

# THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

## The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

### STUDY SEVEN

## Surprised by Jesus

*Matthew 3:11–17*

*Jesus got in line with sinful people to be baptized—not because He had sin to confess but to identify with sinful people. Though without sin, He came to take His place among those without righteousness.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**N ancient times, when a king planned to visit a city, a forerunner would come in advance and call the citizens to prepare for his arrival. Everyone would get busy picking up trash, cleaning the town until it gleamed, and even filling potholes to smooth the road for the king's coach. On the day of arrival, messengers ran ahead shouting, "The king is coming!" Banners waved and people lined the streets cheering as the king made his grand entrance.

Isaiah foresaw the King of creation coming into the world in similar fashion. In his prophecy, he heard a messenger calling for a roadway through the wilderness to be built for the Lord's arrival. He envisioned valleys filled in, mountains leveled, curves straightened, and rough places made smooth; and he saw everyone on earth welcoming the Lord as He arrived in regal splendor (Isaiah 40:3–5).

As forerunner of the Messiah, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, John the Baptizer shouted in the wilderness that the Lord was coming. He called for people to repent, clear away the rubble of sin in their lives, be baptized, and get ready to welcome the Lord.

To John's surprise, however, the Messiah didn't come in a royal coach in regal fanfare. Instead, Christ walked as an ordinary man along the dusty wilderness road to the Jordan River and joined the crowds in line to be baptized. Only John recognized Him when He appeared. "Look!" John exclaimed, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## Surprised by Jesus

*Matthew 3:11–17*

Jesus veiled His glory that day; however, His coming in unveiled glory will happen when He returns (Matthew 25:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). But one thing is certain: the Lord of creation whom Isaiah prophesied had arrived to redeem the world.



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Imagine yourself at the scene when Jesus came to the Jordan River to begin His salvation mission. To prepare to receive your Savior's message, pray the following prayer from your heart.

*Father, thank You for my refuge in Christ, for His love that moved Him to come from heaven to earth to seek and save me, and for His wounds that heal my soul. I find comfort in Your grace and Your Word, which reveal the light of Christ and show me Your way in the wilderness, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Open your Bible and read the passage in context from verse 1, *Matthew 3:1–17*. Notice that Matthew begins with John preaching in the wilderness that “the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matthew 3:1–12) and culminates with Jesus’ coming “near” as the King of the kingdom and the heavens opening to welcome Him (3:13–17).



#### *Searching the Scriptures Study Tools*

Just as we need tools in the kitchen to help us cook our meals, we need Bible study tools to help us feed ourselves God's Word. The tools we recommend for studying Matthew are a Bible dictionary, such as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, and a commentary, such as Pastor Chuck Swindoll's two-volume set, *Insights on Matthew 1–15* and *Insights on Matthew 16–28*. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* is also an excellent resource for your library, and all these books are available at [insight.org](http://insight.org).



#### **Observation: John's Predictions and Jesus' Appearing**

Observation is an important first step to putting together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. As you read, look for contrasts, comparisons, repeated expressions, and emphasized words.<sup>1</sup> Let's focus on the contrasts in Matthew 3:11–17 as we observe two main sections: John's predictions (Matthew 3:11–12) and Jesus' arrival and baptism (3:13–17).



## Surprised by Jesus

*Matthew 3:11–17*

### John's Predictions—Matthew 3:11–12

In what ways did John contrast himself with Jesus, according to *Matthew 3:11*?

John already predicted that the Lord will chop down and burn unfruitful trees, separating them from fruitful trees (Matthew 3:10). How did John say the Lord will use fire in *3:12*? What are repeated themes in these metaphors of the unfruitful trees and the chaff?

Patterned after Old Testament prophets, John warned of coming judgment. Phase 1 in the prophetic timeline has always been judgment followed by blessings (Malachi 4:1–2). However, Jesus came “not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 3:17). And the Messiah’s first saving step was to join with sinners in the waters of baptism.

*Who's in the line to be baptized? Sinful people. Jesus gets in that line, but He has no sin. Jesus came to be identified among us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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*Matthew 3:11–17*

### Jesus' Arrival and Baptism—Matthew 3:13–17

What contrasts do you see in [Matthew 3:13–15](#) between John's estimation of himself and his role versus Jesus and His role? And what contrast do you see between what John expected the King to do at His arrival and what Jesus intended to do?

Jesus' followers often misunderstood His mission. Just as Peter would later try to stop Jesus from predicting His death (Matthew 16:22), John tried to stop Jesus from being baptized. In the interpretation section, we'll examine the meaning of Jesus' baptism. For now, observe what happened after Jesus came out of the water ([3:16–17](#)). Why do you think this moment is crucial at this point in Jesus' life and ministry?

*Jesus knew no sin, did no sin, had no sin. He was undiminished deity without question, but He was truly human. That's why He can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. That's why we never hear from heaven, "Shame on you!" —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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*Matthew 3:11–17*



### Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Baptism

In the interpretation phase, we aim to understand the theological implications of key events, such as Jesus' baptism. Consult your own Bible study resources and read page 59 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. Write down what you discover about two essential elements in Jesus' baptism: His identification with sinners and His divine inauguration for ministry.

Pause here and let the awesome wonder of this holy moment sink in. Each member of the Trinity was working together in divine union to inaugurate and empower Jesus as the rightful King to save the world—including you. What does it mean to you personally that the Son of God identified with your sin in His baptism and sought you as His own?

*What an awesome moment! The Trinity appears in words and invisible form: Jesus is visible, the Spirit descends, and a voice from the Father follows. Son, Spirit, Father in one moment. Let the wonder in. Be still and know this is God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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### Correlation: Spirit from Heaven and Voice of the Father

Luke added a small but important detail that Jesus “was praying” while He was baptized. Right then, as He was communing with the Father, the Holy Spirit “descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:21–22). The Holy Spirit descended *like* a dove, not an actual dove. How does this act fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy in *Isaiah 42:1*?

Read *Matthew 12:15–21*, in which Jesus quotes Isaiah 42:1–4 as fulfilled in Himself, and write down how the Spirit empowered Jesus in His ministry.

The Father then made a significant pronouncement, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 3:17 NASB). How does the Father’s pronouncement fulfill *Psalms 2:6–9*?

The Father’s statement goes far beyond a pat on the head. It is a regal installment of Jesus as the long-awaited messianic Servant-Savior, the promised King in the line of David. His identification with sinners and His inauguration complete, Jesus’ courageous mission to redeem the world had just begun.



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### Application: Jesus' Baptism and Us

Isn't it ironic? John's whole existence had been for the sole purpose of clearing the way for Jesus, and the moment Jesus arrived, John stood in His way. The Preparer had become the Preventer.

Jesus' request for baptism took John by surprise, but despite John's confusion, he still understood that Jesus had to be obeyed. Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers three words of application as we face Jesus' surprises in our lives.

- *Not recognizing Jesus in our midst doesn't mean He isn't there.* Jesus is with you, walking side-by-side with you even though you don't see Him.
- *Not understanding the whole message doesn't mean we should refuse to participate in any of it.* We should try to obey the commands we do understand and then ask God to give us insight into the parts of His Word that are unclear to us.
- *Not hearing God's voice of affirmation today doesn't mean He isn't well-pleased.* God always sees our obedience at times when no one else sees us doing what's right.

Have you been “surprised by Jesus,” perhaps because of a confusing trial in your life or maybe an unexpected change? If so, what has happened, and how might you adjust your thinking to welcome Jesus' surprises?



## Surprised by Jesus

*Matthew 3:11–17*

Thinking we know God's plan, sometimes we resist it when it goes a different direction. As you close this study, write down a prayer releasing your will to Christ's will. Even though you may not understand His plan, you certainly know His heart as your Savior who stops at nothing to demonstrate His love.

Jesus didn't get baptized to be cleansed of sin because He was sinless. Rather, He submitted to baptism to identify with sinners and "carry out all that God requires" to save the world (Matthew 3:15). Jesus' baptism in the Jordan was merely the first milestone in His long journey to His ultimate "baptism"—His death, burial, and resurrection. Let's follow Him each step of the way as He leads us, intimately linked with Him in His work of righteousness in our lives.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, have I unknowingly been preventing You from fulfilling Your will in my life? Open my eyes to see my own hesitation and give me the humility of John to accept Your will and Your way. Lead me to the Jordan where the waters of purification wash over me and I sense the presence of Jesus with me. Have your way, Lord, in my life today, amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. For helpful instruction about *Searching the Scriptures*, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

