

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Devotional Reading: John 1:29–34

Background Scripture: Acts 2:38, 41; Romans 6:1–14;
1 Corinthians 11:23–29

Matthew 3:13–17

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 28:19–20

¹⁹ “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

1 Corinthians 11:23–29

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Key Text

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” —Matthew 28:19–20

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 3: The Church and Its Teachings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the directives found in Matthew 28:19–20.
2. Explain the vital roles of baptism and the Lord’s Supper in the Christian community.
3. Make a plan to bring the good news of Jesus to those with spiritual, economic, and social needs.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. The Table that Unites
- B. Lesson Context

I. Tradition of Baptism (Matthew 3:13–17)

- A. Jesus and John (vv. 13–15)
- B. Father, Son, and Spirit (vv. 16–17)

II. Making Disciples (Matthew 28:19–20)

- A. From All Nations (v. 19a)
Catch the Spirit
- B. By Baptizing and Teaching (vv. 19b–20)

III. Tradition of Communion

(1 Corinthians 11:23–26)

- A. The Bread, Christ’s Body (vv. 23–24)
- B. The Cup, Christ’s Blood (vv. 25–26)
A Taste of Home

IV. Warning Disciples (1 Corinthians 11:27–29)

- A. Have Proper Motives (v. 27)
- B. Examine Yourselves (vv. 28–29)

Conclusion

- A. God’s Gifts for God’s People
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Table that Unites

A team of American college students and I attended a church service in a village 20 miles outside Mbale, Uganda. The worship band played hand drums and the harp-like *a'dungu*. Children’s choirs sang enthusiastic songs. A preacher read from a Bible in the Luganda language.

At the climax of the service, a tray was brought out with a freshly baked loaf of bread and an assortment of glasses filled with red juice. After a time of prayer, we all ate the bread and drank from the cups. Even though we lived thousands of miles apart and spoke different languages, the experience reminded me that we are one body in Christ. It was a precious time of unity as we feasted together and celebrated the promises of our Lord and Savior.

B. Lesson Context

From its beginning, the church has observed two practices that mark its identity: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Both practices have antecedents in the first-century Jewish world.

Christian baptism has its roots in ritual cleansing practiced by Jews, a tradition that predates the first-century church. The Law of Moses prescribes cleansing with water for religious and physical purification (examples: Leviticus 14:8–9; 15:5–13; 17:15). But the Old Testament prophets promised a new baptism, a cleansing from impurity and sin (Ezekiel 36:25; Zechariah 13:1).

In the Second Temple period, washings for purification were a part of Jewish life (compare Mark 7:1–4; John 2:6; etc.). During this time, it is thought that converts to Judaism underwent a “proselyte baptism” for joining the Jewish community. Ritual washing was necessary because Gentiles were considered unclean; rules prevented them from entering the inner courts of the temple or participating with Jews in local worship.

The second practice in today’s lesson is the Lord’s Supper, also called Communion. The Gospels record the events of a “Last Supper”—the meal Jesus shared with his disciples the night before his crucifixion (Matthew 26:17–30;

Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–23; John 13:1–30). Although the apostle Paul was not present at that dinner, he shares an account of the same meal (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

Readers are meant to connect the Last Supper to the observance of Passover, a remembrance of God's liberation of the ancient Hebrews from their enslavement in Egypt (see Exodus 12:2–11; Deuteronomy 16:1–8). Celebrants would eat lamb, bitter herbs, and bread without yeast (Numbers 9:11). Likewise, the New Testament describes Christ as a Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7; compare John 1:29; Revelation 5:6). Thus, this meal and Christ's sacrifice on the cross serve as the fulfillment of Passover: through the giving of Jesus' body and blood, freedom and forgiveness of sins are available to all.

I. Tradition of Baptism

(Matthew 3:13–17)

John the Baptist is a prophetic figure preaching in the wilderness of Judea, where he calls people to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:1–2). John preaches like the Old Testament prophets: "Prepare the way for the Lord" (Isaiah 40:3, quoted in Matthew 3:3). His ministry presumes that all people need confession and forgiveness, alongside water baptism (3:6). John anticipates that another is coming, one who will "baptize . . . with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:11).

A. Jesus and John (vv. 13–15)

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

Because he grew up in Nazareth of *Galilee* (Matthew 2:22–23), Jesus travels south to Judea and the banks of the *Jordan* River. This is where *John* the Baptist is baptizing and preaching about the coming Messiah (see 3:1–12; Mark 1:1–8; John 1:19–28). Jesus' trip is not a sightseeing journey; he comes 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?"

John, however, knows Jesus' identity (compare Luke 1:44). John identifies himself—a mere man—as one needing to be *baptized*, but by Jesus.

John had predicted the arrival of one "whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" (John 1:27). The words of his question are incredulous: *do you come to me?* This is not a rebuke but a surprise. John reveals humility, for he considers himself unworthy to baptize Jesus, as God's anointed king.

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

Jesus replies to John's reticence by encouraging the baptism *now*. The immediacy of Jesus' baptism is necessary because of what it achieves and signifies.

In contrast to other baptisms performed by John, Jesus' baptism requires no repentance of sin. The perfect Son of God has no need for repentance (compare 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). But Jesus' baptism will *fulfill all righteousness* as an act of obedience to the wishes of his heavenly Father.

Jesus' baptism has three implications. First, it initiates his public ministry. Second, Jesus' ministry fulfills messianic expectations and supports John's preaching of repentance. Third, through baptism, Jesus identifies with the people he comes to save: sinful humans in need of repentance (compare Luke 19:10; Hebrews 2:17–18; 1 Peter 2:21–24).

What Do You Think?

How will you explain the necessity of Jesus' baptism?

Digging Deeper

When have you found it necessary to fulfill expectations and obey the righteous requirements of God?

B. Father, Son, and Spirit (vv. 16–17)

16a. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.

The Gospels do not dwell on the method of Jesus' baptism, only that he *was baptized* by John in the Jordan River (Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21; compare John 1:32). Since the Greek word for "baptize" is the same as "wash," flowing water is a fitting image of cleansing (every other person coming to John was repenting for sins).

What Do You Think?

What makes baptism like and unlike other ways we might “wash” with water?

Digging Deeper

If you are baptized, what details of your baptism show God’s favor and welcome?

16b. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

Scripture speaks of the opening of the heavens as a way to indicate divine revelation (Ezekiel 1:1; Acts 10:11–13; Revelation 4:1; etc.). The opening of *heaven* here leads to two miraculous occurrences.

First, Jesus sees the *Spirit of God descending like a dove*. It is not necessarily the case that any actual bird is present, since the wording does not require one. The Gospel of John recounts the event from the viewpoint of John the Baptist, who also witnesses the descending Spirit (John 1:32). The Spirit is not a bird, but a dove is the most fitting comparison for what Jesus and John see.

The coming of the Spirit and *alighting on* Jesus is a powerful representation of God’s approval. It shows his status as God’s servant (compare Isaiah 11:1–2; 42:1). Jesus receives the Holy Spirit so that he might fulfill the mission of his heavenly Father. Later, Jesus will empower followers to receive the same Spirit (John 20:22; Acts 1:4–5).

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God authorizes a person for a particular task or mission (Exodus 31:1–5; 1 Samuel 16:13; etc.). Jesus is also authorized for a mission, and the arrival of the Spirit in this way is something new.

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

The second miraculous occurrence is *a voice from heaven*—an indication that words come from God. The verse does not say whether others hear or recognize the voice. The proclamation of Jesus as *my Son, whom I love* shows that the voice belongs to the Father. Therefore, this scene has all three persons of the Trinity: God the Father is *well pleased*, giving approval of his Son and his ministry; Jesus displays obedience and willingness to follow the will of his heavenly Father (compare John 4:34; 6:38); and the

Spirit descends to authorize and empower Christ’s work (compare Luke 4:14, 18–19).

Two texts of the Old Testament, Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, help us to understand Jesus’ identity and what he will do. Psalm 2 looks forward to when the Messiah will defeat God’s enemies and bring God’s rule through an appointed king. Isaiah 42 describes the servant of the Lord, who will make God known to the nations. He will not rule by raising a shout, but he will serve with gentleness (Isaiah 42:2).

The Father’s words identify Jesus by these two themes. Jesus is the promised king. He will establish his rule, not by conquest but by giving of himself. By submitting to death on the cross, Jesus will make the mercy of God available to all, and he will reign as king (see Revelation 5:12–13).

II. Making Disciples

(Matthew 28:19–20)

Following Jesus’ resurrection, he brings the disciples to a mountaintop in Galilee (Matthew 28:16). Jesus proclaims his universal rule: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18).

A. From All Nations (v. 19a)

19a. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

Since Jesus possesses all authority, he commands the disciples to *go* to continue their ministry of God’s kingdom (compare Matthew 10:7). Their task is disciple-making, teaching others of the resurrected Christ. Jesus had focused his earthly ministry on the people of Israel (Matthew 10:5–6; 15:21–24). But now Jesus expands the ministry of the kingdom to include people from *all nations* (see Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:29).

Catch the Spirit

As a college student, I joined a singing team that partnered with my college’s office of advancement. We traveled nationwide, singing songs, performing skits, and sharing personal testimonies. The school commissioned us to be ambassadors to encourage prospective students and their families to “catch the spirit” of our institution. As audi-

ences “caught the spirit” from our performance, we hoped it would lead them to attend our school.

Jesus commissions his earliest disciples to serve as ambassadors for his kingdom. That same commission stands for us. But do your actions reflect your status as an ambassador for Christ Jesus? Consider creative ways to reach people in conversations about Jesus. You may be surprised when they “catch” new life in Christ!

—B. R.

B. By Baptizing and Teaching (vv. 19b–20)

19b. “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

In this verse, Jesus does not explain every aspect of baptism but says it should occur *in the name* of the triune God: *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. Christians through the ages have understood the task of baptizing in various ways, but have always enacted it as a welcome of God for those who would come to him.

Baptism signifies entry into the community of God’s people and identifies a person as “in Christ” (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; Colossians 2:11–12). Paul uses baptism to connect believers to the ancient Hebrews, who “passed through the sea” and were “baptized into Moses” (1 Corinthians 10:1–2). Baptism accompanies repentance and the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38; 19:4–6). And through baptism, believers obey Jesus and identify with the community of God’s people.

20a. “and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Teaching does not end when someone becomes a disciple. Discipleship requires a lifelong commitment to obey Christ. He alone is the foundation of faith (1 Corinthians 3:11). Through teaching one another, disciples receive Christ as Lord and learn to abide by the words, “live . . . in him” (Colossians 2:6–7).

What Do You Think?

Why do you think that Jesus mentions the “teaching” of future disciples after he mentions their baptism?

Digging Deeper

In what specific ways could you be more engaged in the teaching of new believers at your church?

20b. “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew first presents the birth of Jesus as fulfillment of prophecy: “They will call him Immanuel, . . . God with us” (Matthew 1:23; quoting Isaiah 7:14). Now Matthew concludes his Gospel with Jesus’ assurance that he will always be with followers as they carry out the task of making disciples, even *to the very end of the age*.

III. Tradition of Communion

(1 Corinthians 11:23–26)

Paul plants a church in Corinth during his second missionary journey. However, the church develops problems: factionalism, immorality, rivalry, and false doctrine. At the heart of these is a sense of individual entitlement within the congregation. A lack of concern for one another causes a crisis in how they practice the Lord’s Supper.

Like other early Christians, the Corinthians observe the Lord’s Supper as part of a worship service and fellowship meal. But apparently, their meals begin before everyone arrives, leaving some hungry and others drunk (1 Corinthians 11:17–22). This demonstrates disrespect for the message of unity, which should be evident when celebrating the selfless sacrifice of Jesus.

A. The Bread, Christ’s Body (vv. 23–24)

23a. For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you:

The apostle provides his source of tradition: *the Lord* (compare Galatians 1:12). Paul communicated with Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem, where he would have learned what Jesus did during his last meal with the disciples.

23b. The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

Paul recounts the events of the “Last Supper” of *the Lord Jesus*. He describes it as the *night* in which Jesus *was betrayed*. The memory of Jesus’ betrayal is strong (compare Mark 3:19). It set into motion the dramatic events of the Friday of Holy Week.

This *bread* is unleavened bread consumed during Passover (compare Luke 22:15). Before leaving Egypt, the Israelites ate bread without yeast—



Receive and give thanks,
until Jesus returns.

Visual for Lesson 10. Display this visual as you discuss the commentary associated with 1 Corinthians 11:26.

a signal of sudden deliverance—and received instructions to observe this annual festival (Exodus 12:15, 17; see Lesson Context).

24. and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

The Greek word *eucharisteo* is behind the phrase *he had given thanks*. This is why some refer to the Lord’s Supper as the Eucharist (a meal of thanksgiving). It is appropriate, when we observe the Lord’s Supper, to give thanks to God for the sacrifice of Christ.

Jesus links the bread of this meal with his physical *body*. Although churches may use different versions of communion bread, the symbol of breaking bread points to Jesus’ sacrifice.

B. The Cup, Christ’s Blood (vv. 25–26)

25. In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

The cup symbolizes Christ’s *blood* shed on the cross. Blood is a token of life and sacrifice throughout the Old Testament (Genesis 9:4–5; Leviticus 9:18; etc.). Blood that is spilled is a sign of death and the seriousness of sin. The spilling of blood can accompany the making of a covenant—a binding agreement between two parties (see Exodus 24:8).

Jesus’ words inaugurate this new agreement, the same covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31. The

new covenant restores the relationship between God and his people: instruction shall be written on their hearts and sins forgiven (Jeremiah 31:31–34). Thus, sharing the cup prompts *remembrance* of forgiveness through Christ. Like the group of Israelites who made a covenant with God (Exodus 19:3–8), the Lord’s Supper is for a forgiven people, those saved by his blood. This is the essence of *the new covenant*.

What Do You Think?

What does it look like when God writes on the hearts of those who receive Christ’s sacrifice (Jeremiah 31:31–34)?

Digging Deeper

What are some other ways Jesus has provided new hope for a restored relationship between God and humans?

26. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

When we *eat this bread and drink this cup*, we partake in a meal of remembrance, thanksgiving, and anticipation. We remember *the Lord’s death*, give thanks for the new covenant, and anticipate that Christ will one day *come* again.

A Taste of Home

In my work with a local nonprofit, I teach English to asylum seekers. Most students come from African countries. Cultural differences make assimilation full of challenges.

During one class, we discussed favorite foods. One student mentioned that his favorite dish is fufu, a West African cuisine. Others agreed, and one announced that a local grocery store sold the vegetables for making fufu. For these students, fufu is a reminder of the beloved culture of their home countries. In short, it is a “taste of home.”

The Lord’s Supper invites us to *remember* Christ’s sacrifice and his promise to return. The meal gives us “spiritual sustenance” as we look back at what Jesus has done and look forward to what he will do next. What do you remember when you eat this meal? How might it alter your routine to consider the Lord’s Supper a “taste of home”? —B. R.

IV. Warning Disciples

(1 Corinthians 11:27–29)

A. Have Proper Motives (v. 27)

27. So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

The rebuke to *whoever eats . . . or drinks . . . in an unworthy manner* addresses the Corinthians' abuses and mishandling of the meal. Their mishandling had severe consequences (1 Corinthians 11:29–30).

To participate unworthily is to become guilty of disrespect for Jesus, the behavior of Jesus' enemies during his trial (Luke 23:11, 13–21; John 19:2–3). The way the Corinthians observe the Lord's Supper makes a mockery of Christ's death, disrespecting *the body and blood* of the crucified *Lord*.

B. Examine Yourselves (vv. 28–29)

28. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

Paul advises self-examination to avoid unworthy participation. Elsewhere, he invites the Corinthians to examine whether "Christ Jesus is in you" (2 Corinthians 13:5–6). This occurs through reflection on actions and attitudes, prompting confession and repentance of selfishness and sin—especially wrongs against other members of the family of faith.

29. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Paul warns against failure to discern *the body of Christ*. This phrase can refer to the elements of the Lord's Supper and also the assembly of Christ's followers—the church (1 Corinthians 10:16; 12:27; Ephesians 4:12). The connection anticipates Paul's use of the metaphor to represent the church (1 Corinthians 12:12).

To partake in the Lord's Supper is to participate alongside the body of the church (compare 1 Corinthians 10:17; Ephesians 4:4). The meal helps us to contemplate Christ's love, remember our identity

as a forgiven people, and celebrate Christ's redemption. All are sinners in need of a Savior, and there are no privileged diners at the Lord's table.

What Do You Think?

What steps do you take to ensure that you are not guilty of treating Christ's sacrifice in an unworthy manner?

Digging Deeper

How is the pursuit of God's wisdom helpful in this regard (see James 3:17)?

Conclusion

A. God's Gifts for God's People

Baptism is the ritual entry to the life of faith. It includes a public testimony of God's gifts of grace and the Holy Spirit. We follow Jesus' example when we undergo baptism; Matthew 28 challenges us to invite all people to become his disciples.

The Lord's Supper is a meal of remembrance, thanksgiving, and anticipation. Instead of happening once for each person, it is celebrated regularly. The meal beckons us to examine our relationships with God and others. We share the meal with believers as the unified body of Christ, those who remember his sacrifice and look forward to his return.

There are differences among believers when we practice baptism and the Lord's Supper. But neither Christ nor Paul anticipates either to be cause for division. We should carefully study these practices so that, with our church, we might understand their purpose in worship and ministry. We can practice both with an attitude of humility and joy, recognizing that they are from God and for God's people.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gifts of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through baptism, we experience unity with you and other believers. In the Lord's Supper, we remember your sacrifice. Empower us, through your Spirit, to participate in a worthy manner. In your name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are unifying gifts for God's people.

How to Say It

Eucharist You-kuh-rist.
proselyte prahss-uh-light.