

A Critical Analysis of Matthew 3:13-17

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ABSTRACT

Baptism is an important doctrine in Christianity. It is held in high esteem by all Christian denominations. Baptism doctrine is a debated topic among Christian scholars throughout history. Although there are several biblical text that talks about baptism; the analyzed periscope of this article is Matthew 3:13-17. The methodology of the research is exegetical in nature. This paper discusses the biblical text in view of its keen attention to the concept of baptism with the aim of deriving its relevance for contemporary Christians. Here, Jesus Christ is the focal point of the narration. The humble act of Jesus in submission to John's baptism permeates this discourse; this is exemplary to contemporary Christians. Also, Christian ministry should be characterized with a vibrant proclamation of Jesus as Lord. Regardless of the proclaimer age and status Jesus Christ remain the owner and head of the Church. John the Baptist understood and therefore did not in any form usurp the place of Christ; rather, he consistently made this known to the people.

Keywords: Baptism, Jesus Christ, John, New Testament.

INTRODUCTION

Matthew's Gospel is the first according to the New Testament Canon arrangement. Although there are several arguments (Bruce, 1977; Goodacre, 2001; Stein, 2001; Mcnicol, 2007), Mathew's account demonstrates Christ as the King and Messiah of Israel (Hultgren, 2000). Matthew is often referred to as the 'pastoral gospel' (Luz, 2007; Schmutzer, 2008). Matthew was one of the most cited, exegeted, and preached books of the early church; ranking it as the most prominent book during early centuries (Everett, 2018). Matthew saw that much of what Jesus had taught the disciples was applicable to the Church of his own day (Turner, 2008). Matthew is the only Gospel that used the word 'church' - ἐκκλησία (Matt 16:18, 18:17).

Modern development in New Testament scholarship have experienced a great resurgence of interest in recent years as seen by the increased number of modern works; articles, books, theses and commentaries dedicated this Gospel (Porter, and Dyre, 2016). Matthew's persistent recognition since the early centuries is because of its vivid narrative stories and its practical application to the life of New Testament believer through several themes, this include the concept of baptism.

Mathew began with the account of Jesus' birth and transited to His baptism by John the Baptist

at Jordan. The concept of baptism is not a strange phenomenon in Ancient Near East. The existing forms of baptism are clearly different from the b baptism of John the Baptist. This distinguished John preaching and ministry from others. Although strange, many people (both Jews and Gentiles) responded to the call. This is the same scene where Jesus Christ was found at the beginning of his earthly ministry. On this note, this research addresses the concept of baptism as seen in Matthew 3:13-17 and its relevance for Christians in the contemporary time.

BACKGROUND OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

The authorships of several books of the Bible have been widely disputed. As a result, the Synoptic, especially the book of Matthew has received keen attention. The writer of Matthew's gospel did not identify himself by name just like other biblical books (Strauss, 2007); this has given room for several assertions (Orchard and Riley, 1987). However, the early church believed that Mathew was written by one of the disciples, the tax collector, Levi; who is also called Matthew (Matt 9:9-13). Though probable, more recent studies have argued that the writing shows whoever wrote it was more interested in things that worry the church around in the first century, not during the life time of Jesus (Berkhof, 2004).

Matthew reflects a Jewish worldview closer to that of the rabbis than probably any other writer in the New Testament (Davies and Allison, 2004). Matthew emphasized those features of his tradition that best addressed the pastoral situation of his readers. Matthew proceeds A.D. 70 (Gundry, 1982), many suggest a date after 70, perhaps as late as the mid- to late 80s (Davies and Allison 1988). A later date need not imply that Matthew is inaccurate; as noted above, he depends on earlier sources (Kolawole, 2020).

Matthew's keen attention to Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament scriptures, through characterization of Jesus as Israel's major historical figures, and intentional depiction of the redemption bought by Jesus, which is consonant with the redemption Yahweh wrought in the past, suggests that the audience of this gospel account was predominately Jewish (Turner, 2008). Matthew gives a special emphasis, a different application, and occasionally a new content.

Matthew like all of the Evangelists, set before all, Jesus Christ who came to die to atone for sin and save and deliver all mankind (Nickle, 1993). Matthew was written as an apology; a defense of the Christian; it further establish the foundational doctrines of the Church (Guthrie, 1990).

THE SETTING OF MATT 3:13-17

Matthew 3:13-17 is within the overall context of Matthew 1:1-4:11, which serves as an introduction for the book. The first subsection of the introduction, 1:1-2:23, is Jesus' passive recapitulation of Israel's history; the second section, 3:1-4:11 is an active recapitulation of Israel's history. Matthew's intentional placement of certain periscopes around the baptism narrative colors it in terms of his running theme of exile and exodus (Cerone, 2011). The geographical movement of Jesus in his infancy signals a reenactment of the nation's journey at the time of the exodus event, and as Baxter writes, Matthew's readers...are left anticipating a new exodus, i.e., they are left anticipating the rise of a new deliverer to lead Israel out of exile. John's voice crying out in the wilderness announcing the coming of the Lord, who is portrayed as Isaiah's Suffering Servant, is reminiscent of Israel's return from captivity.

All these accumulates as evidence that Jesus' baptism should be seen as his identification with the nation of Israel by passing through the Red

Sea and by beginning his quest to succeed where Israel had previously failed to keep covenant. Support for the reoccurrence of these themes in the surrounding passages along with Jesus' typological relationship to Israel, Moses, and David will be explored in the following section.

The opening scenes of Matthew create certain moods and expectations, establishing thematic concerns, and foreshadowing the course of subsequent events. The unifying factor to the overall sequence of event is the explicit presence of the central character John and Jesus in virtually every episode. An analysis of the sequence and function of Matthew's major narrative blocks enables the reader to discern an overall progression of events according to a consciously constructed plot. Matthew 3:1-17, like both 1:2-17 and 1:18-2:23, naturally divides itself into three sections. There is first of all a paragraph introducing John the Baptist (3:1-6). This is followed by 3:7-12, which reports John's words to and encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees. Finally, 3:13-17 tells of the baptism of Jesus.

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

¹³ Τότε παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην, τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.

¹⁴ Ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης διεκώλυεν αὐτόν, λέγων, Ἐγὼ χρεῖαν ἔχω ὑπὸ σοῦ βαπτισθῆναι, καὶ σὺ ἔρχῃ πρὸς με;

John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵ Ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν, Ἄφες ἄρτι· οὕτως γὰρ πρέπει ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην. Τότε ἀφίησιν αὐτόν.

But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." Then he consented.

¹⁶ Καὶ βαπτισθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνέβη εὐθὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος· καὶ ἰδοὺ, ἀνεώχθησαν αὐτῷ οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδεν τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ καταβαῖνον ὡσεὶ περιστεράν καὶ ἐρχόμενον ἐπ' αὐτόν.

And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him;

¹⁷ Καὶ ἰδοὺ, φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, λέγουσα, Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα.

And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

The use of τότε – ‘then’ and the historical present ‘*παραγίνεται*’ (unlike *καὶ ἐγένετο* in other synoptics) connects the appearance of Jesus to the mission of John. Also, the aorist *βαπτισθῆναι* implies a definite and completed action. The construction of this verse indicates ‘purpose’ (Morris, 1992). On this note, Jesus becomes an active character; He then comes from Galilee (2:22) to John for the express purpose of being baptized by him. This text is parallel to 3:1. It announces what Jesus is doing at the Jordan. Although, it does not follow a set scheme, its component parts; heavenly voice and vision may be traditional, but the whole does not belong to any one tradition (Davies and Allison, 2004).

Given the embarrassment of some early Christian traditions that Jesus accepted baptism from one of lower status than himself, it is now inconceivable that early Christians made up the story of John baptizing Jesus (Sanders 1993). In traditional Mediterranean culture where society stressed honor and shame; Jesus relinquishes his rightful honor to embrace others’ shame. After Jesus’ public act of humility, God publicly honors Jesus as his own son (3:16–17).

More so, the pronouns ἐγώ, “I,” and καὶ σύ, “and you,” are emphatic and underline John’s protest. The prepositional phrase ὑπὸ σοῦ, “by you,” receives emphasis by being placed before the infinitive (contrast *βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ* in v 13) (Hagner, 2002). πρὸς με parallels the ‘to John’ of the previous verse. καί here means ‘and yet’. Matthew has stressed Jesus’ kingly-messianic dignity, as well as his unique transcendent status. Yet, the first independent act of Jesus is submission to John’s baptism. Even from John’s, Jesus’ submission to his baptism seemed incongruent with their respective roles (Keener, 1997). Why would the “mightier one” who will administer a “Spirit-fire baptism” submit to his preparatory baptism? John even made several unsuccessful attempts to deter him – *διεκώλυεν*; this in turn suggests that John recognized that Jesus had come to bestow the spirit in fuller measure than even he as a prophet had received, and he desired insisting on his own need for the greater messianic baptism (3:11).

Ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης διεκώλυεν αὐτόν, λέγων – “he tried to hold him back” is seemingly redactional; a developed Christology inconsistent with the doubt exhibited by John in Matthew 11:2–6; Luke 7:18–23. John the Baptist, like later Christian officials, may well have interviewed candidates for baptism. If John is not worthy to carry the Messiah’s sandals, how can he baptize him? If John’s baptism only foreshadows an eschatological baptism, how can the dispenser of the latter submit himself to the authority of the former? How can the Messiah submit to a baptism which involves the confession of sins? Presumably questions such as these were in Matthew’s mind; thus, he gives the fruit of his ponderings. This is a further illustration of John’s humility and of his recognition of his own sinfulness (Morris, 1992).

The Fourth Evangelist explained that the Baptist did not know Jesus until he saw the Spirit descend on him like a dove (John 1:33), which may mean that he did not know Jesus or that he did not know him to be the Messiah. But Matthew does not address himself to this question. He simply says John recognized his inferior place without going into the question of how he came to know it or for that matter how he understood it. Since John does not speak of Jesus as Messiah, he may have meant only that he knew that Jesus had greater authority than he or was morally superior to him. Although this present verse perfectly fits verse 11 which stresses John’s comparative unworthiness; the study argues that Matthew does not, however, like the Fourth Gospel, purposely belittle John, but holds Him in the highest esteem (Mt 11:7–15).

In addition, Δικαιοσύνη - righteousness is a derivate of δικαιοσ, which means “right” or “just”. Although, mentioned in other portion of Matthew (5: 3-27, 10); the first place where the word appears is this verse. Although, the parallels of this verse in other gospels did not record Jesus’ statement where δικαιοσύνη sets in unlike Matthew (Mk 1:9-11, Lk 3:21-22 and Jhn. 1:31-34) makes the redactional argument probable; however, the research argues that this does not discredit Matthew’s account but provides the reader with additional explanation of what John meant in the other gospel accounts (Mk 1:7-8, Lk 3:16-17, Jhn 1:24-26).

Matthew’s presentation of righteousness lurks in the background of this gospel. Δικαιοσύνη as a word is often seen in Jesus speech in contrary to the understanding of the Jewish leaders (Matt 6:1, 33); it occurs in Matthew than in any other

New Testament writings in other words, it is not a strange terminology in the Jewish tradition. Hagner (2000) refers to δικαιοσύνη as the ‘key-concept’ in the gospel of Matthew.

The Old Testament exhibits the terminologies of δικαιοσύνη as קִדְּוָה (*Tsedeq*), תְּשׁוּבָה (*Tsedaqah*) and מִשְׁפָּט (*Misphat*) referring to the holy standard of providence towards humanity and the universe. Although Matthew has the habit of placing adverbs after imperatives, ἄφες ἄρτι is an idiom of permission not found in the LXX. οὕτως does not affirm that in the baptism alone Jesus fulfils all righteousness; rather, the baptism is an instance of Jesus’ fulfilling righteousness. Matthew’s church may well have seen itself included in the ἡμῖν - “for us”; seeing itself too as having been baptized and called to “all righteousness” (Kolawole, 2019a).

ἡμῖν focuses on John and Jesus, who in this event are having a unique function to fulfill, defined in the words πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην. ἡμῖν can be interpreted as a plural of majesty or as embracing the Jewish people or as inviting Christians to join with Jesus in fulfilling all righteousness. This stance is somewhat congruent with the fact that even John participates in initiating the age of fulfillment by yielding to the authoritative request of Jesus.

δικαιοσύνη is a direct object of πληρῶω. This gives the context to the affirmation in verse 17 – βασιλεία. The response of John - τότε ἀφίησιν αὐτόν is noteworthy; the usage of τότε in the text controls the proximity of Matthew to other parallel accounts.

Since Matthew has prefixed to the account of the baptism the narrative of the supernatural birth and the words of the Baptist, “He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire,” the question is raised in a new form, How could one who was begotten of the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:20) receive the Holy Spirit at baptism? And how could one who was Himself to baptize with the Holy Spirit come to John for baptism? If baptism is the center of this periscope; then, how does baptism fulfill righteousness?

Δικαιοσύνη-πληρῶσαι has to do the will of God as demonstrated in Christ’ obedience, qualitative rather than quantitative; not in terms of conformity to legal or moral requirements, but submission as an important step in the realization of God’s saving presence (Hagner, 1992). Thus, Jesus dedicates himself to the task of making sinners righteous, an appropriate

beginning of his public ministry. There may also be something of the Israel typology here. Jesus himself had no need of repentance, but Israel certainly did; in submitting to John’s baptism Jesus is pointing to the people’s need (Bauckham, 2006). John the Baptist is significant in the fulfillment of what is legitimate (Connors, 2010). The brief dialogue-exchange between Jesus and John the Baptist sets the stage for God’s positive commission of Jesus to his messianic mission; τότε ἀφίησιν αὐτόν marks the transition from 3:14–15 to 16–17.

In verse 16, the specific mention of the name Ἰησοῦς connotes emphasis; ascertaining the fact that not only did John consented to Baptize Jesus - Τότε ἀφίησιν Ἰωάννης, they actually carried out the baptismal exercise. Matthew does not describe the baptism, but takes up his narrative from the time when it was completed. After Jesus submits humbly to God’s plan, God publicly acknowledges Jesus’ own rank firstly through the opened heavens - ἀνεῴχθησαν αὐτῷ οἱ οὐρανοί; reflecting biblical language for God’s revelation or future deliverance (Is 64:1; Ezek 1:1) and secondly, through the spirit descending like a dove and lighting on him - εἶδεν τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ καταβαῖνον ὡσεὶ περιστερὰν καὶ ἐρχόμενον ἐπ’ αὐτόν.

ἰδοῦ makes the event more vivid and public because the occurrence in the sky is not qualified by εἶδεν - ‘he saw’ but as καὶ ἰδοῦ – “and behold, the heavens opened...” a straightforward fact. The alteration in Mark 1:11 εἰ ο υἱος μου ο αγαπητος εν - ‘You are my Son’ το Ουτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ αγαπητός - ‘This is my Son’ serves the same purpose; the voice is not speaking to Jesus alone. Despite the singular form of the verb εἶδεν, at least two people, Jesus and John, are privy to the events recounted. The question of whether only two witnesses are involved is probably moot; but, that there is no remark on the amazement or awe of others present is noteworthy. The latter seems unimportant to Matthew such that he leaves it puzzling.

Contrary to Mark, it is logical to think Matthew add τοῦ θεοῦ in order to qualify Mark’s oddly unqualified and un-Semitic τὸ πνεῦμα. Matthew reverses the order of ‘like a dove’ and ‘descending’ (Lk 3:22; Jn 1:32), probably to allow the addition of another participle, ἐρχόμενον. Matthew differs from Mark in putting οὐρανοί - ‘heavens’ in the nominative and by changing the verb to the passive of

ἀνοίγω (Maloney, 1981). Both modifications probably signal assimilation to Ezek 1:1: ἠνοίχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδον ὀράσεις θεοῦ. That Luke has ἀνεφώθη τὸν οὐρανόν (3:21) can scarcely be taken as the firm sign of a common source, particularly in view of Old Testament usage (Gen 7:11; Isa 24:18). The expression ἀνεφώθησαν αὐτῷ οἱ οὐρανοί – ‘heaven was opened’ was common verbal affinities used to signal some form of divine disclosure or revelation (Isa 63:19; Acts 7:56; Rev 4:1).

The reception of divinely bestowed knowledge was often conceived of in terms of the heavenly world above drawing back its ‘curtain’ or ‘garment’ (Job 14:12; Ps 104:2) to allow a person in the earthly world below to see secrets. A distinction is to be drawn between this type of revelation and that in which heaven opens in order to allow the seer to journey into the upper regions, as in Rev 4. In the present pericope, the heavens open not only to signal the forthcoming of revelation but also to make it possible for the Spirit to descend. τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ - “the Spirit of God” who came down (Mark and John have “the Spirit,” and Luke “the Holy Spirit”).

Usually the Spirit is referred to as “the Holy Spirit,” “God’s Spirit” and “the Spirit of the Lord.” The dove has symbolic value; some nineteenth century rationalists argued that a thunderstorm broke when Jesus was being baptized and that a dove, frightened by lightning, fluttered around the Messiah’s head. The dove has also been sketched in line with the brooding spirit in Genesis 1:1-2, Exodus motifs (Ex 4:22; 14:29–30), the harbinger of the new world after the flood in Genesis 8:8-12 as well as the representation of the nation Israel (Larry, 1997). But while Jesus identifies with Israel in the context, this passage portrays the spirit, not Jesus, as a dove. Therefore, Jesus is the inaugurator of the kingdom era that John has been proclaiming.

The Spirit’s anointing - καὶ ἐρχόμενον ἐπ’ αὐτόν is not to be construed as a form of adoption wherein Jesus only now becomes God’s Son; the role of the Holy Spirit in his birth (1:18–25), and the earlier recognition of his Sonship (2:15) rule out such an interpretation. καὶ ἐρχόμενον ἐπ’ αὐτόν marks a turning point in salvation-history, for only after the Spirit comes does the Messiah’s ministry begin (Acts 10:38); and it sets Jesus in line with certain national leaders of the Old Testament (Gideon - Judg 6:34, Samson - Judg 15:14, Saul - 1 Sam 10:6) upon whom the Spirit came and even prophets. The participle

καταβαῖνον accompanied by ἐρχόμενον in Matthew alone does not to make Jesus something he was not before.

The coming of God’s Spirit is accompanied by the revelatory announcement of God who speaks explicitly both to approve and to commission his Son to his messianic task. καὶ ἰδοὺ - “and behold,” parallels the same words in verse 16. λέγουσα (which suggests a personified voice – “the voice itself speaks” replaces Mark’s ἐγένετο. It is obvious by the use of the third person (Οὗτός ἐστιν - this is), rather than the second person (εἰ ο υιοσ μου ο αγαπητος εν - you are, Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22), that the announcement was not intended as a direct address to Jesus. Hence, God’s words function either as a “narrative aside directed to the reader,” or in view of the subsequent temptation scene (4:3, 6).

Whatever may be the significance of Matthew’s form of God’s announcement, the divine assessment certainly provides significant insights into the nature and role of Jesus’ Sonship by linking it to key Old Testament texts. The fact of the voice is important, but what the voice says is most important, for this is what officially declares Jesus’ identity to Matthew’s biblically informed implied audience (Keener, 1997). οὗτός ἐστιν, a formula of public identification appears more often in Matthew than in either Mark or Luke. While disputed by some, it appears that the three significant terms of 3:17 (i.e., son, beloved, pleased) have been influenced primarily by the language of Ps 2 and Isa 42 (and possibly, Gen 22:1). This way Matthew gives content to Jesus’ Sonship and messianic mission by linking it to the themes of Davidic royalty and suffering service.

ὁ ἀγαπητός is an adjective attached to ὁ υἱός μου; emphasizing the sense of worthiness and love to the ὁ υἱός. ὁ υἱός μου does not reveal new truth to the readers; rather confirms and emphasizes with the voice of God himself the fact already expressed in 1:18–25 and 2:15 (Wright, 1992). Because of several occurrences (3:17; 11:27; 16:16; 17:5; 26:63; 28:19), the study posits that Matthew implore ὁ υἱός μου as a key Christological title.

ὁ υἱός θεοῦ - “Son of God” had clear messianic significance in Judaism prior to the New Testament period is evident from Qumran (Hagner, 2002). ὁ ἀγαπητός seemingly modifies υἱός in the sense not merely of “beloved” but of “only beloved” (Gen 22:2, where Isaac is referred to as τὸν ἀγαπητόν). Hagner (1997)

posits that the Father's acclamation of the Son may suggest various principles to Matthew's readers; revealing how central Jesus is to the Father's heart and plan; the meek Jesus is obedient to the point of death, who willingly divests himself of his proper honor by identifying with man in baptism and death. εὐδόκησα does not apply to Jesus as the servant per se; rather does it connote God's choice, referring to Jesus as ὁ υἱός θεοῦ.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Jesus' responses and reactions to John's baptism is neither a mere coincidence nor an accident; it is a pure divine arrangement embedded with spiritual cursor relevant for contemporary Christians. John and Jesus are highly respected; this is because of their confirmed divine origin. Although John the Baptist is not the Messiah, his ministry played an important role in acknowledging and revealing the Messiah (Kolawole, 2019b). In view of this, Mathew 3:13-17 is not a scene of superiority and inferiority; rather, it is a scene of divinely orchestrated purpose.

John the Baptist gave stunning recognition to Jesus Christ right there at the river because of Jesus' identity. This intriguing recognition has been interpreted severally to mean John relegating himself. It is however vivid that John the Baptist simply spoke out of His knowledge of Jesus' person. This was later confirmed by the voice from heaven and the descending of God's Spirit. Of a truth, John and Jesus' status quo do not match. Although both of them proceeded from same divine origin, they have distinct identities. John is a man called by God, but Jesus Christ is God. Thus, Jesus' baptism was His own symbolic act of identification with the new, of participation in the kingdom of God.

For thirty years Jesus had lived in Nazareth; awaiting the time when the Father would direct Him to begin His public ministry. His act of being baptized by John was a complete and full identification with the kingdom that John was announcing. Baptism symbolized the turning from the old to the new. Jesus' baptism means something different than the baptism John administered to countless others. For others, baptism was connected with confession of sin. But in Jesus' case, baptism is a rite of entry into his messianic calling. Jesus' alignment gives an authentication to its administration, setting an example for the Church. Therefore, baptism is an outward spiritual exercise done for the identification of a Christian with the body of

Christ. This exercise should be accompanied by a great inward turn of heart totally to the camp of Christ.

Jesus' use of the word "righteousness" is significant; righteousness in the text denotes right relationship. Thus, δικαιοσύνη connotes a concrete act of doing the will of God, which is right and legitimate; which should characterize the Christian community. In a world that regards moral boundaries as impractical, where nothing higher than selfish passion guides many lives around, Jesus reminds of a higher mission and purpose for man. Jesus' humility is explicit. Although Christ does not in any way match with John, He still submitted himself. Even with the fact that the cultural environment views it as strange; yet, Jesus disregarded existing traditions to reveal what is right and true.

CONCLUSION

The setting of Jesus' baptism within the Baptist's ministry is problematic because of the observation that Jesus too needed repentance. Matthew protests against this position in verse 14 - 15. The real point of the text is not the baptism of Jesus itself but the threads of continuity and discontinuity between John and Jesus. Only through contact with the forerunner can Jesus be launched into His own ministry. This formal beginning of Jesus' ministry is filled with theological significance. The story of Jesus' baptism has informed the church in early periods and contemporary time. Jesus' baptism was closely linked with entry into his messianic ministry; likewise, Christian baptism is linked with a calling to serve or minister in Christ's name. Whether or not Christians see the heavens open physically and the Spirit of God descending today; the Spirit still equips to carry out particular calling within the larger mission of God's people in the world. In baptism, however, every believer enters into Christ's ministry.

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