

Sermon Notes for Matthew 3:11-12, Epiphany I

1. Epiphany means "manifestation." The word occurs six times in the New Testament. At II Timothy 1:10 it speaks of Jesus' first coming. At II Thessalonians 2:8; I Timothy 6:14; II Timothy 4:1 and 8; and Titus 2:13 it speaks of Jesus' final coming on judgment day. In the church calendar Epiphany is a fixed festival, January 6. Today's text speaks of the appearance of John the Baptist and Jesus. The number of Sundays in the Epiphany Season depends on the date of Easter which is a moveable festival. Traditionally, Epiphany commemorates the coming of the wisemen, Matthew 2:1-11. For some Christians it commemorated also the birth of Jesus.
2. Both John the Baptist and Jesus appeared as a result of Old Testament prophecies. John was prophesied at Isaiah 40:3-5 and Malachi 3:1a and 4:5-6. Jesus was prophesied hundreds of times in the Old Testament from Genesis 3:15 to Malachi 3:1b-5.
3. Elizabeth and Mary were kinsmen, Luke 1:36. We do not know exactly what their relationship was. But, in any case, John and Jesus were also kinsmen.
4. John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus, Luke 1:26. Bible scholars are of the opinion that Jesus began His public ministry also about six months after John the Baptist began his ministry.
5. The Ceremonial Law in the Old Testament foreshadowed Christ. It covered the Sabbath Day, the Levitical Priesthood and the sacrifices, etc. Christ fulfilled the Ceremonial Law, Colossians 2:16-17. So far as we know, John the Baptist said nothing about the Ceremonial Law. He was on the threshold of the New Testament, introduced Christian baptism and stressed Christ, the fulfillment of the Ceremonial Law.
6. Today's text, Matthew 3:11-12, shows us the contrast between the person of John the Baptist and the person of Jesus Christ. There is no contrast between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus. At Ephesians 4:5 Paul says: "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Likewise the Nicene Creed professes "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins." The charismatics claim to have a "second baptism of the Holy Spirit." That is not found in the Bible. They claim that at Acts 19:1-7 Luke describes a rebaptism. Such a word does not occur in the Bible. Read Acts 18:24 to 19:7 in one reading. Apollos, who knew only the baptism of John, was instructed by Aquila and Priscilla more precisely concerning the way of God. In this context that means that they told Apollos about Jesus who fulfilled what John the Baptist foretold. Note carefully that nothing is said about him being baptized again. He had been baptized with the baptism of John. That was sufficient. It forgave his sins. Then, at Ephesus Paul found disciples who had been baptized with the baptism of John but who did not even know that there was a Holy Spirit. Their baptism was evidently a false baptism, not the true baptism of John. Paul explained: "John baptized a repentance baptism, saying to the people that they believe in the Christ who was coming." They had not even heard of Christ, the very heart of John's preaching and baptism. When these disciples heard this they were baptized, not REbaptized. The text says that they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. That was also what John the Baptist did. Matthew 3:11-12 distinguishes persons, not baptisms.
7. It is clear from Matthew 3:11 and Acts 19 that the Holy Spirit came through Christ, not through John the Baptist. But the Holy Spirit came through the baptism of John. Titus 3:5 calls baptism: "The washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit." There is only one baptism. John's baptism bestowed forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit.
8. Like Elijah, John the Baptist dressed very simply. See II Kings 1:8. Both Elijah and John were preachers of repentance. Jesus said at Matthew 17:12 that Elijah had already come. He was referring to John the Baptist. Elijah and John dressed very simply and lived on very little. Their life was a living example of repentance. Jesus was not a pauper but He lived a very frugal life. The Kingdom of God does not consist of earthly things and wealth. It is spiritual.

Sermon Outline for Matthew 3:11-12, Epiphany I

Theme: JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS

Introduction: Luke 3:15 tells us that John spoke the words of our text when the people asked him whether he was the Christ. John 1:24 tells us that John spoke these words when the Pharisees asked: "Why, then, do you baptize if You are not the Christ, nor Elijah nor the Prophet?" All four Evangelists have preserved John's answer (see also Mark 1:7-8). Evidently John was asked often about his person and his baptism. And, evidently, he testified again and again. That's what the Lord expects of us. And our testimony should consistently be the same all the time.

I THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN JOHN AND JESUS

A John is the servant, Jesus is the Master

All four Evangelists tell us that John said he was not worthy to stoop down to loosen Jesus' shoestrings. In other words: "I am not even worthy to be Jesus' servant." That is true humility. John was confessing that he was the lesser, that he was a sinner and that he was not true God as was Jesus. At John 1:33 we read that John said: "The One Who sent me to baptize with water said to me: 'On whomever you see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, He is the One Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" And I have seen and have testified that this One is the Son of God." "The One Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" and "The Son of God" mean the same thing. Only the Son of God baptizes with the Holy Spirit. God anointed His Son with the Holy Spirit and power. Acts 10:38.

E John obeyed the Master, Jesus

Read John 3:25-36. When John's disciples became jealous of Jesus, John told his disciples: "He (Jesus) must increase but I must decrease." Then he spoke words which show that John truly believed that Jesus was both divine and human. God did not give Jesus the Spirit by measure. That means that Jesus is the Savior. John said that God gave Jesus everything. John truly recognized the person and work of Jesus. Then he added: "The one who believes in the Son has life eternal." John was so obedient to Jesus that he feared not to confront Herod with his adultery. And this cost John his life. John is an example to us. We must confess that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world. And we must be faithful unto death. Revelation 2:10.

II THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN JOHN AND JESUS

A Both of them baptized

John said: "I baptize...He baptizes." That means "I apply what He gives." John 1:31 says: "I came baptizing ('baptizing' is present not future) with water so that He (Jesus) might be revealed to Israel." The baptism of John was effective only because Jesus worked through the baptism of John. When Matthew 3:11 says: "He (Jesus) will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire" he means that the Savior operates through the baptism of John so that forgiveness of sins is given to man. Both John and Jesus forgave sins, John as servant, Jesus as Savior and Master. That's why John says that Jesus is stronger. Matthew 3:6 reads: "They were baptized in the Jordan river by him, confessing their sins." John said: "Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world." John 1:29. The baptism and preaching of John forgave people their sins. Both of them said: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3:2; 4:17.

B Both of them warned the impenitent sinners

In vs. 12 of our text John pictures Jesus as a harvester who separates the wheat from the chaff. The wheat represents the believers who will be saved. The chaff represents the impenitent sinners who will be lost. By the way, in vs. 11 the word "fire" denotes the cleansing which takes place in baptism. But in vs. 12 "fire" denotes the cleansing which takes place in baptism. But in vs. 12 "fire" denotes the fire of hell which will destroy the unbelievers forever. Jesus spent His whole life inviting those who confessed their sins and warning those who would not confess their sins. Cf. John 3:36; 5:29; 7:34; 8:21; 9:39; 10:26; 12:48 and many, many other passages.

Conclusion: John the Baptist is our model of humility and confession.