

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in a bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”

Luke 3: 21-22

At the time of Jesus, the only time that a person underwent a water ritual (baptism) was when someone who was not born a Jew desired to become a Jew. Otherwise, one’s Jewishness was determined by the Jewishness of the father. Now it is determined by the Jewishness of the mother. But baptism was not the way a Jewish person became a Jew.

Baptism is the way any person becomes a Christian. All Christian denominations use a water baptism and a Trinitarian formula for baptism. The Trinitarian formula is found in the 28th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. It is the occasion of the Lord’s Ascension into heaven. He gives his final words to his disciples. He sends them out to preach the Good News and to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The baptism of John the Baptist did not make a non-Jew a Jew. Nor did it make a Jewish person more Jewish. His baptism was a baptism of repentance for one’s sins. It washed the effect of sin away and restored the person to their rightful place before God. It was a second chance. A new beginning.

So why does Jesus undergo John’s baptism if he is sinless and the Son of God? It is not because there is something lacking or missing in Him. It is because he brings something to the moment of Baptism that John could not bring. What does He bring? The Holy Spirit of God. How do we know this? Reread the two verses at the top of the page. The Holy Spirit descends upon him. Jesus is the result of the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit at his conception. Jesus is endowed with the Holy Spirit of God to impart to the waters of baptism. After his Ascension the Word of God is reunited with the Father and together they send their Holy Spirit upon all the believers on Pentecost. We who have been baptized and confirmed have received a share in the same Spirit that conceived Jesus, endowed him at his baptism and was breathed on all at Pentecost. Do we really grasp all of this? That is the question of the week.