

# Baptism of Our Lord

**THERE'S POWER. AND THEN THERE'S POWER!**

**Mark 1:4-11**

**Baptism of Our Lord**

**Analysis by Marcus Felde**

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Here's Power**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) :** *People Messing Up*

Mark doesn't give us the details, but we don't really need them. Maybe it was easier in his society, but it's still pretty easy in ours to win an audience by telling people what's wrong with them. John must have been categorical in his denunciations and

his rhetoric must have been persuasive, because “everyone in Judea” and “everybody from Jerusalem” went out to hear and be baptized. Even if we take this with a grain of salt-“all,” “every,” “everyone” and such words being popular with the evangelists-it is interesting that nowhere in Mark is it said that Jesus got such a response. (When such words are used around him, it may include at best all of a certain crowd, for example.) People wanted to confess. They needed to confess.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *At Least, Contrite*

I’m sure they didn’t feel “holy and righteous” by comparison with John the Baptist. Or in comparison with the Law. So hard to keep. They went to the Jordan not to receive new life (see Step 5 below) but to comply with the law that was their master. Baptism was an admission of failure.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *Sinners Go Under*

In the Duna language of Papua New Guinea, there was no word for “drown.” You said, “He went into the water”; that meant the person died. People did not swim; at most, they pushed a raft across a river.

I wonder if the people of Judah and Jerusalem didn’t feel the same way-that to “go into the water” and get baptized was in fact to come at least so close to dying that they might even be said to have died.

But then you came out, dripped dry on the bank, and tried again.

Not a powerful baptism after all, this washing of John. Certainly not enough to make you right with God.

**PROGNOSIS:** *There’s Power*

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *One Coming with More Power*

My favorite lesser-to-greater comparison is Paul Hogan in Crocodile Dundee, casually saying to a mugger who threatened him with a switchblade: "That's not a knife. [Then he draws his own, huge knife.] This *here's* a knife!"

John the Baptist's baptism, from the vantage point of people who have experienced the baptism of Jesus, couldn't compare to being baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No contest.

For the Holy Spirit which gives *new* life to the repentant actually works in that person to make them what they knew they were not, and feared they never would be: holy.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *Beloved, Worthy*  
By faith in Jesus, *anybody* in Judea, Jerusalem, Jericho, or Jiwaka is given that power, the power of God in them, the Holy and holiying Spirit. They will be filled with a water which, unlike the Jordan itself, will never dry up. They are, by faith, counted-not merely worthy to untie the thong of Jesus' sandals, but to sit right up to the table with him.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Blessed Up People*  
We go out from the baptism of Jesus not to dither on the bank or slink home with to-do lists (or to-not-do lists); but to wander the world with the good news about a powerful washing that gives life. In Jesus, we too are the Sons, the Daughters, the Beloved. With us God is, well, pleased!