**Luke 3:15-17, 21-23 15The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might be the Christ. 16John 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. 17His 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.” … 21When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. While he was praying, heaven was opened, 22and 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.” 23Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry.**

Anointing Uncovered

John the Baptist. That name brings strange images. They even bring shivers and sounds. Camel’s hair clothes held together by a leather belt. The crunch of a grasshopper between his teeth after it was dipped in sweet honey. A man saying the right things at the right time to an audience that didn’t want to hear them. So bold to say what was not politically correct. John was the one who called the people who came to hear him preach slithering snakes. He wasn’t winning friends. He did however influence people with his message: *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance* (Luke 3:8). In spite of his outward strangeness and his direct condemnation of many who came to hear him, he also baptized many for the forgiveness of sins. He preached the good news that God had mercy and was sending a Savior.

Although John didn’t care what people thought about him, there was a time when John almost unhinged. John knew clearly what he had come to do: call sinners to repentance and baptize them. From what John knew about Jesus, baptism didn’t seem to fit Jesus. Jesus—the sinless Son of God partaking in a sacrament for sinners. It made no sense for Jesus to need baptism.

John the Baptist’s confusion is appropriate for us to consider. We might well ask the same questions, 1. Why did Jesus need to be baptized? And 2. What does it uncover about our baptisms?

I’m sure you have experienced a story or movie where there was a bit of a time leap. The image of a child fades into an adult face. If we were watching the life of Jesus play, just such a jump has happened. For two weeks we have been all about the baby and boy Jesus. Today, he’s about 30. It’s onto the next event of his life that is important for us to know. A turning point in Jesus’ life. **When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. While he was praying, 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.”** Jesus was baptized too. That bring us back to the question of John the Baptist. Why? Why was Jesus baptized? Why did it need to happen?

Simply put: Jesus was baptized because he needed to be. But not for the same reason as why we need to be baptized. Over and over the Bible tells us that Jesus is prefect. Without blemish. With stain. With iniquity. Jesus didn’t need his sins to be washed away. Jesus, as true God, didn’t need God’s name placed on him. He already had that. But if you look at your self and your sins, you see why Jesus needed to be baptized. Jesus was baptized to join us in our sinful, helpless, pitiful condition.

Jesus’ baptism with sinners uncovered that he was the substitute for sinners. By being baptized like a sinner, Jesus showed his willingness to be our Savior. Jesus takes the mantel of sinfulness as the water of baptism mark him as the prefect lamb of God. God places his holy Son in the position of our fallen race. He was baptized like a sinner to serve as our Savior.

**Jesus was baptized too.** That short phrase says so much. It uncovers that Jesus was selected and placed, anointed, to be like sinners. At the Jordan River almost 2,000 years ago, the Son of God stepped into the same waters as prostitutes and tax collectors, soldiers and cheats. The same water that was used to baptize those separated from God because of their sins was used to baptize the one who brought sinners back to God. The baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins that soldiers and farmers, adults and children received was also given to Jesus.

We can see ourselves in the crowd that came out to see John. Like the soldiers who came to John, we have not always been content with what we receive in life. We have grumbled about our job and complained about our pay. The cheating one by the tax collectors has been repeated in us through similar actions. Anything we receive pay for less than our best we are guilty of cheating another. We too have been like the prostitutes with our sexual sins through our thoughts, words, and actions. We have been harbored the pride and arrogance of the Pharisees. We are those who stand as sinners before the John who says, *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.*

Jesus steps into that stream. The waters anointed him to be included with sinners before God. Although Jesus began living as our substitute at the moment of earthly life began with his conception, he didn’t present himself as the Lamb of God until he was in his 30’s. It was at his baptism that he stepped into our shoe as the sacrifice for sin. **While he was praying, 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 Holy Spirit agreed by lighting on Jesus as a dove. God the Father declared to all the sinners who heard that he accepted his sinless Son as the one connected to sinners. Jesus’ baptism is his anointing that uncovered him as our Savior.

Understanding Jesus was baptized like a sinner helps us understand John’s previous words. Listen again: **The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might be the Christ. 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. 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.”** John confidently declared he wasn’t the Christ. He did his job of directing people to Jesus by telling them that the Christ would be greater in power.

Was John’s baptism something important? Why does it appear that John downplays what he was doing even while it was for the forgiveness of sins? Because John had one purpose in life. He was born to uncover or point out God’s anointed Savior. He knew that Jesus would provide additional blessings and greater significance than what he was doing.

Jesus being baptized gave him the opportunity to provide a baptism for sinners. In addition to the forgiveness of sins, Jesus added more to baptism. After his death and resurrection, Jesus would anoint his believers with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would equip the believers for service. When that happened on Pentecost, they could now proclaim the refrain of John *Repent and be baptized* (Acts 2:38). There are deep truths in those words. When Jesus joined himself to sinners, he opened the way to provide a baptism for sinners that would give them the Holy Spirit.

Fellow sinners, who have been baptized, Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit through baptism. Perhaps we have forgotten what that means. Having the Holy Spirit on us enables and empowers us to live a new life for God. Through baptism we have the fruits of repentance. Since Jesus was uncovered as our Savior, he now provides sinners with a baptism.

Jesus would not only baptize us with the Holy Spirit but also with fire. Throughout the Bible, fire is a symbol of purifying and cleansing. The baptism Jesus provides for sinners brings fire into their hearts to purify them from their sins. The fire of Jesus burns up the old sinful nature with which you were born. You are free to live a new life for him.

Do you realize that when you leave sin unchecked you are denying who God baptized you to be? You are rejecting your baptism, your identity, your anointing as one of God’s children. When your life is not a life that produces the fruits of repentance, you are as if you have not been baptized. You are chaff ready and marked for the fires of hell. No doubt about it. As long as the sins in your life go unchecked and you choose to live in them, your baptism has no value for you because where the connection with Jesus is present sin is turned from especially what is clearly sinful. So, if there is something clearly sinful in your life that you want to continue to do, you are abandoning your place as connected to Jesus. You are still in your trespasses and sins.

Anointing uncovered: that phrase reminds us that Jesus became our substitute. It also explains how he was able to provide a baptism for sinners. Through his work as Savior, he opened the way for the living water of the Holy Spirit to flow to and purify us.

Jesus’ baptism uncovered him as the Savior of sinners. Today, we recall Jesus’ baptism. Let’s see him as our Savior who became sin for us. Then let’s put our faith in him and in the baptism he provides. Amen.

Points to consider as an individual or with a small group:

* If Jesus is sinless, why was he baptized?
* How is Jesus’ baptism an anointing?
* Formulate two blessings that come to us in baptism at are similar to two things Jesus received in his baptism.
* Explain the connection between baptism and our life of repentance.