

## INTRODUCTION

*T*HE RAPID PACE of twenty-first-century living is not very conducive to setting aside time to slow down, read the Bible, and pray and meditate on God's Word. Yet such activity ought to be the daily priority of every Christian—it is the primary way God leads us in our sanctification. Just as physical nourishment is essential to physical life, so spiritual nourishment is essential to spiritual life—your growth in Christ depends on it.

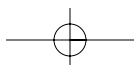
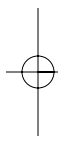
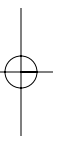
The frustration comes for many Christians when they're unable to find the time to study God's Word as they would like. I certainly understand that frustration. While I think you should be striving to carve out as much time as possible to spend with the Lord, which you can do by letting go of less important priorities, I do realize that's not easy to do.

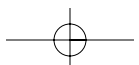
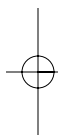
That's why I offer you this book of daily readings from God's Word. The goal of this book is to help you develop a consistency in reading and meditating on the truths of the Bible—yet this does not mean a large time commitment on your part.

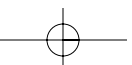
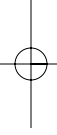
However, that doesn't mean this is like other devotional books that merely offer inspirational thoughts and meditations to help you feel good about your life. This book contains substantial, thought-provoking selections that come from my commentaries on the gospels, which are products of my lifetime of study in God's Word.

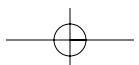
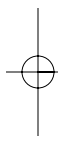
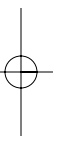
The focus of this volume and two more to follow is the life of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. My greatest joy in the pulpit has been teaching from the gospels and seeing how our Lord lived and interacted with all sorts of people, from the disciples who truly loved Him, yet were weak in their faith, to the masses of people who were mesmerized by His miraculous acts, yet many of whom never believed in Him, and to the religious hypocrites who pretended to want to know Him, yet always wanted to kill Him. In short, by observing how Christ interacted with people you'll gain great insight into how you can live as He did.

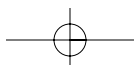
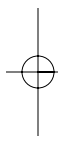
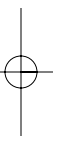
In each of the selections that follow, you'll draw daily nourishment from a nugget of God's Word. In this volume I focus on the first year or so of Jesus' life and ministry. Each entry will challenge you to meditate and act on significant truth. My desire for you as you conclude this first year of reading and meditating is a growing commitment to deeper subsequent study, meditation, and prayer with our great heavenly Father.

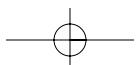
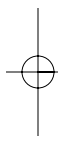
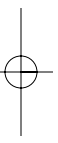


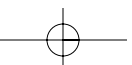
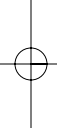
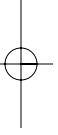












JANUARY 1

JESUS' PUBLIC BAPTISM

*Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan.*

MATT. 3:13A

*T*HERE IS SOMETHING majestic about Jesus' baptism that brought all the previous events of His earthly life into focus. Here He came fully onto the stage of the gospel story and His work and ministry truly began.

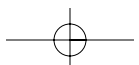
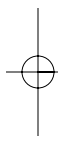
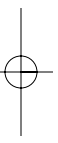
Following an eternity past in heaven and thirty years of obscurity in Nazareth, God presented the Savior publicly to the world. John the Baptist, as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," had heralded the coming of the Messiah (3:3; cf. Isa. 40:3), and now He was fully and publicly prepared to begin the fulfillment of His earthly mission.

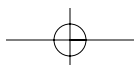
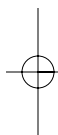
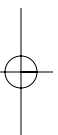
A parallel passage in Luke tells us that this was no private or secluded ceremony: "Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized" (Luke 3:21). The word translated "arrived" in Matthew 3:13 often indicated an official arrival or public appearance by a dignitary. From now on Jesus would be in the public eye and call no place His permanent earthly home (8:20).

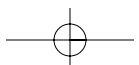
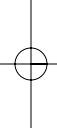
This important episode from the beginning of Christ's ministry clearly shows us that Jesus, though knowing what a high degree of visibility would ultimately cost Him, obediently stepped from the comfort of obscurity into the high-risk position of a public figure. His work would invite strong opinion, but in order to accomplish the Father's will, it must take place in full view of the world. It must come at the cost of being widely observed.

*Ask*YOURSELF

We are called to be salt and light, not merely to enjoy God's seasoning and illumination in our own lives but to be His conveyors of grace to others. How does this public calling alter the way you express and live your Christianity? Pray that you will live not in fear but in faith.







JANUARY 2

JESUS' PURPOSEFUL BAPTISM

*Then Jesus arrived . . . coming to John, to be baptized by him.*

MATT. 3:13 A, B

*I*N THE ORIGINAL TEXT of this passage, the wording “to be baptized” emphasizes purpose in this momentous appearance by the Lord Jesus. But it was extremely difficult for John the Baptist to understand why the God-Man would need to be baptized.

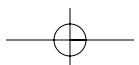
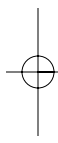
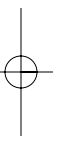
John's baptism was for the confession of sin and repentance (3:2, 6, 11), but Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) had no need for such a baptism. It is hard to see why One who would take away sin would need to submit Himself to a ceremony that symbolizes death to sin and rising to spiritual life.

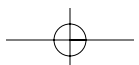
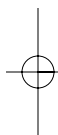
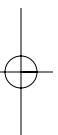
Because John knew so well that Jesus was the sinless Messiah, come to fulfill God's redemptive purpose, he “tried to prevent Him” (Matt. 3:14). The Greek pronouns in John's statement “I have need to be baptized by *You*, and do *You* come to *me*?” are all in the emphatic position, underscoring his strong bewilderment over the situation. This was not a direct refusal, as Peter might have given (cf. Matt. 16:22), but the Baptist no doubt misunderstood Jesus' request, thinking He could not possibly intend to undergo baptism.

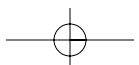
All sinners need the repentance that baptism symbolizes, but many, such as the Jewish teachers and leaders of Jesus' day, do not seek true repentance. Jesus, on the other hand, purposed to receive John's baptism to show His complete obedience to God's will.

*Ask*YOURSELF

The same Jesus who walked with such resolve and determination throughout His own earthly life has a distinct and daily purpose for yours. What pieces of this plan are becoming clearer to you? Pray that He will continue to reveal . . . and that you will continue to follow.







JANUARY 3

TESTIMONY TO JESUS' SINLESSNESS

*John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"*

MATT. 3:14

*J*OHAN THE BAPTIST'S INITIAL reluctance to baptize Jesus is a testimony to Jesus' sinlessness—and John's awareness of his own sinfulness.

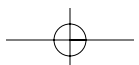
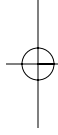
In effect, John said to Jesus, "I'm a sinner, just like everyone else I baptize, so why should You, the sinless Son of God, want me to baptize You?" In an indirect yet definite fashion, John agreed with the later description of Christ by the writer of Hebrews, "One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (4:15).

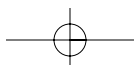
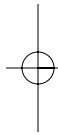
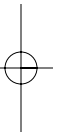
Jesus Himself testified to His perfect righteousness and His reason for wanting to be baptized, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Jesus' words did not deny His superiority to John the Baptist or His sinlessness. "Permit it at this time" is an idiomatic expression meaning that Christ's baptism, though seemingly not appropriate or necessary, was actually appropriate for this special time.

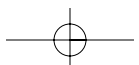
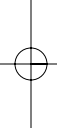
The Lord understood John's strong hesitation, and knew it came from deep spiritual commitment and sincerity. Thus He gave John divine permission to do what he was otherwise reluctant to do, so he could perfectly fulfill the Father's plan.

*Ask*YOURSELF

How do you think you would have reacted to Jesus' request for baptism? How do you react today when you're in His presence, in awe of His holiness and purity? Pray for the spiritual understanding to know that by His grace, He has washed this same righteousness over you.







JANUARY 4

SYMBOLS FROM JESUS' BAPTISM

*Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."*

MATT. 3:15A

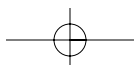
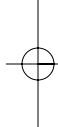
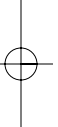
*T*HE MOST IMPORTANT SYMBOL Jesus' baptism gives us is a perfect example of obedience to God the Father. Our Lord always modeled obedience in all things (e.g., Phil. 2:6–8; cf. Matt. 17:25–27). In submitting to baptism, Jesus affirmed the validity of John's standard of righteousness and demonstrated that baptism was God's will to which every believer should be obedient.

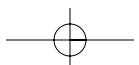
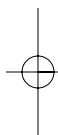
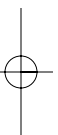
Furthermore, Jesus' baptism is a profound, symbolic identification with sinful humanity. Hundreds of years earlier the prophet Isaiah stated that the Messiah "was numbered with the transgressors; yet He himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). The sinless One took His place among sinners, and that in part entailed submitting Himself to a sinner's baptism.

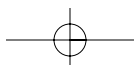
Finally, Jesus' baptism is a symbol of His death and resurrection, and therefore a prefigurement of our Christian baptism. Concerning His death, Jesus later said, "I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). In pointing to His obedient identification with sinners (cf. Isa. 53:11; 2 Cor. 5:21) and His subsequent atoning death and bodily resurrection, the key symbols stemming from Jesus' baptism remind believers of their need to faithfully obey and be baptized.

*Ask*YOURSELF

He became one of us, identifying with our sin. Marvel again at the amazement and immensity of this truth. What grace! What humility! What kind of worship should flow from this reality? Worship Him today as the One who was not ashamed to take your place, who stooped down so that you could stand.







JANUARY 5

## TRUE BAPTISM—CHRIST IMMersed

*After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water.*

MATT. 3:16A

CHRISTIANS, ESPECIALLY NEW BELIEVERS, sometimes wonder what mode of baptism Jesus underwent, and therefore wonder which is correct for them to experience. Since genuine baptism represents cleansing from sin and symbolizes the believer's identification with Christ's death and resurrection, the ordinance must involve immersion, not merely sprinkling or pouring.

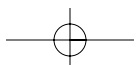
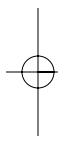
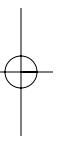
The Greek word (*baptizo*) literally means to dip or submerge an object into water or another liquid. Confusion regarding the word's meaning resulted largely because Latin and more modern-language translations of Scripture simply transliterated many occurrences of the Greek word.

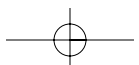
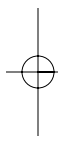
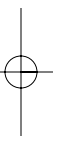
Until the Middle Ages, the Christian church knew and officially practiced no form of baptism but immersion. Then the Roman Catholic Church formally introduced and sanctioned baptism by sprinkling or pouring. Prior to that, even the great Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas wrote, "In immersion the setting forth of the burial of Christ is more plainly expressed, in which this manner of baptizing is more commendable."

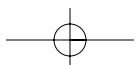
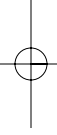
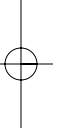
That Jesus "came up immediately from the water" indicates He had been completely *in* the water—in other words, almost surely immersed. John baptized people in the Jordan River (Matt. 3:6) and at other places where "there was much water" (John 3:23). That would not make sense if he had baptized only by pouring or sprinkling (cf. Acts 8:38–39). Unlike immersion, those other modes just do not fully symbolize dying to sin and being raised to new life.

*Ask* YOURSELF

Baptism is a one-time exercise in obedience, but the reality of being crucified with Christ and raised to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4) is an ongoing experience. How do you remind yourself of this on your average day? Pray that the gift of God's grace never loses its wonder.







JANUARY 6

THE HOLY SPIRIT VALIDATES JESUS

*The heavens were opened, and he [John] saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him.*

MATT. 3:16B

*A*BOUT THE SUPERNATURAL SIGN that occurred at the conclusion of Jesus' baptism, one commentator has suggested, "Just as the veil of the Temple was rent in twain to symbolize the perfect access of all men to God, so here the heavens are rent asunder to show how near God is to Jesus, and Jesus to God."

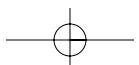
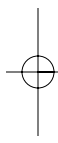
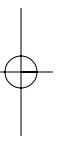
But did Jesus really need an anointing from the Holy Spirit? When He came to earth, Jesus retained His full deity. In His complete humanity, however, He needed divine strengthening for ministry. Like any human being, Jesus experienced fatigue, hunger, sleepiness, and the like. Only the Holy Spirit could strengthen such humanness (cf. Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:14).

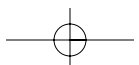
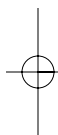
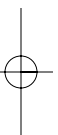
That the Spirit came upon Him at His baptism was a fulfillment of the prophet's words, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners" (Isa. 61:1). It was also the sign God had given to John the Baptist so that he would know Jesus when he saw Him (John 1:33).

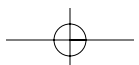
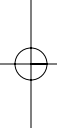
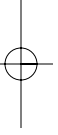
This anointing by the Holy Spirit was unique in several ways, including being the only New Testament instance in which the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove. Most important, however, this act not only empowered Jesus as the Son of Man for redemptive service, but it was a confirming sign to everyone present—and to us as well—that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

*Ask*YOURSELF

If Jesus was dependent on the Spirit's empowering for effective service, how much more do we need His help and strengthening? In what ways are you making yourself fully open to the Holy Spirit's power and direction? Pray that He will make you ever aware of your need for Him.







JANUARY 7

## BELOVED JESUS—SUPERIOR TO ALL SACRIFICES

*A voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."*

MATT. 3:17

*N*O OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICE, no matter how carefully selected, was genuinely and completely pleasing to God. The people could not possibly find an animal without some imperfection. Furthermore, the blood of the sacrificial animals was at best only symbolic, "for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4; cf. 9:12). But the Cross would effect a sacrifice that would be "with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:19).

It was this reality that rang out in the Father's declaration of blessing at the Jordan that day—the day of Jesus' baptism. His use of the word "beloved" connotes a rich, profound, ultimately satisfying relationship between the Father and the Son. Forms of this word occur elsewhere in the New Testament to denote God's love for believers (Rom. 1:7) and to describe the ideal love they should have for one another (1 Cor. 4:14). But in God's eyes the Lord Jesus ever remains the most beloved among any living being—past, present, or future.

This means that Christians, too, are a delight to their heavenly Father, because they are now "in Christ" and adopted into God's eternal, spiritual family. If God can find no imperfection in His Son, He likewise by His grace finds no defect in His saints (cf. Rom. 3:26; Eph. 1:3–6).

*Ask* YOURSELF

Is the Son "beloved" in your eyes as well? How does your love for Him express itself in your conversation, your interactions, your behavior, your worship? If you couldn't say that He is your "first love" (Rev. 2:4), ask God to help you return Him to His rightful place of adoration.