



Illustrations created with Grok (AI) and reviewed by our team

Jesus Is Baptized

Matthew 3:13–17 · Bloom · Ages 13–19

Matthew places Jesus' baptism right after John the Baptist's fiery preaching (Mt 3:1–12) and right before the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert to be tested (Mt 4:1–11). It's the hinge between Jesus' hidden years in Nazareth and his public mission.

The story: Jesus travels from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. John objects. He has just told the crowds that someone mightier is coming, whose sandals he isn't worthy to carry, and now that someone is in front of him asking for baptism. John says he is the one who needs Jesus' baptism. Jesus answers that this belongs to God's saving plan, which he means to carry out in every detail. John agrees and baptizes him. As Jesus comes up out of the water, the heavens open, he sees the Spirit of God coming down upon him in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven speaks of him as the Father's own Son, dearly loved and a joy to him.

What the Church sees here:

The sinless one among sinners. Jesus has nothing to repent of, yet he lets himself be counted among sinners. The Catechism sees in this his acceptance of his mission as God's suffering Servant, already the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, and a foreshadowing of the 'baptism' of his death (CCC 536; Mk 10:38; Lk 12:50).

The Anointed One. The Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation now rests on Jesus as the Messiah, which means 'the Anointed One' (CCC 438; 1286).

The Son revealed. The Father's voice shows who Jesus is: not only a prophet but the eternal Son (CCC 444). Father, Son and Spirit are all present in one scene.

Our Baptism. Christian Baptism is not just John's sign of repentance repeated. It truly takes away original sin and personal sin, makes us children of God and members of Christ's Body, the Church, and gives us the Holy Spirit (CCC 1213; 1265; 1279). Through it we are joined sacramentally to Jesus, who already pointed to his death and resurrection in his own baptism (CCC 537).

Honest questions:

If Jesus is God, why would he need to be baptized? He didn't need it for himself. He did it for us: to stand with sinners, to begin his mission in public, and to go ahead of us on the path we will follow. Early Christian writers taught that he went into the water not to be made clean but to make the water cleansing for us. St. Ignatius of Antioch, writing around the year 110, said that Christ was baptized so that by his Passion he might purify the water (Letter to the Ephesians 18). That is a teaching from Tradition, not a line from Matthew.

Does the dove mean the Spirit is a bird? No. The Spirit is a divine Person, not a creature. The dove is a visible sign, the way fire and wind are signs at Pentecost (CCC 701; 696).

Why baptize babies, who can't choose? Because Baptism is first a gift from God, not a reward for something we've done. Parents give their children food and love before the children can ask; the Church has given the grace of Baptism to infants the same way since ancient times, and each person later grows into it and makes it their own, especially in Confirmation (CCC 1250; 1252; 1285).

A step this week: if you were baptized, find out the date. Many saints celebrated it like a birthday.

Church teaching note

Church teaching: Jesus' baptism as acceptance of his mission as the suffering Servant (CCC 536); our Baptism joins us to him (CCC 537); the Spirit rests on the Messiah (CCC 438, 1286); the Father reveals the Son (CCC 444); the effects of Baptism (CCC 1213, 1265, 1279); the dove as a sign of the Spirit (CCC 701; fire, CCC 696); infant Baptism (CCC 1250, 1252); Confirmation (CCC 1285). Christ sanctifying the waters for our Baptism is a teaching of the early Church Fathers (e.g. St. Ignatius of Antioch, To the Ephesians 18), from Tradition. Mt 3:1–12, 4:1–11, Mk 10:38 and Lk 12:50 are cross-references outside the retold passage.

Talk about it

1. John felt unworthy to baptize Jesus. What does Jesus' answer show about how he saves us?
2. How does this scene reveal the Trinity?
3. What is the difference between John's baptism and the sacrament of Baptism?
4. Catholic connection: read CCC 1265. What does Baptism make a person?

Key verse: Mt 3:17. Look it up in your Bible.