upon Jesus. The Holy Spirit is both the giver of life and also the power for life. The Bible

understands the Spirit both as the one who passes over the waters to create and the power who fills the prophets.

When the Holy Spirit descends from heaven, God empowers Jesus for ministry. In the next chapter, chapter four of Luke's Gospel, we read that,

Jesus, *full of the Holy Spirit* . . . was led by the Spirit into the desert (4:1)

Jesus, filled with the *power of the Spirit*, returned to Galilee (4:14)

Jesus quotes Isaiah at his Nazareth sermon,  
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. (4:18)

The Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus to empower him for ministry, to lead him to the desert to be tempted by Satan, and to launch him into action in Galilee. When Jesus gathers the disciples in Acts, he tells them,

You will receive *power* when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. (Acts 1: 8)

How do we get the power to do what Jesus is doing? Let me give you a huge hint. Luke alone among all the Gospel writers tells us that Jesus is praying when the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends. Prayer is power. We gain the power of God through prayer. Jesus prays and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove; the disciples pray and the Holy Spirit descends upon them in tongues of fire (Acts 2). If you want power in your life, get on your knees and pray.

#### A Voice Comes: God calls us witness

Luke reports that when the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends, a voice comes from heaven saying,

You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.

The voice quotes both Psalm 2:7 and also Isaiah 42:1. Psalm 2 is a coronation psalm for the Davidic king, affirming the identity of Jesus as the unique Son of God. Isaiah 42 is the beginning of the so-called Servant Songs, affirming the calling of Jesus to serve in the world.

The voice both *identifies* Jesus and *calls* him into ministry. It says, “You are my *son*, and you are my *servant*.” As we follow Jesus through the Gospel of Luke we see how Jesus serves as the Son of God. At his baptism God calls Jesus; Jesus hears who he is and what he is to do. At the beginning of the Book of Acts, Jesus calls his disciples,

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria,  
and even to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

The disciples hear who they are and what they are to do.

Vocation is a fancy word meaning calling. We speak of our vocation as our job. For example, when we fill out our tax forms there is line asking for vocation. On this line we write our job, “doctor, lawyer, pastor.” But there is far more to vocation than a job. The word vocation literally means “calling.” In the past hundred years or so we have secularized calling to mean our job. In a sense this is good, because God calls us into the world *to work*; but in another sense this is bad because we forget that it is *God who calls* us to work.

Your calling is very simple; it is to witness to Jesus. God doesn’t really care whether you are a nurse, an astronaut, or a stay-at-home Mom. You are to witness to Jesus.

Jesus’ vocation is to witness to God the Father. The disciples’ vocation is to witness to Jesus the Son of God. Our vocation is to witness to Jesus in the world. How we do it, our job or lack of it, doesn’t really matter.

Jesus’ baptism launches him into ministry.

The heavens open

The Holy Spirit descends

God’s voice comes

Our baptism launches us into ministry as well. Let’s get going!

