

The Inauguration of Our Savior

by Mark Jarvinen

Time marches on. About this time next year another presidential election will have taken place and we'll be awaiting his or her inauguration. The word "**inauguration**" means "***a ceremony to mark the beginning of something.***" Inauguration Day, which happens every four years in our nation, marks the moment on which the President - elect is publicly sworn in and recognized as our leader for another four year term with the "blessing" of the American people.

Christ Jesus came to fill an office and to fulfill a God-ordained task, not as the president of a nation, the king of a country, or the general of an army. He came to be our Savior. Thus, Jesus' baptism served as an "inauguration" of sorts. It was God's public affirmation that Jesus, His Son, is our Savior. We read of this important moment in Jesus' life and ministry in today's text, recorded in **Matthew 3:13-17 (ESV)**:

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

First, we notice that ...

I. JESUS WAS INTENT ON BRINGING OUR SALVATION.

We all know how leaders are elected in this country. On the campaign trail, candidates make promises to the people, hoping to garner the vote of the majority and win the office for which they are running. God has made some promises of His own. **His main promise is salvation.** In fact, the first Gospel promise in Scripture goes all the way back to **Genesis 3:15**. Our first parents, Adam & Eve, sinned against God in their garden paradise, and thus needed God's salvation or rescue. There, in the garden, God delivers a curse upon the Serpent (the embodiment of Satan), and makes the first Gospel promise. God says to the Serpent:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, (Eve), and between your offspring (sinful humanity) and hers (a coming Messiah); he (the Messiah) will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

The crushing of the Serpent's head portends the future victory of Jesus, the Messiah, over Satan and the forces of evil, through His death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection. In the spiritual realm, Satan is active, but is a defeated foe because of Jesus' redemptive work on our behalf.

Another salvation promise made by God appears in the OT prophecy of **Isaiah 53:11**, which looks ahead to the coming Messiah –

“After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.”

In this passage, written some 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a **“righteous, suffering servant”** who would **“bear the iniquities”** of the people, **“see the light of life,”** and thus **“justify many.”** What is this, if not the promise of a coming Savior,

who as a righteous (sinless) servant, would suffer, die, and rise again to provide justification (right standing with God) for many? This verse is a classic example of how God's saving activity, prophesied throughout the OT, is now being fulfilled with the inauguration of Jesus to His earthly ministry, marked by His baptism, which would ultimately lead to the cross, in order to, **"fulfill all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15)**. What's worthy of note here is that **"all righteousness"** is a gift given to us on the basis of Jesus' redemptive work as our Savior, and NOT granted to us on the basis of our own attempts to live righteously according to the Law. These attempts will always fall short, since as **Isaiah 64:6** says, **"all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."**

In our text, John the Baptist was strongly reluctant to honor Jesus' request to be baptized. After all, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for sinners. Jesus, who was without sin, had no reason to repent. John knew that Jesus was the greater one, God's Anointed One, the Messiah, for whom he had been called to prepare the way. Strictly speaking, John knew that as the forerunner, he should be baptized by Jesus, and not Jesus by him. But Jesus was intent on bringing our salvation. It wasn't until Jesus tied his desire to be baptized to His role in God's saving activity on behalf of all people, i.e. **"to fulfill all righteousness,"** that John consented to baptize Jesus. On what was the day after Jesus' baptism in John's gospel, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as **"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," (1:29)**, and gave testimony that because he had seen the Spirit come down and remain on Jesus (at His baptism) that He was indeed **"the Son of God" (1:33-34)**. The fact that Jesus came straight from his home town area in Galilee to the Jordan River to be

baptized by John the Baptist for all the reasons just stated, demonstrates that Jesus was intent on keeping God's "campaign promises" by fulfilling His role as the Savior of the world.

We should understand this morning that it pleased God to make this promise of salvation to the world. God is not selective in His grace. Israel was God's original people of promise, but not so that His salvation would be limited to one chosen nation. God's heart was always salvation for the world. Israel was to be a blessing to the nations. In God's covenant with Abram, God said, "***I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you...***" (Genesis 12:2) and concludes with the statement, "***... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you***" (Genesis 12:3). How would all nations be blessed through Israel? The answer lies in the fact that, from Israel, God's people of promise, would come a Savior. We are all sinners from birth, and therefore, we all need a Savior. This Savior is Jesus, the Son of God, who was publicly inaugurated at the River Jordan as He was baptized by John the Baptist. But wait! There's more to be said about this inaugural moment in the life of Jesus. Even as God's Son was **intent** on bringing us salvation ...

II. JESUS WAS CONTENT WITH HIS ROLE IN SALVATION.

What do I mean that Jesus was a "**role player**" in salvation? Certainly His role was central to God's plan of salvation. After all, we call Him "**Savior.**" At His baptism, Jesus is publicly revealed and recognized as the Savior promised by God. Jesus is our Epiphany Lord – revealed as God's incarnate Son. However, at Jesus'

inauguration another role player in salvation is mentioned – **God, the Holy Spirit**. Our text says in **3:16** –

“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ...”

At Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit came in an unassuming manner, ***“like a dove ... coming to rest on him;”*** In scripture, the dove is a symbol of peace and hope. Not a bird of prey, the dove speaks of gentleness and love, attributes that correlate with peace. As for hope, you may recall that forty days after the flood, Noah sent out a dove from the ark to see if the water had receded, and it returned. Seven days later, the dove was sent out again and it returned to the ark with an olive branch in its beak (**Genesis 8:8-12**). ***There was hope!*** The comfort that peace brings, and the strength that hope provides, are dimensions of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and are connected with Christ’s redemptive work. The fact that the dove came to rest on Jesus to provide peace and hope speak to the fact that Jesus was not only God’s divine Son, but also fully human, like us, since peace and hope are aspects of the salvation that we need and which God freely, and by grace provides.

As if this wasn’t enough, the Father Himself speaks. In **3:17** He says, ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*** The Father doesn’t speak here because He must try to persuade us that this is true, or that this is some sort of ***“bandwagon”*** that we must decide to jump on. The Father speaks for one reason, in keeping with the inaugural dimension of Jesus’ baptism, to validate and confirm the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man, the Anointed

One, the promised Messiah. After all, Jesus is no self-proclaimed Messiah, people that are eventually proven to be frauds. God wants us to know without a doubt that Jesus is the Sent One – the divine Savior of the world, powerful enough to overcome sin by dying on the cross, and also the righteous and fully representative human being – strong enough to face and overcome the temptations of Satan, as He would soon do in the wilderness (**see Matthew 4**). In humility, Jesus was content to play his role within the Godhead as both the divine Son of God, and also as the Suffering Servant on whom the wrath of God would be poured out as payment in full for human sin, through His shed blood on the cross.

CONCLUSION

In our text, we have the appearance of the Spirit, the presence of the Son, and the voice of the Father, demonstrating that the Triune God, One God in Three persons, was in full agreement within the Godhead on salvation's plan, and it was confirmed and validated at Jesus' baptism – His moment of inauguration. Here Jesus is revealed as One who is fully divine in his essence and attributes, yet who did not operate on earth in a glorious display of His deity. We see also in Jesus, our Savior, who lived on earth a fully human life in the power of the Holy Spirit, giving us, His followers, the ultimate example of a Spirit-led and empowered life, the example of how true human life is to be lived.

So where does that leave us? Is the message simply to try to be more like Jesus? To be better? To try harder? Hardly. Is our goal to seek attainment of a righteousness based on our own merits?

Impossible. In our world today, there is a tragic escalation of pressure to perform, to make something of ourselves, to become acceptable, to make a difference in the world, to justify our own existence. This phenomenon throws us back on ourselves, leaving us hopeless, in despair, and frankly exhausted. No, the answer lies in remembering who we are, those baptized as disciples, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Trusting in the One who was inaugurated at His baptism as our Savior, the Son in whom the Father was well pleased, who was sent by God to fulfill all righteousness. Let's remember in closing, the words of **II Corinthians 5:21**, that – ***“God made Him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** Through faith in Christ we find our standing with God. In Christ we have become the righteousness of God. In Him lies our peace and our hope. ***A-men.***