



Study Series

Follow Me: Week Two AM

Who is Jesus?: Marc Rader

Bible

Matthew 3:1-17 (NIV)

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea **2** and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." **3** This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. **5** People went out to him from

Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. **6** Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **8** Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. **9** And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for

Abraham. **10** The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 "I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **12** His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

The Baptism of Jesus

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. **14** But

John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptised 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 fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptised, 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."

Sermon Summary

Expectations can be a funny thing. The higher our expectations are, the greater our disappointment when things don't turn out to be as great as we expected, but the greater our joy when things are even better than we hoped.

Matthew's account of Jesus opens with a series of events that heighten our expectation of Jesus. Or at least they should. Sometimes our familiarity with the text desensitises us to the radical presentation of who Jesus is. This all begins with Matthew's infancy narratives where Jesus is linked to King David and Abraham in the genealogy; as an extraordinary human being in His divine conception and birth; and as a fulfilment of prophecy. And not just any prophecy, but those from Hebrew Scriptures that had shaped the Jewish hope for a new age of the Spirit in which the kingdom of heaven would be revealed.

The expectations are then heightened some more with the appearance of John the Baptist; himself a fulfilment of prophecy who declared the imminent coming of the Lord. The arrival of the Lord necessitated a removal of the wicked and a renewal of righteousness. Many people were baptised as a symbol of their commitment to righteousness as they awaited the Lord's coming, and when the Lord arrived there were even more signs of something special. As Jesus came out of the water after being

baptised as a symbol of His commitment to the plans and purposes of God, the heavens were opened, the Spirit descended on Him, and God spoke.

By the time we get to Matthew 4 we are invited to be on the edge of our seats in expectation; what will Jesus go on to do? He is, as far as Matthew is concerned, the most significant, important, and interesting person in the whole history of the world.

What I find remarkable is that Matthew presents Jesus in this history-shaking sort of way, despite Jesus' early ministry most commonly being regarded as a major disappointment. He didn't do what most people expected Him to do. The religious leaders thought He was a fraud, His disciples didn't fully believe or understand either, and the crowds just thought He was amazing. But Matthew is convinced, alongside countless others since, that Jesus is not a disappointment, but a source of incredible joy as He exceeds our wildest expectations.

As we begin to follow Jesus there are no conditions placed upon us, apart from a willingness to follow (as we saw last week). However, as we follow Him it quickly becomes evident that a crisis of faith will come. The claims that are made about Jesus bring this on. Is He really the most significant person in history? And Matthew invites us to bring our questions, doubts, and scepticism to his account as we listen to what Jesus said and did.

For those of us who believe and follow Him it raises the question, "How much do we expect Jesus to do in our lives?" Matthew presents a portrait of someone who will do amazing and incredible things in our lives, but do we expect it or are we only expecting small changes?

The gospel of Matthew urges us to heighten our expectations of Jesus and what He will do in Matthew's account, and in the lives of those who choose to follow Him.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Take some time to think about a time where you have had expectations about an event or moment. How did your expectations affect your experience? Were they met and exceeded? Share your reflections with the group.

2. Read Matthew 3:1-17 aloud. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that seemed to stand out. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain **why** they stood out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to a word or phrase, take time, and share what you've been lead to.
3. Given the details of Jesus' baptism and John's preaching, what do you think people expected from "the one to come"? How did the reality of who Jesus is challenge those expectations?
4. We can often slip into a pattern of presuming we know who Jesus is, but when we consider afresh the extraordinary life and ministry of Jesus, we are invited to be surprised again by the challenge He brings even to our own expectations of Him. Take some time to share stories of how learning more about Jesus has surprised you or challenged your expectations.
5. What do you expect Jesus to do in your life in the near future?
6. Sometimes it seems as if Jesus has failed to meet our expectations and we can become disillusioned by disappointment or seemingly failed promises. How can we support and encourage each other when it feels like this is the case, and what personal steps might God be inviting us into in these times?

Prayer

Take some time to consider each other's answers to question 6. Our Heavenly Father, the creator of the universe, understands all human emotions and is big enough to deal with all our disappointments. Bring each others failed expectations before Him now, and invite Jesus to lead you into a future following Him, bringing everything before God.