

Read also Isaiah 61:1-3, 6-7; 64:1-4, Matt. 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34

Hear the Word of the Lord, and as you listen to it, ask God to show you what God has for you this week, as you live out your faith. READ Mark 1:7-11

All four gospels tell about Jesus' baptism.

1. Matthew tells us John was hesitant to baptize Him but Jesus insisted.
2. Mark says Jesus saw the dove.
3. Luke states Jesus was praying and the dove descended on Him in bodily form.
4. John testifies that John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend as a dove and it remained on Him, and that's how John realized Jesus was the Son of God.

You might wonder, why the differences? It's kind of like asking four people who saw the same event what they saw.

While each of the four had a different angle, each said something about a dove. There was something very real about the dove – or the Holy Spirit, and it is Mark's validating Jesus as the Son of God.

We get clues about this from another passage of the Bible. Genesis 1:2 says, "The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters." Early Rabbis interpreted in the Targum, the Aramaic translation: "The Spirit of God fluttered above the face of the waters like a dove. And God spoke, "Let there be light.""

So three parties are active in the creation: God, God's Word, and the Spirit.

The same three parties are present at Jesus' baptism: Father, who is the voice, Jesus, His Son, and the Holy Spirit who descended on Him as Jesus came up out of the water.

The Bible says, "God is love." It's the community that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that makes it love. In other words, we cannot say "God is love" as if you can reverse it, "Love is God," as if any love is God.

To say "Love is God" is like saying God is a principle – of love. Or that God is the experience of love. Actually, though, we say "God is love" because there are relationships within God which are filled with love for one another. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit love one another. They are three "persons." So it's a relationship. God is not singular.

God created us to be a part of that relationship.

So when we are invited to be a part of that, it is an invitation into their love. It's not just in principle. It actually exists. Our ultimate reality is about love relationships.

Before God created us God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit had the experience of love. C. S. Lewis says that God is not a static thing, but a dynamic, pulsating life; almost a kind of drama, or, a

kind of dance.¹ And as we join the dance, the Love in this three-person life is extended through us.

Lewis explains, if you want to get warm, you must stand near a fire. If you want to get wet, you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them.

These things are not separate commodities that God just hands out.

Sometimes we want certain things from God. We pray when we are in trouble, or we ask God when we need something or we want to be healed, thinking that what we want will make us satisfied. But those things will not be the thing that gives us lasting satisfaction. God is the one who brings us true joy.

Do you believe that the “dance,” that love relationship with God is possible? Or, do you think God is just “up there” to call to occasionally to get you out of trouble?

You can have so much more when you center your entire life in God and take part in the dance. Because it is then that you experience the love you truly seek.

So at Jesus' baptism God says, “You are my dearly beloved Son, and you bring me great joy.”

When you seek God, as you give your life to Him, He says, “You are my dearly loved child. You bring me great joy.”

What if you lived with your spouse or children but you never talked to them. You only felt a sense of duty. So you did all those obligations that a husband or wife or parent should do, yet you never really knew or enjoyed your spouse or children.

God wants more than duty – God gives much more than duty.

Father, Son, and Spirit were together creating the world in the beginning – not from duty or need but because they wanted to give love. They had so much love within themselves that they wanted to spread it to others.

And, so they are there together that day at that river's edge to initiate your redemption; because you don't really trust their love without redemption. So, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit together act to bring redemption to the world.

But why would Jesus need to be baptized? Seems like a strange way to begin. Isn't baptism to wash away sin? Jesus had no sin. What was He doing?

Hebrews 2:14-15 says this:

“Because God's children are human beings-- made of flesh and blood-- the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could

¹C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 152-53.

he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.”

So Jesus came to set us free. He identified with us, lived with us, got to know us. Then in the amazing power of the Holy Spirit, died to accomplished our freedom.

Once in the Old Testament God's people were discouraged. Enemies had torn down their cities and the temple; God seemed to be nowhere. So Isaiah prayed, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down . . . make the mountains shake!” He adds, “No one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him” (Isa. 64:1, 4).

John the Baptist saw “the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove.” (v. 10b) This would accomplish such a powerful work of God that “no one could see, perceive, or imagine” what God would do on our behalf.

God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit present in creation, present in redemption. It's a collective, loving effort on our behalf. When we center ourselves in that love, God works in power for those who wait on Him.

Perhaps that is what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. felt as he set out on His God-given call. When he began he certainly could have never conceived of what God would do. He said he had a dream but it was more than that in God's hands. For there is great power in connecting yourself with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

So what is the Trinity? It might be called a love triangle and we are invited to participate in its love, its commitment to one another, and creative power.

This tells us you cannot be a part of God alone, just like you cannot be married to yourself. You need this community, the church, where we learn to know God.

When Jesus was baptized, he identified with us.

When we are baptized, as you go under the water it signifies dying to yourself and being raised to new life, living in the center of God's love. Jesus' baptism pointed to his death. But with God, death is followed by life, because when you are a part of God, you can't help but have resurrection life.

Paul writes: “That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it's like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so we too might walk in newness of life” (Ro 6:3-4).

Paul adds, “But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (6:8).

And, just as Christ, we are commissioned to reach out to others through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the prototype; the first of the new creation.

It is all accomplished for love – so that you and I can experience this love-relationship with God.

Are you experiencing it? Would you like to go beyond duty? You are a cherished child of God. Baptism tells us that. You have been chosen, called, washed, gifted, and named “my child.”

Will Willimon said, “The uncalled life is an empty one.” God shows us He calls.

Do you want to dance?

AMEN