

God's Presence as Never Before

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Matthew 3:11-17

¹¹ [John the Baptist says to the crowds] "I for my part am **plunging** (baptizing) you in **water** aiming toward a **change of heart** (repentance), but the one who is coming after me is **stronger than I am!** I'm not capable even to carry his sandals. He himself will **plunge** (baptize) you in **Holy Spirit** and **fire**. ¹² His sifting shovel is in his hand. He's going to **cleanse** his threshing floor and **gather his wheat** into the barn, but the straw he'll **burn** with a fire you can't put out."

¹³ Then **Jesus** comes from **Galilee** to the Jordan **to John**, to be **baptized** (plunged in water) by him. ¹⁴ But **John** tried to **hinder** him, saying, "I myself need to be baptized (plunged) by you! And **you are coming to me!**"

¹⁵ But in answer Jesus said to him, "**Permit it now**, for thus it is fitting for us to **fill up all righteousness**." Then he permitted him.

¹⁶ After Jesus was **plunged** (baptized), he immediately **came up** from the water, and suddenly, **the heavens** were **opened** to him, and he saw **God's Spirit coming down** like a dove and coming upon him.

¹⁷ And behold, **a voice out of the heavens** said, "**This is my beloved Son**, in whom **I am well pleased**."

Matthew 11:2-3 From prison John the Baptist inquires about Jesus

² Now when John [the Baptist] in prison heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

Malachi 3:1-2 God's messenger prepares for the Lord to come as refining fire.

¹ See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his sanctuary. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire....

Isaiah 30:27-28 The prophet anticipates God coming with Fire, Spirit, Flood, Sifting

²⁷ Yahweh comes from afar, burning with wrath ... and his word / tongue is like a devouring fire. ²⁸ His Spirit / breath is like a stream of water flooding up to the neck; to sift the nations

Matthew 5:20 Jesus challenges hearers to a transformed meaning of righteousness

²⁰ "For I tell you, unless your righteousness abounds more than the scribes and Pharisees, you'll certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Isaiah 42:1 God anoints his Servant with his Spirit

¹ Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul is well pleased; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

Luke 4:17-18 Jesus at the synagogue in Nazareth calls on Isaiah's words.

¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Jesus. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives...." [Isa 61:1]

Acts 2:1-4 On Pentecost the Spirit comes with signs of wind and fire

¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived, ² Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.

⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit....

Acts 2:38 Peter announces God promise of transforming baptism, forgiveness, Spirit

³⁸ And Peter said to the crowds, “Change your way of thinking (repent) and be plunged in water (baptized), each one of you upon the name of Jesus Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit....”

Matthew 28:18-20 After his resurrection, Jesus appears to his disciples in Galilee

¹⁸ And Jesus came near and said to them, “To me has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, as you go out and make all the nations disciples (learners of that truth), baptizing (plunging) them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to hold fast all that I have commanded you. Know that I myself am with you every day, to the consummation of the age.”

The Anticipation and Surprise of John the Baptist

In our text we hear the voice of Jesus himself for the first time in Mt. After a 30-yr gap in our knowledge, Jesus comes to John to be baptized and amazing things begin to happen.

John was a prophet like Elijah in wilderness pronouncing God’s coming judgment – especially on Pharisees (Law) and Sadducees (Temple): “brood of vipers” (3:7). He calls all to repent, be baptized to prepare “the way of the Lord” for the in-breaking Kingdom of Heaven.

John proclaims the one who will follow him: his power, worthiness. Beyond plunging in water, he will plunge you in Spirit and Fire. John’s words echo words of scripture in Mal., Isa., etc. The coming one will embody God’s judgment, sifting, gathering wheat, burning chaff. He’s ready.

Then Jesus comes. It doesn’t seem right. He should take over, not be baptized. He should show power, fire, judgment. John expects the Messiah that so many envisioned. Jesus surprises! Not by being more glorious than we expected, but by being one of the crowd of people.

Filling up God’s Faithful Righteousness

Jesus’ first words are to touch that surprise that runs throughout the Gospel. “Permit it ... to fill up all righteousness.” Not to rigorously obey commands, but to fill up in a new way God’s faithful righteousness to his people and the world. Jesus is not concerned to establish his glory but to be with his people. In scripture, God delivered from slavery, judged sin by exile and return, created a people. Mt shows the infant Jesus sharing the exile, alienation from home. Now Jesus stands among the crowds confessing their sins, sharing their baptism. He recognizes the struggle, doubt, longing, and misunderstanding, and begins to transform it.

God comes among us, as on the Mount (Mt 5-7). We’re weak and broken, but he never talks down to us. He calls us to be light of the world. Fill up the Law as Pharisees never can. Know the God who’s with you in secret, who leads you not to be anxious, to love your enemies, not to judge. Jesus rejects the old rigorist righteousness. The Law is not God final gift but is aimed toward a goal, the Kingdom of God breaking in in Jesus’ work and teaching.

A Widening Vision of God’s Presence

When Jesus is plunged in the Jordan, humbly like the sinful people, God breaks forth in signs of celebration. Not descending fire of judgment, but a dove, a symbol since Noah of shalom, renewed life. This is God’s Spirit upon Jesus, anointing the Servant for his true but surprising Messianic work. A voice from “heaven” the source of the Kingdom, echoes scripture with joy: Jesus is the beloved Son, the Messiah, the one who embodies God’s delight in love.

In Jesus, God begins to reveal more fully his unity and complexity in Father, Son and Spirit. This is the deep “God with us.” The Gospel ends with Jesus’ call for us to share in God by our own plunging/baptism into Father, Son, Spirit. Mt starts the journey: Jesus stands among us sinners for baptism, the God who shows his ultimate love and power in cross & resurrection.