

11/16/25

Sermon Title: The Ministry of John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Matthew 3:1-17

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

³ In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea

² and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

⁴ John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.

⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with^[a] the Holy Spirit and fire.

¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

The Baptism of Jesus

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

¹⁵ Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Matthew concludes the account of Jesus’ birth and childhood in chapters 1 and 2.

Then, in this chapter, he leaps forward about thirty years and introduces the events that take place just before Jesus begins His public ministry—namely, the ministry of John the Baptist and the scene of Jesus receiving baptism from him.

He begins by introducing the ministry of John the Baptist.

Strictly speaking, John the Baptist belonged to the era of the Law.

He was the last prophet of the Old Testament who rebuked sin and called people to repentance.

He carried out the role of a forerunner—closing the age of the Old Testament Law and preparing the way for the age of New Testament grace.

He is not referred to simply as *John*, but as *John the Baptist*, with the title “Baptist” attached to his name to indicate his specific ministry.

This distinction was necessary because the name *John* was common among the Jews, and the title helps differentiate him from other individuals named John.

After nearly 400 years during which no prophet had appeared since the book of Malachi, John the Baptist suddenly emerged in Israel, proclaiming the message of God.

¹ In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea
² and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

“At that time” refers to the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, which was when both John the Baptist and Jesus were about thirty years old.

According to the Law of Moses, a man had to be thirty years old in order to officially carry out the duties of the priesthood.

Therefore, “at that time” refers to the age at which Jesus—the One who came as the eternal High Priest to fulfill the Law and accomplish the work of humanity’s redemption—was formally approved for His ministry.

John the Baptist proclaimed God’s message in the wilderness.

For the people of Israel, the wilderness had always been a place of new beginnings.

Before entering the Promised Land of Canaan, the wilderness had been a place of training for Israel.

It was also the place where, after returning from the Babylonian exile, they lifted their voices to praise the works of God.

In that same wilderness, John the Baptist was now declaring to Israel that a new chapter in God’s history was beginning once again.

The message of John the Baptist was this: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Because the kingdom of heaven had drawn near, they must repent—meaning that without repentance, one cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

People who heard this message would have been greatly startled.

They had not encountered a prophet for 400 years, so receiving such a message from a prophet-like figure was entirely unfamiliar to them.

On top of that, John's appearance was unusual.

He wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist.

³This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

⁴John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

John the Baptist's clothing was very similar to that of the prophet Elijah.

In 2 Kings 1:7,8, it says that Elijah was a hairy man who wore a leather belt around his waist.

(2 Kings 1:7) The king asked them, "What kind of man was it who came to meet you and told you this?"

(2 Kings 1:8) They replied, "He had a garment of hair^[a] and had a leather belt around his waist."

John the Baptist's appearance, which resembled that of Elijah, connects him to the prophecy spoken 400 years earlier by the prophet Malachi.

(Malachi 4:5) "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.

(Malachi 4:6) He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

Matthew uses John the Baptist's clothing to testify that he is the very prophet Elijah whom God promised to send, as foretold by the prophet Malachi 400 years earlier.

Matthew then tells the confused people that John the Baptist is the one spoken of in the Old Testament through the prophet Isaiah—the one who would prepare the way of the coming Messiah and make His paths straight.

It is written in the book of Isaiah as follows.

(Isaiah 40 :3) A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

John the Baptist was the forerunner who prepared everything so that the Lord would have no hindrance in carrying out His ministry on earth.

For 400 years the people of Israel had been starving for God’s word, and when they heard the message preached by John the Baptist, they believed he could satisfy their spiritual thirst and came to him to receive baptism.

⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.

⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Baptism was one of the initiation rites required for Gentiles to convert to Judaism—an act symbolizing the washing away of Gentile impurity.

However, this rite was now being administered to the people of Israel themselves.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees heard the report that the people were flocking to the wilderness to repent and be baptized, they came out to the wilderness to see for themselves.

Seeing them coming, John the Baptist rebuked them, calling them “brood of vipers,” and warned that they would not be able to escape the coming wrath—that is, the imminent judgment.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

However, these words were, in a paradoxical way, a call for them to repent and thus escape judgment.

John the Baptist did present a way to escape the coming wrath.

⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

Hypocritical religious acts cannot save them from the coming wrath, so he tells them to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

He warns them not to rely on their ethnic lineage, because the true condition for Salvation is not attained through physical ancestry but by becoming God’s spiritual children through faith; therefore, they must abandon their pride as the “chosen people.”

He goes on to say that God can even make the Gentiles—whom the Israelites despised as worthless as stones—into children of the promise.

This message was truly shocking to the Israelites of that time, who were steeped in their belief of ethnic privilege.

So then, what exactly does it mean to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance”? The answer to that question is found in the Gospel of Luke.

(Luke3:7) John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

(Luke3:8) Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

(Luke3:9) The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

(Luke3:10) “What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

(Luke3:11) John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”

(Luke3:12) Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

(Luke 3:13) “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

(Luke 3:14) Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

Bearing fruit in keeping with repentance ultimately means to fear God and love one’s neighbor, as recorded in Leviticus 19.

John the Baptist proclaims that judgment is already imminent.

¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

The kingdom of heaven and judgment are inseparable.

To proclaim the kingdom of heaven is also to announce the coming of judgment.

Judgment will come upon all who do not bear good fruit.

Matthew then introduces Jesus and His ministry to the people of Israel through John the Baptist, and he records the scene of Jesus being baptized.

John the Baptist explains that while he baptizes with water, Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

He acknowledges that he is a lowly being, unworthy even to carry Jesus’ sandals.

Moreover, he proclaims that those who do not receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit from Jesus will face thorough judgment.

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Matthew, having introduced Jesus through John the Baptist, then describes the scene of Jesus receiving baptism.

Jesus and John the Baptist were relatives, so they were well aware of each other and of their respective ministries.

Yet Jesus came to the Jordan River, where John was ministering, to be baptized Himself.

John the Baptist, fully aware of who Jesus was, was initially greatly perplexed, but he soon obeyed Jesus' word and administered the baptism.

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

It would seem impossible for John the Baptist, a sinful man, to baptize the sinless Jesus.

However, when Jesus declares His intention to receive baptism in order to fulfill God's righteousness, John consents.

By receiving baptism, Jesus bore the curse of the Law and took upon Himself the sins of humanity.

As Jesus is baptized, the heavens open, and the Spirit of God descends upon Him. A voice from heaven is heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

The descent of the Holy Spirit was the fulfillment of the anointing.

At the age of thirty, as prescribed by the Law, Jesus was publicly anointed through a formal procedure, officially becoming the Christ—our Prophet, High Priest, and King.

Beloved members of Church of Godly Dreams,
Jesus came to this earth as our Prophet, our High Priest, and our King.

As Prophet, Jesus proclaimed the will and truth of God,
rebuked sin and unbelief and called people to repentance,
and fulfilled the Law and the Prophets.

As High Priest, Jesus offered His own body as the sacrifice,
atoning for the sins of humanity once for all and forever.
He became the Mediator who reconciles God and sinners,
and even now He intercedes for us in the heavenly sanctuary,
bringing our salvation to completion.

As King, Jesus proclaimed and established the kingdom of God,
broke the power of Satan and the forces of darkness,
and brought us true freedom.
He now reigns over all things from the heavenly throne,
and He will return to judge the world with righteousness and justice,
establishing the eternal kingdom of God and reigning as King forever.

Apart from Jesus Christ, no one in this world can enter the kingdom of God—
heaven.

But anyone who repents and receives the baptism that Jesus Christ gives with the
Holy Spirit and with fire can enter the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who take hold of it.
May we all receive the baptism that Jesus Christ gives with the Holy Spirit and
with fire, and become those who enter the kingdom of heaven.