

Our Promised Messiah begins his work **Luke 3:15-17, 21, 22**

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might be the Christ. ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But someone mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." ²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. While he was praying, heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you."

In less than two weeks Donald Trump will be inaugurated into office as the next president of our nation. President Trump has a tough job ahead of him. He needs our prayers. One can say he's done it before. But these four years will probably be different from his first four years. We've already witnessed attempts made on his life. We pray for the Lord's protecting hand. We ask God to bless his administration for the benefit of society. We pray that God's gospel may have free reign in the hearts of all people. It is difficult work for our president to govern our nation. Our Savior had a difficult job ahead of him. He needed to restore severed relations between our holy Creator and us sinful creatures. He needed to bring together the God who by his law hates sin as well as sinners and those sinners who by nature hate God. At his baptism, Jesus would begin this difficult work. The Gospel writer Luke takes us to the day Jesus began his work to save us. He started his work backed by John's faithful witness of him. He began with God's approval.

As our nation prepares for a new president, a lot of preparation needs to be done. After this week, safety will be a high priority. But there are also celebration galas that are being planned. So much of that preparation work is being done as we speak. Much preparation work needed to be done to prepare God's people to meet their Savior. God knew his people were not ready for his Son. They needed to be reminded how much they needed him to save them. So God sent John into the desert. From a deserted place John called to people whose hearts were desolate with sin. Luke tells us how the people were waiting and wondering if John might be the Christ. John didn't want them to be mistaken. Though he too was sent by God to do important work, he was not the One they should look to for deliverance.

So John points them to the only One who could deliver them. John tells the people, *"I baptize you with water. But someone mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* John had an important job. His preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins was what the people needed to hear. They needed to take an honest look at how they had missed the mark of God's holy law. To find forgiveness for all their misses, they needed to look beyond John. And John helped them to do that. He did it with an important message for all to hear: He's coming! He's coming! One mightier than I. Compared to him, I'm the

lowliest servant, not even worthy to loosen the strap on his sandals. I baptize with water, which God called me to do and what you people desperately need. You need all your sins washed away. And the baptism I give you does just that. But look what the One mightier than I is going to do. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Isn't it amazing how God does his saving work? His Son is about to begin his ministry. But God doesn't order stretch limos or beef up security. He doesn't make sure that it's covered by all the major networks. No, he sends a single voice into the wilderness. "Repent," the voice says. Turn back from your life of sin. Look to the mightier One who has entered our world. For his first assignment he won't just battle the elements and starve for forty days. He'll face an onslaught of satanic temptations. He'll resist every one of them and maintain his innocence. But one day he will take on the guilt of every sin for every sinner. From a cross he'll suffer God's punishment for everyone. He is God's Lamb that will be sacrificed to take away a world of sin. Turn from your sin and look to him. He's mightier than any. You won't be disappointed.

John had important work to do. He had to prepare the people to meet their Savior. With his faithful witness he prepared the people for the Savior's important work. But our Lord had another important job that he wanted John to do. Not only was John to baptize the crowds of people that came to him. Jesus wanted baptism as well. Our Savior didn't need baptism the way we do. He had no sin that needed to be washed away. But John would finally consent. And when he did baptize our Lord, he'd witness how God approved of the work that Jesus was starting.

Luke tells us, "*When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.*" Luke doesn't go into much detail about the conversation Jesus and John had before John baptized him. From Matthew's Gospel we learn how John first felt about baptizing his Lord: *John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."* Then John consented (Matthew 3:14,15). The One who has no sin to confess, who needs no baptism, he comes to our side in baptism. He chooses to be one with us by being baptized. With his baptism, Jesus showed his willingness to substitute for sinners like us. He'd face rejection for us. He'd taste the bitterest of all deaths for us. And he showed his willingness to do all that when he came to John to be baptized in the Jordan.

Following Jesus' baptism, Luke describes what took place: *Heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with you."* The heavens tore open—a violent scene indeed. But then the Spirit of God comes down in the form of a dove—how gentle; how peaceful from such a violent occurrence in the heavens. Then a voice came. Not the voice of John preparing people to meet their Savior. This voice comes from heaven. It's the voice of God the Father. The Father announces his great love for his Son.

He proclaims how well pleased he is with the work his Son will do. What a precious moment! All three persons of the godhead are on hand for that special day. We see God's total backing for the Son's saving work. But who was there to witness this historic event? We know John was. Possibly a handful of John's disciples as well.

The scene is somewhat repeated toward the end of his earthly ministry. Our Lord will take with him three disciples up a mountain where Jesus will appear in glory. The Apostle Peter recalled that glorious day in one of his epistles: *For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well-pleased"* (2 Peter 1:17). Jesus would then come down that mountain to complete his saving work. His work seemed to come to an abrupt halt when his life ended. Following those few hours when his Father forsook him, he died on a cross. But the Father's love for his Son never ended. And his approval of his Son's saving work came through loud and clear in the silence of an empty tomb. Jesus' return to life was God's way of saying: job well done! Already at his baptism, God had voiced his approval of the important work that his Son began to save all mankind.

What a blessing to know that Jesus was willing to be baptized to be one with us. He took our place in life. He took our place in death. He won us forgiveness for every mistake we make in life. He won us God's love and approval. And he offers all that to us in holy Baptism. You were baptized in the name of our triune God. In Baptism you were joined with Christ; you were washed clean of sin and wrapped in Christ's righteousness. God's Spirit came and rested on you, creating saving faith in your heart. Now God's approval came to you. You were once his enemy; you are now my son; you are now my daughter; In you he is so well-pleased. What a precious day when we became God's dearly loved children and heirs of eternal life. Celebrate that day. Treasure your baptism. Return to it daily. And live your whole life as the beloved, baptized child of God that you are.

I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability preserve, protect and defend the constitution of the United States. In a little more than a week we will hear a man speak those words. And then the difficult job begins. We pray for our president that he may faithfully execute his office for the betterment of all Americans and for greater unity among all its citizens. With eternity at stake for every soul on earth, our Savior Jesus had quite a job ahead of him. It would be painful to suffer through every temptation, to suffer hell's punishment for all and finally die on a cross. Knowing what lie ahead of him, we praise Jesus for his willingness to do the work of saving us. John made his faithful witness and God gave his approval. Starting with baptism, Jesus begins the most important job known to man. He'd fix our problem of sin. He'd win us God's forgiveness. He'd finish the job from a cursed cross and an empty tomb. Someday, God willing, he will bring you and me safely home to heaven. There we will spend all eternity praising him for a job well-done.