

Advent II: Matthew 3:1-12: The Baptist deals with penitent and impenitent

1. The parallel accounts are found at Mk. 1:2-8; Lk. 3:3-17; Jn. 1:19-27. They ought be read. Also, Is. 40 ought be read in its entirety. The parallel text(s) can be studied from Exegetical Notes on ILCW, Series C, Advent II and III, though not necessary here.
2. With a few exceptions, Lenski, MATTHEW, pp. 90-121, though lengthy, is superb. These notes are much briefer and differ at a few points from Lenski.
3. Vs. 1: "In those days" (KJV, RSV, NIV, NASB, NKJV) simply points to the time when John was preaching but Jesus had not yet entered His public office. Note how the Gospel of John distinguishes the two. Cf. Jn. 1:19-27 with 1:28-34. LB goes too far when it translates "while they (Jesus and parents) were living in Nazareth" but it gets at the idea that Jesus had not yet appeared in His public office. παραγίνεται graphic historic present. κηρύσσων denotes attendant circumstance. He heralded, merely repeating what his King (God) had told him to say. ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ is purely locative, τῆς Ἰουδαίας is adjectival or locative genitive. A definite place. λέγων might be translated "as follows".
4. Vs. 2: μετανοεῖτε pres. impv. denoting a continued state. Cf. the first of Luther's 95 theses. In classical Greek προνοέω means "think ahead" (so that you have no regrets), and μετανοέω "have afterthoughts" (denoting regret because of lack of careful forethought). Lenski rightly says it means "'to perceive or see afterward' i.e. when it is too late." But he should have added that the great difference between classical and NT on μετανοέω is that "what is too late" for the unregenerate Greek is the very beginning for the Christian. Here μετανοεῖτε is used in the wider sense: "be contrite and believe." γάρ introduces the reason: "There has drawn near the Kingdom of heaven." Not: "coming soon" LB. It is durative-punctiliar (-----), not punctiliar-durative (-----). Jesus Christ was about to appear. He brings the Kingdom of heaven. τῶν οὐρανῶν is adjectival, denoting the kind of Kingdom; possessive, it belongs to heaven; and also genitive of "direction" (if we may coin a term) because it leads to heaven.
5. Vs. 3: γάρ explains the part played by the Baptist. ῥηθεις is passive with God as agent. διὰ denotes agency. The prophet Isaiah was only the mouthpiece of God. ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ is plainly locative, corresponding to the same phrase in vs. 1. The second and third lines of the prophecy are Hebrew parallelism, saying the same thing in different words. In prophecy they say precisely what the Baptist said in vs. 2. By the way, when Jesus came on the scene, 4:17, He said precisely the same thing as did the Baptist. Even the same verbs are used as in 3:1. Their message was the same: acknowledge your sin, confess it, believe in the Messiah for forgiveness, abandon your sins, do works in keeping with your repentance.
6. Vs. 4: Contextually αὐτὸς is not intensive: "John himself" (NKJV and NASB) but rather demonstrative. KJV has "the same John", not bad. Note that the verbs εἶχεν and ἦν are impf. for obvious reasons. Three articles are mentioned: robe, belt and food. It reminds one of I Tim. 3:3: "not a money-lover." Also of I Tim. 6:6-10. A model for those who heard him. It takes very little in this life for the one who truly trusts his Lord. The Baptist practiced what he preached. This vs. proves it. By the way, Luther has a beautiful passage in the *Smalcald Articles* on this passage: "Here the fiery angel St. John, the preacher of true repentance, intervenes. With a single thunderbolt he strikes and destroys both (the scribes and the Pharisees). 'Repent' he says. On the one hand there are some who think, 'We have already done penance' and on the one hand there are others who suppose 'We need no repentance.' But John says 'Repent, both of you. Those of you in the former

group are false penitents, and those of you in the latter are false saints. Both of you need the forgiveness of sins, for neither of you knows what sin really is, to say nothing of repenting and shunning sin. None of you is good. All of you are full of unbelief, blindness, and ignorance of God and God's will. For He is here present, and from His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace (Jn. 1:16). No man can be just before God without him. Accordingly, if you would repent, repent rightly. Your repentance accomplishes nothing. And you hypocrites who think you do not need to repent, you brood of vipers, who has given you any assurance that you will escape the wrath to come?" The people in vss. 5-6 did listen. Those in vss. 7-12 evidently did not. In which group are we?

7. Vs. 5: τότε referring back to "in those days" vs. 1. Notice that the verbs in 5 and 6 are impf. of continued action. From these vss. it has been estimated that from 200,000 to 500,000 people were baptized by John. John's disciples, so far as we can tell, did not baptize. Only John did that. Notice the extent of the visitation of people: Jerusalem, Judea, all of it, and all the country surrounding the Jordan River. Look at Mt. 11:12 or Lk. 16:16. Hordes came into the Kingdom of God through the Baptist. The text does not say that they came to be baptized. It simply says βάπτιζοντο "they were baptized". And note that ἐξομολογούμενοι is attendant circumstance. That denotes their contrition over sin. ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ is simply locative dative. No passage in the NT can be used to support immersion. βάπτιζω means simply to apply water.
8. Vs. 7: Note that Nestle begins a new paragraph. A change of subject. δὲ is plainly "but". Ἰδὼν, John noticed them especially. Note that there is but one article with two nouns, both partitive genitive. ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα means "to the baptism" (KJV and NKJV) not "to be baptized" (TEV, LB, JB, NEB, AAT, NASB). We disagree with Lenski and the majority of the translations. LB has: "to where he was baptizing". Though not literal, it is better than the majority. It is said of neither those in 5-6 nor of those in 7-12 that they came to be baptized. We think that the sole difference was that the former truly listened to what he said, and then confessed their sins and were baptized, but that the latter did not confess their sins. By the LACK of their confession John could tell that they remained impenitent. If that is not so, he would have had to look into their hearts. No indication of that. Lenski thinks that they came to be baptized because so many others came and that the Pharisees and Sadducees did not want to lose their control over them. Maybe. Furthermore, he thinks that the delegations mentioned at Jn. 1:19-27 must have followed later than the account in Mt. 3:1-12. That may be too. But all we wish to point out is that the text does not say that they came to be baptized. Furthermore, confession of sins is conspicuous by its absence. The Pharisees were known for their legalism and self-righteousness. The Sadducees were known for their skepticism and moral laxness, the modern antinomians and "situation ethics" people. Neither confessed their sins. That is crystal clear from context. No wonder John called them "Products of deadly snakes". They were like their forebears, deadly to self and others because of their self-sufficiency. Read Luther again, quoted above. In the quotation above, Luther brings out the meaning of the rhetorical question very well: "Who has given you any assurance that you will escape the wrath to come?" The answer is easy: "No one has." The coming wrath is eschatological but not limited to that. That becomes clear in the following vss.
9. Vs. 8: οὖν "in view of the fact that no one has assured you." Vss. 8-12 are full of metaphors. Dead trees produce no fruit. Living trees do. What makes a man alive? Repentance. Here we quote *Apology*, Art. XII, par. 28: "In order to deliver pious consciences from these labyrinths of the scholastics, we have given repentance two parts, namely, contrition and faith. If someone wants to call fruits worthy of repentance (Mt. 3:8) and an improvement of the whole life and character a third part, we shall not object." In other words, the word "repentance" is used in the wider sense. If there is no contrition and faith, there will be no fruit, newness of life. Evidently the Pharisees and

Sadducees did not confess sins nor accept his Gospel. John could easily determine that.

10. Vs. 9: In vs. 8 a command. In vs. 9 a prohibition: "Don't ever get the idea to say (privately) to yourselves." From Jn. 8:37-59 we know that Jesus knew how His enemies reasoned. Somehow the Baptist knew that too. τὸν Ἀβραάμ is direct object. Πατέρα is in apposition to the direct object. Note how far forward the latter is thrown for emphasis. (At Jn. 8:39 Jesus' enemies did precisely the same. The subject there is Ἀβραάμ.) They thought that mere physical descent was enough. Furthermore, they considered all Gentiles, those not descended from Abraham, lost. (Do we secretly think that our family is better simply by mere physical descent?). γὰρ gives the reason. λέγω ὑμῖν is used by Christ and His appointed prophets as the voice of authority. ὅτι is recitative, corresponding to quotation marks. What does John here mean? "Children to Abraham" means "children of God, believers". ἐγεῖραι "to raise up" implies deadness. He is speaking of a miracle which only God can perform. They predicated membership in the Kingdom on mere physical descent. John says: "Don't ever get that idea!" And implicit in this statement is the idea that those not descended from Abraham, the Gentiles, God can raise up, despite their total lack of life. It's a straightforward word of warning and Law.
11. Vs. 10: The Pharisees and Sadducees did not confess their sins. Therefore, John preaches only Law, in vss. 7-10, to them. No Gospel for impenitent sinners. ἤδη "already now" is prominent. The metaphor of the tree is continued. The axe already lies right at the root of the trees. Not fruit, limbs or trunk which are dead, but at the very root. Total cutting off is imminent. The wrath of God abides on him who rejects Christ. οὖν "in view of this imminent, drastic threat." Every tree. God's justice is precise. Note the repetition of words used in vs. 8. John is speaking of the person who is devoid of repentance. Lenski thinks that ἐκκόπτεται means "cut out" not "cut down". He means "cut out from the good trees" but no one else agrees with him. We suggest that the ἐκ in the verb makes it intensive only, a total cutting down, right from the root. The last four words denote its total uselessness. Cf. Jn. 3:19-20. The works of the impenitent man are evil and useless. He hates Jesus, the Light, and refuses to come to Him, lest his works be made evident.
12. Vs. 11: In vss. 11-12 John compares himself with Jesus. These vss. need the most careful exegesis. Note ἐγὼ μὲν and ὁ δὲ, "I, for my part" and "but He". ἐν is not locative but denotes means (despite Lenski). εἰς μετάνοιαν occurs nowhere else with βαπτίζω. It cannot denote purpose in the sense that contrition and faith only follow baptism. AAT "for a change of heart" is misleading. RSV, NIV, NEB and NASB have "for repentance". What does that mean? NKJV has "to repentance". What does that mean? TEV: "to show that you have repented". That sounds like baptism is only proof, not a means of grace. KJV has "unto repentance". LB: "With water I baptize those who repent of their sins" neither precise nor literal. KJV is the best. As said above, εἰς μετάνοιαν occurs nowhere else in NT with reference to βαπτίζω. John is here talking to impenitent Pharisees and Sadducees. Lenski says: "'For repentance' refers to the repentance manifested by all those who came to be baptized by John." In vs. 6 those baptized were confessing their sins. This is not said of those in vss. 7-10 and Jesus is plainly telling them that they are not repenting. We suggest that εἰς μετάνοιαν means a baptism involving repentance and leading to the proper resultant repentant living. John is NOT saying that his baptism is a mere form, devoid of the Holy Spirit. εἰς μετάνοιαν clearly denotes the spiritual power of John's baptism. ὅπως μου is purely temporal, that's all. ὁ ἐρχόμενος clearly denotes Christ. He is stronger, which implies that John is strong. "Of whom I am not worthy to bear His sandals" pictures John as servant. αὐτοῦ, Christ, is emphatic. Note juxtaposition of subject and object for emphasis. βαπτίσει "will baptize" should not be limited to Pentecost. ἐν πνεύματι ἄγω καὶ πυρὶ does not denote a different baptism, because Jn. 4:2 tells us that Jesus baptized no one. It means that in baptism, whether by John or Jesus' disciples, Jesus bestowed the

Holy Spirit and His cleansing power. Look carefully at Jn. 1:33, ὁ βαπτίζων, "the One Who IS baptizing with the Holy Spirit." Some translations mistakenly translate this with the future. Wrong. In Jn. 1:29-34 the Baptist is saying that in John's baptism, limited to Israel, Jesus IS baptizing with the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit cleanses (πυρῆ) the baptized person. In Ti. 3:5 baptism is called "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." And Paul says in Eph. 4:5 that there is ONE baptism, not two. The Baptist's baptism was limited to Israel, looked forward to the fulfillment of the promises BUT IT WAS THOROUGHLY CHRISTIAN. Likewise that of Jesus' disciples before Pentecost (Jn. 4:1). Beginning with Pentecost, when all the promises had been fulfilled, baptism was FOR ALL NATIONS, likewise thoroughly Christian. Christ bestowed the Holy Spirit and His cleansing work in the Baptist's baptism and all others thereafter. Never depart from that. By the way, did these Pharisees and Sadducees repent and undergo baptism? Likely not. Look at Lk. 7:30 and 20:3-8.

13. Vs. 12: A beautiful metaphor, the threshing floor. With finality grain and chaff are separated when they are thrown up for the wind to drive the chaff away, never to be joined again. A stern warning: "If you reject this Christian baptism in impenitence you must face Christ as Judge." Cf. Jn. 3:36.