

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 22 January 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“This Is My Beloved Son”

Matthew 3:13-17

Nearly forty years ago, on the Sunday evening of 16 October 1983, a very important event in my life took place. Only a month earlier, on 18 September, I had repented of my sin, and, in simple faith, had asked Jesus Christ to be my personal Lord and Saviour. In the four weeks since then, my life had changed radically. My attitude had completely changed. Instead of arguing with and defying my parents and teachers, I now had a genuine inner desire to listen to them, and obey them. Instead of being bored when the Bible was read, I was now fascinated with God’s Word. I remember telling everyone that Christ had come into my heart, and that I was now on my way to Heaven. But now, the time had come to declare my faith in Jesus publicly; and many of my friends and loved ones were present to see my baptism. I ascended to that mysterious dressing room up behind the choir loft (a room that I saw only a handful of times in my life), and put on a white robe. My dad stood with me at the doorway to the baptistry; and when Pastor Foss called my name, my dad gently led me to the baptismal pool. As I walked toward the pool, with my heart pounding, the organ was playing the hymn “Trust and Obey”; and it seemed that there was a sea of people out there watching me! Pastor Foss took hold of my hand; and I carefully stepped down the stairs into the water, and then stepped onto an upside-down bucket in the middle of the pool. (Since I was seven years old, my head and shoulders would barely have appeared above the surface of the water if I hadn’t stood on the bucket!) Pastor Foss asked me, “Stephen, have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins?” I said, “Yes.” He then asked me *how* I knew that I was saved; and I told him briefly. He then said, “Then, by the authority vested in me as a minister of the Gospel, I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” He then pinched my nose, let me down under the water, and pulled me back up, as he said, “Buried with Him in the likeness of His death; raised to walk in newness of life.”

That was an extremely special day to me. In fact, it was the second most important event in my life (my salvation being number one, and my marriage to Katie being number 3). Baptism is an extremely special event in the life of *every* child of God. How much more special, then, must the baptism of *the Lord Jesus Christ Himself* have been? And what did Jesus’ baptism accomplish? This morning, we will be answering these questions, as we learn about the event which marked the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. The title of this message is **“This Is My Beloved Son.”**

Read Matthew 3:13-17.

I. Jesus’ admittance into His sheepfold (3:14-15)

When Jesus travelled from Galilee to Bethabara to be baptised, he walked a distance of **60 miles**. Obviously, the Lord considered it very important that He be baptised, and that it be done in the right way. Yet, what was the *purpose* of Jesus’ being baptised? Why did *He*, the King of Israel, *need* to be baptised? (John Himself was baffled by that question. Probably with a look of bewilderment, John protested, **“I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me?”**) What was so important about being baptised, that Christ considered it necessary in order to **“fulfil all righteousness”**? That is a loaded question, with a multi-faceted answer. Let’s examine them one by one.

First, Jesus' baptism was necessary because through it, God **revealed Himself as the Triune God, and Jesus as the second Member of the Godhead. (Read verses 16 and 17 again.)** Throughout the Old Testament, God strongly emphasised the truth that He is *one God*. For example, Moses said to the people of Israel, "**Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one Lord.**" Yet, while God constantly declared that He is one, He also strongly hinted that He is *three Persons* in One. In the very first verse of the Bible, we are told that "**God created the heavens and the earth.**" God's very name (the Hebrew name *Elohiym*) indicates that He is "three in one." How so? Because the *-iym* ending of the word *Elohim* indicates at least *three* of something. In fact, the word *elohiym* can also mean "gods"! The way we know the difference between the true God and false "gods" is that whenever the *true* God is being spoken of, the verb that goes with it is always *singular*, instead of plural. Another way that God showed His triunity is that He often spoke to Himself in the plural. He would say things such as "**Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.**" In **Isaiah 48:16** God said, "**Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me.**" Think about that! If God be the one speaking, then how can "**the Lord God**" and His "**Spirit**" be sending Him? There is only one answer: God is three Persons in one! In this verse, God the Son is being sent into the world by God the Father and God the Holy Spirit!

In obedience to that divine mission, the Son of God came down into our world, and took on human flesh; and it was now time for the mystery of the Trinity to be revealed fully. As Jesus came up out of the water, **God the Father** spoke from heaven in a voice that the people could hear; **the Son of God** was there in human flesh; and the **Holy Spirit** descended upon Jesus in a visible form, like a dove. This was the Father's way of testifying that Jesus is His Son. It was also God's way of revealing Himself as the Trinity—the great Three in One!

Now, how else was Jesus' baptism needed in order to fulfil all righteousness? It was needed because through it, **Christ was manifested to Israel.**

Read John 1:29-31.

In what way was Jesus "manifested (made known) to Israel" when He was baptised? He was manifested in that **His future death, burial, and resurrection were being pictured.**

Folks, this is really important to understand! Baptism is not a ceremonial "washing away" of sin; it is a *picture of burial and resurrection*! Why is that so important? Because many religions that call themselves "Christian" teach that the water of baptism *washes away* your sins. Do you see the problem with this? If the purpose of baptism were to wash away sin, **then why did Jesus, the sinless Son of God, need to be baptised?** Jesus never sinned; yet, He insisted that He receive baptism from John, who was a sinner. Obviously, baptism *does not* wash away sin, or else Jesus would not have insisted that He receive baptism. Baptism is a *symbol* of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins; and by receiving baptism, Jesus was declaring that this is what He would soon do in order to pay for our sins.

Read Romans 6:1-5.

These verses make it crystal clear: **baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** Christ's death and burial are symbolized by being put completely under the water; and His resurrection is pictured by coming up out of the water.

(That is why true baptism is by *immersion under water*, and not by sprinkling a few drops on someone’s head.) By being baptized, a Christian declares his belief that Christ died, was buried, and rose again to pay for his sins. Secondly, he is also declaring that by trusting in Jesus Christ, he has become dead to sin, and alive to God. Thirdly, he is declaring that He will one day be *physically* resurrected from the dead, just as Christ was literally, physically resurrected from the dead. **Baptism is a picture of the Gospel—the message that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day.**

That is how John’s baptism manifested Christ to Israel! Though Jesus had not yet gone to the cross and risen again, baptism was a picture of what Jesus would be doing very soon to pay for our sins. To this day, every time a Christian is baptised, Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection are being pictured all over again. That is why Christ Himself requested to be baptized. He was personally showing, through the symbol of baptism, exactly how He was going to purchase our salvation. He would die for our sins; He would be buried; and on the third day, He would come forth from the grave, conquer death, and offer new life to all who place their trust in Him!

Now, there is another important reason why Jesus received baptism from John the Baptist. (Pay attention now: this is important!) Jesus’ baptism was necessary because through it, **Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was admitted into His own sheepfold!**

Read John 10:1-18.

The overall message of this parable is simple and clear: Jesus is the Good Shepherd to those who believe in Him. Yet, there is a part of this parable that is often skipped over, or hardly noticed. In **verse 3**, Jesus mentions a man whom he calls “*porter*.” Who is this “*porter*”? According to Jesus, this “*porter*” is the one who opened the door to the sheepfold, so that He, the Shepherd, could enter it! The word “porter” means “a gate warden; the keeper of a door; someone who opens the door, and gives admission.”

Now, we know that the Shepherd is the Lord Jesus Christ; but who is this porter? Why would Jesus even *need* a porter to open the door for *Him*? Is there actually someone who *admitted* the Lord Jesus Christ into His *own sheepfold*? Yes! This porter was a sinner, just like us; and he certainly wasn’t worthy of this incredible privilege. Nevertheless, God gave this man the task of “opening the door” to the sheepfold, so that His Son, the Good Shepherd, could enter it. Who is this porter? It’s John the Baptist! **John the Baptist** was that “*voice crying in the wilderness*” whom Isaiah foretold. John the Baptist was the messenger was sent to go before Christ, to prepare people’s hearts to receive Him. He is the **porter** who opened the door of the sheepfold to Jesus!

Now, if Christ be the Shepherd, and John be the porter, then what *is* the “**sheepfold**”? The “sheepfold” is what Jesus called His *ecclesia* (“assembly”). The sheepfold is *the church*.

Read Matthew 16:18.

There is a lot of confusion out there as to what this “sheepfold” represents. Many people see the “sheepfold” as a picture of the Family of God—the spiritual realm of all who are saved. Some even view it as representing Heaven. However, if you look closely at this passage, it is evident that none of these ideas fit the context. This “**sheepfold**” represents **Christ’s local, visible assembly—the local church.**

Now, at the time when Jesus made this statement, there was only one assembly. Jesus Himself was the Pastor of this church; and wherever He travelled, His flock of saved, baptised disciples travelled with Him. Today, there are *many* churches, with many pastors; but each biblical, New Testament church is Christ's "sheepfold" in its particular location.

Now, how do we know that this "sheepfold" represents the church? One big clue is the fact that Jesus said that He had "*other sheep*" that He must bring into the fold. (**Read John 10:16 again.**) Who are these "other sheep"? They are Gentile believers! For the first ten years after Christ went back to Heaven, only Jewish believers were members of the churches. But then, God made it clear that *Gentile* believers were now accepted as members of His churches. The Samaritan believers, the Roman believers in Caesaria, and the Greek believers in Ephesus, all received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which showed that God had accepted them; and when these Gentile believers were baptised, they became members of Christ's churches.

How else we can know that the "sheepfold" is the church, and not the Family of God? Because no one can illegitimately "sneak into" the Family of God; yet, according to Jesus, people *can* sneak into the church. God knows who His children are; and no one can get into His Family by any other way than faith in Jesus Christ. Yet, according to Jesus, it *is* possible for "wolves, thieves, and robbers" to sneak into the "sheepfold," and cause havoc. (**Read verses 1, 8, 12 again.**) Who are these "wolves, thieves, and robbers"? They are unsaved people who *claim* to be Christians, who sneak into churches, and who then teach false doctrines, stir up rebellion against the pastor, disharmony among church members, draw people after themselves, and scatter the flock. Obviously, in the *Family of God*, this cannot happen. You are either saved, or you aren't. No one can get into God's family illegitimately, nor be scattered *out* of it. However, in a *local church*, it is very possible for lost people to find their way into church membership, and cause serious harm.

Now, this brings me to another important point. Jesus said that He not only is the *Shepherd* of His sheep: but He is also "*the door*" to the sheepfold. (**Read verse 9.**) What does Jesus mean when He said that He is "*the door*"? Well, in Bible times, sheepfolds were made up of mounds of rocks, earth, briars, and brambles. The doorway was narrow; and the shepherd, to ensure the safety of his sheep, would sleep *in the doorway* at night, so that if any wild animal tried to get in through the door, he would instantly be aware of it, and would arise to defend the sheep. In this sense, *he was* "the door." To get into the sheepfold *legitimately*, one had to go through the shepherd, who guarded the doorway. Any man or beast that got into the sheepfold *illegitimately* had to get in there by climbing over the wall.

Are you seeing the picture? The only legitimate way to enter a New Testament church is to be *saved first* by coming to Jesus Christ, and placing your faith in Him. Now, baptism is needed to become a church member, *after* you are saved; but if you have been *baptised* without having been *saved by faith in Jesus*, then you have entered the sheepfold illegitimately. You are not one of Christ's sheep, but an intruder. Sadly, New Testament churches all over the world are often filled with illegitimate "members"—people who got wet (in baptism), and were placed on the membership role, but who were never truly saved. The under shepherd (the pastor) can do his best to make sure that every person's salvation testimony is genuine before he baptises that person; but even the pastor can be deceived. Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, is the *only* legitimate Door into His church!

Now, there is one last simple reason why Jesus' baptism was needed. It was needed **in order that Christ might be an example to every one of His followers.** If Jesus, our Lord and

Master, received baptism, who are we to *refuse* to receive it? Jesus said, “***The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.***” What our Master did, we must do. If you are saved, but have not received baptism, don’t put it off! Obey this ordinance of the Lord. “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey.”

II. The Spirit’s appearance at Jesus’ baptism (3:16)

(Read Matthew 3:16.) As John the Baptist was preaching to the crowds one day, he said, “***No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*** (made Him known).” No one has ever seen God in His true essence, because He is the King immortal and *invisible*. He is invisible to our mortal eyes. That is why the Son of God appeared in *human flesh*. He came to reveal God the Father. He is “God manifest in the flesh.” Those who saw Jesus saw “God,” in the sense that they saw God manifested in *human flesh*. However, no mortal has seen God in His true, divine essence.

So it is with the Holy Spirit. No one has seen the Holy Spirit in His true essence. He is *infinite*; His power is immeasurable; and He is invisible. Yet, on the occasion of Jesus’ baptism, the Spirit manifested in a form that could actually be seen by mortal eyes. He appeared in shape like a dove, and lit upon Jesus as He was being baptised.

The appearance of the Holy Spirit at Jesus’ baptism was a profoundly important event in Jesus’ ministry. The Bible says in **1 Timothy 3:16** that “***God was manifest in the flesh,***” and “***justified in the Spirit.***” Think about that! Jesus Christ is the “***God***” who was manifest in human flesh; and His Person and ministry were “***justified,***” or “declared righteous,” by the Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit’s appearance at Jesus’ baptism was *God’s stamp of authenticity* on His Son, and on His mission. The Spirit, by His visible presence, testified of Christ; and He still testifies to this day.

Read 1 John 5:5-8.

In this passage, John says that there is a set of *earthly* witnesses of Jesus, and a set of *heavenly* witnesses of Jesus. He mentions the earthly witnesses first, then the heavenly witnesses, and then the earthly witnesses one more time. (By the way, this literary technique reveals John’s Jewishness! Hebrew poetry usually begins with one thought; climbs to its grandest thought in the middle of the poem; and then “descends” back to the first thought at the end.)

Now, let’s look at these two sets of witnesses. First, there is the *earthly* witness of Jesus; and this witness is three-fold. The three earthly witnesses are the **Spirit, the water, and the blood**. (Read verses 6 and 8 again.)

What does John mean when he says that “***the Spirit, the water, and the blood***” testify of Jesus on earth? He’s talking about the events that happened at the *beginning* and at the *end* of Jesus’ earthly ministry. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, the *Spirit and the water* testified of Jesus, at His baptism. The Spirit testified of Jesus by appearing in a form like a dove, and lighting upon Him; and at the same time, the water (in which Jesus was being baptised) “testified” of Jesus by picturing His future death, burial, resurrection. The “***blood***” testified of Jesus at the *end* of His ministry, when He died on the cross, and shed His precious blood.

Now, who are the *heavenly* witnesses? Like the earthly witnesses, this band is three-fold. The three heavenly witnesses are the Members of the Godhead—the **Father**, the **Word** (John’s favourite name for the Son), and the **Holy Ghost**. (Read 1 John 5:7 again.)

Folks, this verse is incredibly powerful. This is the clearest declaration of the Trinity in the entire Bible. (Perhaps that is why Satan hates this verse so much, and has tried to erase it from our Bibles!) To this day, the three Members of the Trinity testify from Heaven through the written Word of God; and the Spirit is one of these three Witnesses. Yet, the Spirit is *also* one of the three *earthly* witnesses. He witnesses from Heaven, through the Word of God; but He also witnessed of Jesus on earth, when He appeared in the form of a dove at Jesus’ baptism.

Brethren, it is extremely important that we be grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity, and of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and of exactly what happened on the day when Jesus was baptised. You see, when the Apostle John wrote the book of **1 John** to the members of the church of Ephesus, he was writing to warn them about the false teachers called **Gnostics**, who were denying and undermining these doctrines. He had to warn them about these Gnostics, because their church was being subtly infiltrated by them. (The Gnostics were going secretly to the homes of new and ungrounded believers, and targeting them with their lies.)

Now, who were the Gnostics? They were a heretical group that claimed to be Christians; but they were nothing but pagans who had mixed their pagan ideas with Christian ideas. They denied the *true* Lord Jesus Christ. They denied that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. There were two kinds of them, though. Some of them were what are called “**Docetists**.” These people denied that Jesus was a real man, and said that He was only a phantom, who *appeared* like a man. (In their thinking, human flesh is evil, and needs to be gotten rid of through many cycles of reincarnation. To them, Jesus was a “higher master” who had “progressed” to the stage of being a disembodied spirit.) Now, the other kind of Gnostics were the **Adoptionists**. These people said that Jesus was merely a man, but that the “Christ spirit” came upon him at His baptism and “adopted” him, thus making him the “Son of God.” (The Jehovah’s Witnesses have this kind of view of Jesus.) To the Adoptionists, the Holy Spirit was merely an impersonal “Christ spirit,” who came upon the man Jesus, and gave him “secret wisdom.” This idea of a “Christ spirit” is making a *huge* comeback today in our society, and in many professing “Christian” churches. As Christians, we need to be prepared to defend the *true* teaching of who Jesus is, of who the Holy Spirit is, and of what happened at Jesus’ baptism. Jesus didn’t become indwelt by the “Christ spirit” at His baptism: He Himself *is* the Christ, and *is* the Son of God, and has *always* been one with the Father *and* the Holy Spirit. He didn’t become “adopted” as the Son when He was baptised; He has *always* been the Son of God!

Read 1 John 4:1-3.

This passage shoots down both forms of Gnosticism in one blow. **Docetism** denies that Jesus Christ is come in the *flesh*; but John (who *personally knew* Jesus, and saw Him, and touched Him) says that He *did* come in the flesh; and anyone who says otherwise is an antichrist. Now, on the other end of the spectrum, **Adoptionism** says that Jesus was merely a man who “took on” the “Christ spirit” when he was baptised; but *John* says that “**Jesus Christ**” is come in the flesh. You’ll notice that John didn’t merely say that “**Jesus**” came in the flesh; he said “**Jesus Christ**” came in the flesh. This means that He was *already* the Christ before He took on human flesh! By the way, many modern Bible versions leave out the words “**Christ**” and “*is come in the flesh*.” That’s serious, folks! Every word in that phrase is extremely important. John says that we must confess that “**Jesus Christ is come in the flesh**.” It isn’t

enough merely to confess the name of “Jesus,” because there are *many* false “Jesuses” that people have invented to suit their own fancy. We *must* believe on the Jesus who is the *Christ* (the Anointed One) from eternity past, and who took on human flesh, and died for our sins on the cross, and rose again! The Holy Spirit testified of this Jesus at His baptism; and He still testifies of Him from Heaven, through the Word of God.

III. The Father’s approval of Jesus (3:17)

(Read Matthew 3:17 again.) As we have seen, there are three heavenly witnesses—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. On the day of Jesus’ baptism, all three Members of the Godhead testified. Of course, Jesus testified of Himself, by accepting John’s baptism; but He was not alone in His testimony. As Jesus Himself later said, ***“It is written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.”*** On the day of Jesus’ baptism, the Father *verbally* testified of His Son, directly from heaven. This wasn’t the last time the Father verbally testified from heaven, either. Near the end of Jesus’ ministry, the Father spoke from heaven again. As Jesus was praying to His Father one day, He said, ***“Father, glorify thy name”***; and the Father responded in a thundering voice, ***“I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.”*** The Father also testified from heaven to Peter, James, and John, when they were on a mountain in northern Israel. He said, ***“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”***

By the way, the words that the Father spoke were not new. God the Father was citing from two Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah. First, He was citing **Psalm 2:7**. In **Psalm 2:7**, the Son of God is the real speaker, through the pen of King David; and He says, ***“I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.”*** What does this mean? It means that on the day of Jesus’ resurrection, the Father declared Him to be ***“the Son of God with power.”*** Jesus didn’t *become* the Son of God on the day of His resurrection, because He had *always* been “the Son of God,” from eternity past: **but**, He was ***“declared”*** to be the Son of God, ***“with power.”*** By His resurrection, Jesus was *proven* to be the Son of God beyond all doubt. He also is bound to rule the world one day. In **Psalm 2:8**, the Father went on to say to His Son, ***“Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and he uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”*** By citing this psalm, God the Father was telling everyone in the crowd that “This Man, whom you see before you, will rise from the dead one day, just as you see Him rising up from the water; and by His resurrection, I will *prove* that He is my Son, who will one day inherit all nations!”

Now, there is one other Scripture that the Father was citing at Jesus’ baptism. He was also citing **Isaiah 42:1**, which says, ***“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.”*** The Father delights in His Son. He is well pleased with Him; and as Jesus was being baptised, the Father put His Holy Spirit upon His Son, in the form of a dove, to show that He is His elect Servant, who will one day rule over all nations of the earth.

Conclusion: Jesus *will* rule over the whole world one day; and when He sits down on His throne of judgment, ***“Every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** The question isn’t, “Will you bow the knee to Jesus,” because *everyone* will one day bow to Him, whether he wants to do so or not. The question is, “Will you bow your knee to Him *now*, and confess Him as your personal Lord and Saviour *now*, while He is still willing to receive you?” It will be too late after you die. *Now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation! If you haven’t been saved, please ask Christ to save you today! I would also ask, “Christian, are you serving Him with

all your heart and soul?” Is the Father pleased with *you*, and with *your* testimony for Him? Christ lives in you; but can others *see* Jesus in you? Or is His light quenched by the unconfessed sin, pride, and fleshly desires in your heart? If so, confess your sin, and get right with God! If you are saved, but need to be baptised in obedience to your Saviour, please make that resolve in your heart today.