

after forty years of penance and suffering in the desert. Through baptism in the Jordan, John's followers showed their willingness to become like their ancient ancestors. They were willing to turn from self-centered sinfulness to be open again to God's word. Thus, John's baptism was a public sign of repentance as they prepared for the coming of the Messiah.

After Jesus' years in Nazareth, the Holy Spirit led him to the Jordan where John baptized him. Thus, the sinless savior identified with all humans in their spiritual need. He took on the identity of his people as he was immersed in the waters of the Jordan. He allowed himself to be numbered among the sinners. Thus the mystery of Jesus' baptism displays the Lord's humility. From the beginning of his mission of preaching and healing, he accepted the role of God's Suffering Servant.

Each of the gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism notes the role of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove and the heavenly voice that proclaims Jesus to be the Son of God. These three phenomena—the opening of the sky, the descent of the Spirit, and a voice—identify Jesus.

Depending on which gospel you read, the experience after Jesus' baptism can be seen as a private event which Jesus later revealed to his apostles, or a public event that was seen by all present at the time. Because of the inconsistencies, we cannot tell for sure who really witnessed these events. However, all the gospel writers do emphasize the significance of Jesus' baptism in the following ways:

- ❖ The opening of the sky represents that God has come to his people in Jesus. His mission is about to begin.
- ❖ The dove is a symbol of joy, innocence, freedom, power, and peace all combined into one rich image. It suggests that we are at the dawn of a new age. This new era will erupt under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ The voice proclaiming "You are my beloved Son" (Mk 1:11) recalls to mind the words of two Old Testament prophecies:

