

# The Baptism of Our Lord

## THE MAIN EVENT

### The Baptism of Our Lord

Mark 1:4-11

### Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And 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. 6Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He 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. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10And 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. 11And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

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## DIAGNOSIS: This Is Not It

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *The Main Act?*

The people had to have been eager for something new, to go out into the wilderness (v. 4) to see a strangely clad, locus-eating prophet. They must have known something was not right with life, to seek out this man who was calling people to fess up to their

sorry condition through a baptism of repentance (v. 4). And the crowd included more than country folk, even those who lived close to the center of Jewish religious life came out to see him (v. 5). They came hungry for someone to affect a change in their lives. Could John the Baptizer be this one?

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *No, the Opening Act*

Imagine the people's disappointment then, when they discovered—straight from John himself—that he, in fact, would not be the one to change their lives. “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” (v. 7), John says. John's not the main event, he's just opening for the Messiah. And here they were, hanging their hopes on him. But the water they'd been washed in, and the one who had washed them, wasn't powerful enough to save them.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *Missing the Show*

Placing your trust in someone or something less than God's Messiah is a losing investment. John may have been able to deliver immediate forgiveness—clearly not a bad thing; but self-admittedly, John declares he isn't even worthy of untying the Messiah's sandal, so the ultimate cause of righting things between humans and God was clearly beyond John's reach. In John's hands, the people may have been washed, but they couldn't stay clean. And, if all you have come for is the opening act, then you have missed the main event. And to miss the main event is to miss the real show.

**PROGNOSIS: This Is It**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *Opening Day, Main Event*

But stick around, and you will find that there is One worth waiting for: Jesus came and was baptized, the gospel writer

tells us (v. 9). Whether John knew that Jesus was the One whose sandals he would be unworthy to touch, is debatable (we hear no more from John in Mark's gospel). In fact, like an opening act, John walks on and off the stage rapidly; leaving the crowd (and us) to anticipate what comes after him. And when Jesus arrives on the scene he provides more than special effects: Yes, the heavens are torn apart (v. 10); yes, a voice from heaven declares him the Beloved, the One with whom God is pleased (v. 11). But it's what comes after this opening (this public appearance) that tells us why Jesus is the main event. Not only does he subject himself to John's ministry of baptism (finite as it is), but he identifies himself with the masses. And this won't be the last time. In fact, every time he touches someone who needs healing, eats with social pariah, speaks wisely and humbly about God, he shows just how blessed the world is to have him as God's Messiah. But these acts reach a crescendo that is most unexpected: Jesus, the beloved Son, pleasing to God, identifies himself with the masses by being tried and convicted by the self-proclaimed religious authorities as less than godly. He gets into the true wash of human life by suffering the death that God's wayward children deserve (those who can get themselves washed, but never quite clean with God). And it's this unbelievable humility that puts not only him, but all whom Jesus loves, right with God. Heavenly consolation comes through him (not just the earthly stuff John could offer).

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *An Act of Opening***

And this consolation that Jesus, the beloved Son, brings is no temporary fix. With Jesus, comes the power of an advocate who will stay with God's people for all their days on earth. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit (v. 8) who cleanses believers daily, and turns them back toward the One who is pleasing to God: Jesus. Baptized with the Holy Spirit, believers are

empowered to turn to the One who can meet their heavenly needs and empower them for a faithful life on earth.

Once we've witnessed the main event, in Jesus crucified and raised, we will not be satisfied with any lesser promiser or promise.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Rave Reviews**

In fact, believers trust the power of Christ and his Holy Spirit so much, that we even expect our earthly acts of forgiveness have a heavenly impact for those on earth. That is, as we live in and for the world (as Jesus did when he walked into the Jordan to be baptized), we bring to the world the promise of God's forgiveness and life (baptism with the Holy Spirit). We've seen the main event—we are recipients of God's lasting mercy through Jesus, the More Powerful One. Now only do we have rave reviews about God's Messiah to share, we have his Spirit to point (as John did) to Jesus, the main event.