



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 3:21-22

To understand more about the baptism of Jesus Christ and the nature of God.

The Things We Don't Understand

One of the most beautiful aspects of the Scripture is the clear and powerful manner in which God has made Himself known to His people. The Scriptures reveal (revelation) who God is, the problem of sin, and what He has done to solve that problem. It is sufficient for anyone to read it, believe it, and be born again as a result. There are, however, concepts in the Scripture we can't and won't fully understand on this side of eternity. The very concept of eternity is one of them. The notion of no beginning and no end makes no sense to us who exist inside of space and time.

Perhaps the most challenging doctrine for us is the doctrine of the Trinity. How is that God can be one, but also exist eternally in three persons? Attempts are usually made to illustrate the Trinity (3 dimensions, water/ice/mist, etc.), but all fail at some level in fully capturing the biblical doctrine. This is one of the central issues of the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and led to the development of the first "creed of Nicaea." It was later clarified in the Council of Constantinople (381 AD), and is now known as simply, "The Nicene Creed."

THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he

suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come. Amen.

This early, formal expression of Trinitarian confession is quite clear, and represented the early church's understanding of Scripture. This issue was clarified because of a rising heresy known as *Arianism*, which rejected that Jesus was co-eternal with the Father, but was rather created by Him. These Trinitarian views were further explored and clarified in the Council of Chalcedon (451), which explored the divine nature and the human nature of Christ.

While history has much to say about this doctrine, what does this have to do with Luke's Gospel? Of the many pro-Trinitarian Scriptures, Luke's account of Jesus' baptism is one of the foremost examples of the Triune nature of God.

The Baptism of Jesus

Unlike the other Gospel accounts, Luke does not record the meeting of Jesus and John, nor is there any description of how each of their ministries overlapped. As James Edwards wrote, "For Luke, John is less important as a baptizer (title occurs only at 7:20, 33) than as the preparer of the way of Jesus (1:17; 3:16; 7:19–20, 27)."¹ Below are some key details in the baptism account.

HEAVENS OPENED

The significance of "the heavens were opened" should not be overlooked. This calls to mind the prophetic words of Isaiah in Isaiah 64:1, speaking of a future messianic age: "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down." That the heavens opened signify the divine interaction taking place; God's presence is involved.

THE SPIRIT DESCENDED

The Holy Spirit is often depicted as a dove, but the wording in Luke's Gospel is a bit more nuanced: "and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove" (Lk. 3:22). He appeared in real time and space in a way that was similar to a dove. The point here is that the Spirit was not imagined, nor was Luke using figurative language to describe something happening on a spiritual, unseen level. The presence of the Holy Spirit was manifested *visibly*. Again, this transaction taking place was more than a mere demonstration of what obedience looks like (although it is that, too). This was the work of the divine seen visibly in the physical realm.

A VOICE FROM HEAVEN

The final aspect of this is the voice of God saying, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Lk. 3:22b). This is the first glimpse that Luke gives us of the Father and Son relationship between the two persons of the Trinity.

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 116.

The Trinity in View

At Jesus' baptism, the fullness of the Godhead can be seen. God the Father expresses His love and pleasure with God the Son, while God the Holy Spirit comes to rest upon the Son as this is all taking place. This is an important moment for us to consider because it rules out at least one common heresy that still exists today called *modalism*. Modalism is the view that God is one God who reveals Himself in different modes at different times, but that are not coexisting persons. The idea is that God sometimes operates as the Father, and other times as the Son, but now as the Holy Spirit, but never all three at once. The baptism of Jesus negates this teaching by demonstrating all three persons of the Trinity at work at once.

It is because of Jesus' baptism that Christ Himself commands us to baptize new disciples "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Paul mentions "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" in 2 Corinthians 13:14. Peter writes, "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood" in 1 Peter 1:2. The New Testament contains a myriad of examples of the presence of all three, but none as clearly as Luke's account because they are not spoken of as doctrine, but they are all physically either seen or heard.

What About Now?

There are many ways in which the Trinity shapes our Christian faith. We find principles for marriage, leadership, and submission to authority in the way that all three co-equal persons of the Trinity submit to one another in different times through redemptive history. It also means that our relationship to God should move in three distinct directions in the way we pray and worship. Understanding the nature of God is the only way to rightly relate to Him, and so it benefits us and our fellowship with Him to better understand the Trinity.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 3:21. Who had been baptized before Jesus? What did Jesus do either while He was being baptized, or after His baptism?

2. Read Luke 3:21. What happened during Jesus' baptism in this verse? What did it indicate? (Hint: See above notes)

Day Two

1. Read Luke 3:22. Who descended on Jesus during His baptism? How is He described?

2. Read Luke 3:22. What came from heaven during Jesus' baptism? What did the voice say?

Day Three

1. Read Matthew 28:18-20. How did Jesus' baptism in Luke 3:21-22 impact Jesus' words in this passage?

2. Read 1 Peter 1:2. Describe the role of each of the three persons of the Trinity in this passage.

Day Four

1. Read Acts 2:33. Describe the role of each of the three persons of the Trinity in this passage.

2. Read Ephesians 1:17. Describe the role of each of the three persons of the Trinity in this passage.

Week 11 Discussion: Worship

One of the applications of the doctrine of the Trinity is that it shapes the way we worship. We don't just worship God the Father, but also God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We don't just remember God's lovingkindness towards us, but the sacrifice of the Son, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit who moves us to worship "in Spirit and truth" (Jn. 4:23-24). Talk as a group about how this view of the Trinity changes your view of worship.

1. Icebreaker: When you worship, do you primarily think of one person of the Trinity? If so, which one?
2. How should the doctrine of the Trinity shape the way you pray?
3. Is the doctrine of the Trinity important to you? If not, why not?
4. Read John 15:26. What are the three persons of the Trinity doing in this passage?
5. How difficult is the doctrine of the Trinity to understand?
6. How important should Trinitarian worship be in the corporate worship experience?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptizer.
2. During Jesus' baptism the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit came down onto Jesus in bodily form like a dove, and the voice of the Father was heard commending His Son.
3. All three persons of the Trinity are in view during Jesus' baptism.