

15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. 16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

21 When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (NIV84)

SET APART AS SPECIAL

Jesus was
Now so are you

He was a pretty common boy. Not yet old enough to be called a young man. He was ordinary, in fact so ordinary that he wasn't even invited to the celebration. Everyone in the family was there, but it wasn't going to involve the boy, so he wasn't even invited. He was left to babysit – to babysit the sheep that is – until the Lord's prophet had chosen the one that would be the next king. Everyone else would get to see it, David would have to hear about it later that night!

But Samuel went down the line, one by one, 7 sons, but none that stood before him was the one. They all were fine looking men, they were strong, they looked the part. They could be the next warrior king of Israel, but he wasn't there. The one that God had chosen wasn't at the party.

So Samuel had to ask ***"Are these all the sons you have?"***

Jesse responded ***"There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep."***

Relieved Samuel exclaimed: ***"Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives!"***

And he was the one! David, the youngest, the unlikely one grew to be the mightiest king that would ever lead God's people. Samuel didn't know, Jesse didn't know, David himself didn't know, but God had great plans for David! And Samuel anointed him, poured oil over his head, and **Set him Apart as Special.**

I've always wondered about the anointing process. It seems like it would be an inconvenience. It seems like kind of an ooey, gooey mess. It was more than just a dab of oil. The Psalmist talks about oil running down and through the beard of the High Priest Aaron. But it had its purpose. God would use this ceremony to announce to an individual that he was the chosen one. And more than just to the one being anointed, he would announce to anyone that was watching that this man was **Set Apart as Special.**

As the gospel writers' paint the scene for us today, as we see the water of the Jordan River running down through Jesus' beard, we see someone special. There in the water, there standing in the place that sinners should stand, we see Jesus anointed! He's **Set Apart as Special.** And as we focus on these words from our God, we'll see that our baptism does the same for us!

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

John the Baptist was called to be the forerunner of the Messiah. Isaiah foretold it, Malachi too. There would be one who would come before, who would help people to prepare their hearts for the Savior. And that was John.

The crowds thought he was special. But he knew the truth. He told them that he wasn't the Christ- he wasn't special. The one that was coming after him, he was the special one!

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John's job was to help people to see Jesus. Did you find it interesting how he did that? He announced the judgment that Jesus was coming to make.

His (Jesus') winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Wow! He didn't mince words, did he? Jesus is coming to judge – to separate the wheat from the chaff, the useful from the useless.

Are you familiar with this picture? When the wheat was gathered in from the field, the first thing that needed to happen was threshing. That is how they would get the kernels of wheat out of the heads of the plant. They would walk on the grains, maybe have animals walk in circles sometimes with a heavy millstone tied behind them.

Then came the winnowing! The farmer would take this pile of wheat and chaff and with his fork, he would take a pile of wheat and chaff and throw it up in the air. Then the wind would catch the light chaff and blow it away, but the heavy grain would drop straight down. Winnowing would separate the good from the bad.

So what are you? Are you wheat or chaff? Good or garbage? Food or fuel for the fire? Wheat is what we all want to be? How do you find out what you really are?

John was right! Jesus holds in his hand a winnowing fork. Most winnowing forks have two or three prongs. Jesus' has ten! The Ten Commandments are what he uses to sift the good from the bad, the wheat from the chaff!

Christ plunges his fork into the pile and throws it up in the air, and then the prongs of his fork do their job. Those who worship God with their whole heart and never dwell on the meaningless things of the earth, they fall straight down, while the rest blow to the side. Those who honor and respect the authorities and always speak just as well about them as you would about God, they fall to the floor while the rest blow away. Those who treat their bodies as God's temples and respect the lives of others fall to the floor, while those who cave to sinful pleasures blow off to the side. Those who serve their spouse

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

selflessly, or live the pure life as a single person in deeds and in thoughts fall to the ground while the rest blow off to the side. Those who are always honest and find kind things to say about others when they are around and when they are not fall down with the wheat, while those who lie and gossip and slander blow onto the burn pile.

There's a problem. The chaff pile is pretty big and there is no wheat to be found. The Psalmist is right when he says: **All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one** (Psalm 14:3).

We can't stand up to the test. We can't pass the harvesting. The winnowing fork of God's law reveals who we truly are. We do not obey God's law, we cannot. We deserve punishment, we deserve to be put on the burn pile, we deserve to be blown off this earth and out of God's presence, we deserve hell.

And that's where our farmer does the impossible. He turns worthless chaff into beautiful wheat. He takes the ordinary and **Sets us Apart as Special**. He loved us too much to see us on the trash heap, so he did what only he could do. He changed us. He makes us wheat! He did it by allowing that winnowing fork to be used on him. He left God do the winnowing and he put himself in our place. Here on earth, here in human flesh, God's law was applied to him. But unlike us, he passed the test. The prongs of God's law didn't separate him out, because he kept that law perfectly. He kept God his priority throughout his life. He respected even the corrupt governments of his day, even the ones that took his life. He always showed compassion and always had words of love to share. Jesus was the perfect wheat. And he was the only one! God demanded perfection and he was the sole kernel of perfect wheat on the threshing floor. All the rest were blown away because of their sins.

Yet instead of the fire being applied to the chaff who deserved it, Jesus subjected himself to the fire. He endured God's wrath for us. He took the blame for our sins and even gave us credit for his perfection. He exchanged with us holiness for sin, peace for punishment, life for death. Jesus gave up his life, so that we could be forgiven, so that we could be spared, so that we could life with him forever. John was right when he told the world – **Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world** (John 1:29). He was the sacrifice that brought us back to God's side forever.

At his baptism, God voiced his approval of Jesus' work. **"You are my Son, whom I love. With you I am well-pleased!"** The 30 years of perfection that he had accomplished, the 3-year ministry that he was embarking upon – to stand in the sinners' place and to be the willing sacrifice of our atonement. There in the Jordan he was anointed for special service, needed service, saving service.

At our baptisms, we were claimed by Jesus from the burn pile. The Holy Spirit entered our hearts and his gospel promises changed our lives forever. We were anointed with his love. Though common and ordinary, though frail and sinful, we were **Set Apart as Special**. In baptism our Lord Jesus picks us up and places us on his Father's lap, and says "Here, my Father! Here is another one for whom I died!" We are set apart, set apart from the world, set apart from our old sinful ways, set apart from the destruction that should have been our hopeless future. Instead God calls us special, holy, loved.

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

And that Baptism, that faith that the gospel has created, gives us another calling. It **Sets us Apart for Special** service. Faith anoints us to serve the Lord. We are called to let our light shine. So we can look with love on the less fortunate, like Jesus did. We can embrace instead of shun the outcast. We can see in ourselves the opportunities to serve others by helping meet their earthly needs, by supporting others emotionally. And maybe we'll have the privilege to do what John did– to point people to Jesus – the Lamb of God, the world's Redeemer!!

Christ's baptism is worth remembering! He was **Set Apart as Special** to be our Savior, to stand in our place and live for us. And your baptism is worth remembering too. Those tiny drops of water and the powerful Word of God **Set You Apart as Special**, too. Sins forgiven, heaven secured, go and live in your baptismal grace all the days of your life. Rejoice in what Jesus did for you in his baptism and yours. Celebrate his love, thank him for his love, look to share his love with a world that needs about our Special Savior!! Amen.