

Bible Study Class
Clayton Presbyterian Church
Lesson 3 Jesus

**The Early Ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus' Baptism and
Temptation**

Lord may we be reminded that we too face temptations just as Jesus did and may we have the strength to resist them just as He did. In Jesus 'name, Amen.

The Ministry of John the Baptist

Read Matthew 3:1-12

Q 1. Briefly describe John the Baptist as to his dress, diet, and lifestyle.
Camel's hair, wore a leather belt and ate wild locusts and honey.

Q 2. What was the basic message of John's preaching? Repentance

Q 3. What baptism did John preach? He was baptizing with water. In what region of Palestine was he baptizing? He was preaching in Judea

Q 4. How did the Jews react to John's preaching and baptizing? They were coming from all over Judea and from the country near the Jordan River

Q 5. What did John say to the scribes and pharisees who came to be baptized by him? He called them snakes. Why? He wanted them to reflect their repentance with actions.

Q 6. What was John referring to when he said, "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees?" He seems to think that the Christ will bring the judgment.

Q 7. How did John compare himself to the Christ?

He said that the Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Q 8. What did John say the Christ would do when He came? How and when would that be done? Again, he alludes to judgment by the Christ when he comes.

Read Mark 1:1-8

Mark's good news is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Here at the beginning, Mark answers his central question: who is this man? The characters of Mark's Gospel will take some time to arrive at this conclusion for themselves. Mark's readers are in a privileged position, for they have inside information. The words "Christ" (Greek) and "Messiah" (Hebrew) and the phrase "Son of God" are essentially synonymous, referring to Israel's long-awaited King.

At the end of the Old Testament period, despite Israel's physical return to the land, these great cosmic promises remained unfulfilled. Mark is declaring that the time of fulfillment has now come. Jesus brings the day that Isaiah had promised, when good news would be proclaimed. Isaiah's new exodus would be

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achieved through the ministry of the suffering servant, and Jesus is that servant.

Mark abruptly introduces John the Baptist, the messenger of preparation. John's preparatory work is done at the Jordan River, which was the entry point of Israel into the promised land following the exodus. John's main role was to preach and prepare: he announces the coming of the powerful one, who will baptize with the Spirit. By describing John's dress and diet, Mark unambiguously identifies him with Elijah. John preached a baptism of repentance, which did not itself convey forgiveness of sins but was a preparation for forgiveness at some later date. John's audience came from Judea and Jerusalem to confess their sins.

In Luke's account the first ten verses are much like Matthew and Mark's account, so we only are reading the part that is different.

Read Luke 3:10-20

Notice the specific instructions that John gives to different groups of individuals. The people wonder in their hearts whether John is the Messiah. John's baptism of water is contrasted with Jesus' power to effect change. The association of fire with judgment indicates that Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire is a reference to one baptism that results in a division into those who receive the Spirit and those who receive judgment. The good news that John proclaims includes the forgiveness of sins and the purifying work of the Spirit that Jesus will bring. "Herod the tetrarch" is Herod Antipas of Galilee, son of Herod the Great. John's rebuke of Herod anticipates Herod's response. The rebuke concerns two things: Herod's marriage to Herodias, who was the wife of Herod's brother, and all the evil things Herod had done. Now Herod commits the worst of his evil deeds: he incarcerates John the prophet, who is preparing people for the Lord.

The Baptism of Jesus by John

Read Matthew 3:13-17

Q 9. What did John the Baptist say to Jesus when He saw Him coming to be baptized by him?

He said that he needed to be baptized by Jesus rather than the other way around. What was Jesus' answer to him? Let's do it this way now.

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Q 10. Briefly describe the events surrounding the baptism of Jesus.

They go into the water and Jesus is baptized, as they are coming out of the water a spirit in the form of a dove descends on Jesus and a voice from heaven says, "this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

We don't know who heard or understood this voice other than Jesus and John. When Jesus goes to the desert to receive John's baptism, John initially tries to deter him because he recognizes Jesus as the more powerful one who brings Messianic baptism. But John consents after Jesus says this water baptism will "fulfill all righteousness". With these words, Jesus reveals that God's saving activity, which was prophesied throughout the Old Testament, is now being fulfilled with the inauguration of Jesus' ministry, a ministry that will culminate in his death on the cross. Jesus' baptism is an endorsement of John's ministry and message, and it links Jesus' cause to John's. Though Jesus needs no repentance or cleansing, through water baptism he identifies with the sinful humanity he came to save.

Read Mark 1:9-11

Mark introduces the one about whom John had been speaking—Jesus. Mark portrays the vision of as a private one to Jesus, highlighting what it meant for him. Isaiah had longed for the heavens to be torn apart and God to come down. Jesus sees it happen as the Spirit comes on him. V 11 Quotes Isaiah 42:1 and Psalm 2:7, a voice from heaven leaves him with no doubt about what is happening. Jesus is the powerful Son of God who will conquer the nations, but he will do so by being the gentle, Spirit-endowed servant of the Lord. Jesus is the one John the Baptist prepared for. Anointed by the Spirit as the servant of the Lord, Jesus is the mighty one who will baptize others. Jesus' future path is now clear. He will go to his death to bring forgiveness of sins for Israel, and this forgiveness will then flow out to the nations.

Isaiah 49: 6 "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

Read Luke 3:21-22

Only Luke notes Jesus' praying at the time of his baptism. Two other times the Gospel writers record the declarations of a voice from heaven referring to

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Jesus: (1) on the Mount of Transfiguration Luke 9:35 and (2) in the temple courts during Jesus' final week John 12:28.

Jesus' Temptation in the Wilderness

Read Matthew 4:1-11

Q 11. By whom and for what purpose was Jesus led into the wilderness?

The spirit led him there to be tempted by Satan. It is the Spirit who guides him as he accomplishes the Father's will.

Q 12. How long did Jesus fast? 40 days and 40 nights Briefly state what you believe His physical, mental, and emotional conditions may have been. Since Satan mentions bread, he must have been hungry. He would have been tired and nearly exhausted. Most of us would be having hallucinations at this point.

Q 13. What did Satan say to Jesus in an effort to get Him to turn the stones into bread? If you are the Son of God, turn the stones into bread.

How did Jesus answer this temptation? It is written that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Q 14. What was the second temptation? Took him to the pinnacle of the temple and told him to jump off.

How did Jesus answer it? Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Q 15. What was the third temptation? He took Him to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth. He asked that Jesus bow down and worship him.

How did Jesus answer it? You shall worship only the Lord thy God.

Q 16. Since both Satan and Jesus used scripture, describe the basic differences in how they used it. Satan is using it for his personal gain and not to honor God. Jesus in each instance points not to himself but to God. Jesus uses the truth of Scripture to guide his understanding of reality.

The word "tempted" can mean either "tempted" or "tested." Scripture is clear that God never tempts anyone to do evil, but he does allow circumstances to test a person's character. The devil is the real adversary, opposing God's purposes. Temptations are Satan's diabolical attempt to foil God's plan for humanity's redemption. Though Satan aims to disqualify Jesus as the sinless Savior and obedient Son, God uses Satan's evil intention for good: the temptations strengthen Jesus for his Messianic role. Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the wilderness corresponds to Israel's 40 years of testing in the wilderness.

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In a powerful turn Jesus is cared for by angels after proving faithful in his testing. Clinton Arnold states, "the devil is an intelligent, powerful spirit-being that is thoroughly evil and is directly involved in perpetrating evil in the lives of individuals as well as on a much larger scale. He is not an abstraction, either as a personification of the inner corrupt self or in the sense of a symbolic representation of organized evil."

Read Luke 4:1-11

Adam, Israel, and the ideal Davidic king have been identified as *God's sons*.

Jesus fulfills the role of all three and is uniquely and fully the *Son of God*.

The three specific temptations recounted in *Matthew* and *Luke* seem to have occurred at the close of this period—when Jesus' hunger was greatest and his resistance lowest. The sequence of the second and third temptations differs in *Matthew* and *Luke*. The climax to each temptation narrative is appropriate to its particular *Gospel*. *Matthew*, who emphasizes mountaintop revelations, ends the temptation on a high mountain. *Luke*, who strongly stresses Jerusalem and the temple ends with Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple.

Jesus' successful encounter with the devil reveals how thoroughly dedicated he is to *God's will and call*. Jesus will take only the road *God* asks him to follow. He will not take any shortcuts. He knows that a successful walk with *God* only goes where the Father leads.

Jesus is taken to the temple in Jerusalem — probably on the Royal Porch on the temple's southeast corner, which looms over a cliff and the Kidron Valley some 450 feet below. Josephus mentions that just looking over the edge made people dizzy.

One commentator gives us some guidance to our own tests. The main issue is my response to a test. Do I respond in a way that looks to *God* to guide me through it? Do I trust him, or do I put him to the test? How do I respond to personal struggles in my life? Do I get angry? Do I seek to reassert my control? Or do I rest in faith, look for *God's hand*, and ask him what I should learn from what I am going through? Though I personally wish I could say that I always do the latter, I know I do not, but that should certainly be my goal. If I am to grow spiritually, I can expect trial. If I am to grow spiritually, I need to look to *God* in the midst of it.

Read Mark 1:12-13

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This first conflict in Mark's Gospel sets the stage for what will be throughout the book a spiritual war between God and the forces of Satan. In Jesus' day there were many more wild animals—including lions—in Israel than today. Only Mark reports their presence, which likely indicates danger and so highlights that God kept Jesus safe in the wilderness. Another possibility is that the animals are meant to recall the garden of Eden, presenting Jesus as a new Adam. Jesus succeeds where Adam and Eve failed. Angels attended him just as they had attended Israel in the wilderness.

John the Baptist Testifies of Jesus

Read John 1:19-34

Q 17. What was John's initial reply to the priests and Levites who asked him who he was? He said that he wasn't the Messiah. When pressed for a more definite answer, what did he say? "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'

Q 18. When asked why he baptized, since he was not the Christ, Elijah or one of the prophets, what was John's answer? "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

Q 19. When John saw Jesus approaching, what did he say to the multitudes who were listening to him? "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

Q 20. How did John know Jesus was the Son of God? "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

The religious establishment questioned John the Baptist about his own identity. John the Baptist established not only who he believed himself to be but who he believed Jesus to be. John the apostle uses the wording "the Jews" or Jewish leaders should be understood as a reference to the Jewish leaders and authorities in most cases since almost everyone in this Gospel is Jewish,

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including Jesus and his disciples. John the Baptist saw himself as a herald and a forerunner preparing the people for the coming Messiah. The Pharisees were an influential religious sect during this time. They are characterized as meticulously following God's law and their oral traditions. They failed to understand that John's baptism was an outward act symbolizing inward repentance and cleansing from sin. His water baptism, however, was anticipatory as he awaited the greater one.

V 19 The Levites were descendants of Levi, who were assigned to specific duties in connection with the tabernacle and temple. They also had teaching responsibilities, and it was probably in this role that they were sent with the priests to John the Baptist.

V 20 The Jews remembered that Elijah had not died and believed that he would come back to earth to announce the end time. In this sense, John properly denied that he was Elijah. In Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus said the Baptist was Elijah, he meant it in the sense that John was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi. John the Baptist emphatically denies being "the Prophet." He had come to testify about Jesus, yet the people kept asking him about himself. The Jewish people expected a variety of persons to be associated with the coming of the Messiah. They didn't expect angels, shepherds, or wise men.

V 27 Disciples would perform all sorts of service for their rabbis or teachers, but untying sandal straps was expressly excluded. This a menial task for a slave.

V 31 While John was Jesus' cousin, they may not have personally met. But the words probably mean only that he did not know that Jesus was the Messiah until he saw the sign mentioned in vv. 32-33.

V 33 The Holy Spirit emphasizes his holiness rather than his power or greatness.

Throughout the late Old Testament period and especially in intertestamental period Judaism hope in a coming Messiah was widespread. This would be "the Lord's anointed," someone filled with God's power and Spirit who would work some saving miracle on behalf of God's people. Judaism frequently thought about Moses as perhaps the ideal messianic model. Not only did Moses give the people spiritual leadership, but he also provided political redemption from Egypt. It is no accident that in the days of Greek and Roman oppression a

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period of over three hundred years, the term *Messiah* or *Christ* was filled with political connotations. John the Baptist declares firmly he is not the *Messiah*. Judaism knew about ritual washings for ceremonial cleansing. But baptism was generally reserved for *Gentiles* who had converted to Judaism. It was a total cleansing that marked a threshold crossed.

Closing prayer: Dear Lord, help us to be better witnesses of Jesus' to the world around us. May we testify as strongly as John the Baptist did. In your holy name, Amen.

Matthew 3:1-12	Luke 3:10-20	Mark 1:9-11
Matthew 3:13-17	Luke 3:21-22	Mark 1:12-13

Scripture for Lesson Four:

John 1:35-3:36 John 1:35-3:36 John 1:35-3:36

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