



Theme: What Christians Believe and Why


Baptism


Weekly Memory Verse:

¹⁰ As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."

– Mark 1:10-11

Monday, March 11 – Read **Mark 1:9-11**. Mark's gospel is concise and action-oriented, so it's no surprise that he gave the shortest account of Jesus' baptism we have. The text simply tells what happened, not what led up to it or how the participants felt. But what happened set the stage for Jesus' entire ministry. He was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove and the voice from heaven affirmed his divine sonship.


 Mark used the Greek verb "schizo" to describe what Jesus saw happen to "heaven." In New Testament Greek, this word meant the place where God dwells. Mark 15:38 used the same verb, saying the Temple veil was torn in two as Jesus died. In what ways has Jesus' life and death "torn open" heaven for you, and allowed you to move into a closer relationship with God?


 We sometimes think that the Holy Spirit didn't show up until Pentecost, after Jesus' resurrection. However, the Bible, using words that also mean "breath" or "wind", describes God's Spirit at work throughout history, even at creation in Genesis 1:2. In what ways have you sensed God's Spirit guiding, comforting, or encouraging you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you that because of your baptism, life, death, and resurrection, I, too, may hear God say to me, "You are my child, who I dearly love; in you I find joy." Amen.

Tuesday, March 12 – Read **Matthew 3:13-17**. John called people to repent and baptized them when they did. He tried to stop Jesus from being baptized. He


had said in verse 11 that the one coming after him would baptize, “with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” He saw Jesus as that sinless savior and felt unworthy. But Jesus said, “This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus modeled baptism for us. We value our baptisms as a sign that we choose to follow Jesus and let him direct our lives.


 Baptism is a type of washing. We come to God tired and broken. We are washed clean and given a fresh start. Jesus did not need that kind of baptism—he was sinless. Yet he humbly asked to be baptized anyway. Jesus did what was necessary for us, humbling himself and identifying with our humanity, as we read about in **Philippians 2:5-11** and **Hebrews 2:11-18**. What does that tell you about how much he values you?

 In the words from heaven, discerning readers could hear echoes of **Psalms 2:7** which was a “royal psalm” the New Testament church applied to Jesus, and **Isaiah 42:1**, a “servant song,” which Jesus said shaped and described his mission. How do allusions like these point your heart to the connected sweep of God’s grand story in human history?

Prayer: *Lord, I yearn to be connected to you and what you’ve been doing throughout human history. I give myself anew to you today. Amen.*

Wednesday, March 13 – Read **John 1:29-37**. The gospel of John focused more deeply on the meaning of events. Here we “see” Jesus’ baptism when the baptizer points him out to his followers as “the Lamb of God,” and recalls seeing the Spirit descend on him. We see the result of this powerful testimony when two of John’s disciples took his words to heart, and immediately began following Jesus.

 “The Lamb of God, who takes the sin of the world,” evoked Jews’ annual sacrifice of a spotless Passover lamb, recalling God freeing them from slavery in Egypt and pointing to the Messiah, the ultimate deliverer. It also evoked **Isaiah 53:7**’s picture of God’s suffering servant, “Like a lamb being brought to slaughter.... He didn’t open his mouth.” In neither their world nor ours was the lamb a symbol of power. What does this tell you about God’s divine idea of true strength? What kind of strength is God leading you to develop in your own heart, and with your family, friends, and coworkers?

 We don’t read about any conflict when two of John’s followers set off after Jesus. John saw his life mission being about leading people to Jesus (see John 3:28-30.) How can a desire for credit or status get in the way of your life carrying out its deepest mission?

Prayer: *O Lamb of God, thank you for taking away my sins! I’m thankful for water baptism’s symbol of your cleansing me, but I most want the inner baptism of your Spirit to help me grow into all you want me to be. Amen.*

Thursday, March 14 – Read **Romans 6:1-7**. In Romans 5:20, Paul wrote, “where sin increased, grace multiplied even more.” It seems that some of his opponents tried to discredit his trust in God’s grace by saying, “Let’s keep sinning, so that

there can be even more grace." Absolutely not, Paul replied. We can't truly accept God's grace without dying to that old way of living, and our baptism is the way we show that we're serious about that. If you've never been baptized, or reaffirmed your baptism, but want to be, we will have an opportunity at all the services this weekend to do that. You can get more information and connect with us at www.summitdurango.or/baptism or contact the church office for more information, 970-247-4213.



Christ's followers through the centuries have wrestled with the paradox that, even as we "walk in newness of life," we still fall short of God's ideal again and again. Paul himself stated the other side of this paradox in **Romans 7:14-25**. In what ways have you seen Christ's gift of new life break the ruling power of sin in your life? What are the ongoing areas of struggle in your life?



The New Interpreter's Bible notes that Paul's words are about status as the source of actions, "like saying 'shall we remain in France,' assuming that if one does one will continue to speak French." How, in Christ, can you "declare independence" from your old status as a sinner, even as you keep seeking to grow beyond certain acts of sin?

Prayer: Lord, free me more and more from the habits and ways of thinking that keep me enslaved. Guide me so that I may "walk in newness of life" with you. Amen.

Friday, March 15 – Read **Matthew 4:1-11**. God's people, Israel, wandered in the desert for 40 years before they entered the Promised Land. The Israelites gave in to the temptation to distrust God in Numbers 14:28-34. Jesus, God's son, spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness. He, too, was tempted, but did not succumb. He loved and trusted God and built his life on the Bible's principles.



Unlike Jesus, we've never been tempted to turn stones to bread. The temptation "fit" him—he could use his power to be the political, material kind of messiah most Israelites hoped for. In what ways have you been tempted to use your unique abilities and powers for our own glory and advancement, rather than to bless others and build God's kingdom?



Jesus met temptation with scripture. So, can we. Author Gary Smalley advises us to learn **Philippians 4:8-9**, and check temptations and choices against it before we act: "...if anything is excellent, if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, all that is worthy of praise." What other Bible passages help you resist the lure of evil? Do you, like Jesus, make memorizing key Bible passages part of your life with God?

Prayer: Lord, every day I'm tempted to take my eyes off you. Please help me treasure your words enough to learn it and bring it to my mind when I need to resist temptation. Amen.

Saturday, March 16 – Read **Luke 4:1-13**. Luke slightly altered Matthew's account of the temptations. He said Jesus, "was tempted for forty days by the devil." He

also reversed the last two temptations, perhaps so that the sequence began and ended by emphasizing Jesus' standing as God's son, and the regular temptation to doubt that. Matthew contrasted Jesus' success in withstanding temptation to Israel's failure in the wilderness. Luke went even farther—his genealogy of Jesus ended, in Luke 3:38, with “Adam son of God.” That son of God failed when tempted, but Jesus did not.



Each wilderness temptation Jesus faced involved an easier path to be the messiah Israel thought they wanted. “Dazzle them with signs, impress them with your power, meet their material needs,” the tempter whispered. “Why try to change their earthly focus, and face suffering and death?” In what ways are you tempted to follow Jesus only if it's easy, and doesn't create any risks? How are you opening yourself to Jesus' power to grow the fruits of the Spirit we find listed Galatians 5:22 (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, and self-control) in your life, making it better both now and for all eternity?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to live the words of Psalms 119:11, “I keep your word close, in my heart, so that I won't sin against you.” Help me commit myself to this spiritual practice, and like you to build my life squarely on the principles of your word. Amen.*