Week#	253	Series:	The Gospels		
Title:	John the Immerser				
	Malachi 3:1; Malachi 4:5-6; Luke 1:15-16; Luke 3:1-3; Matthew 1:1-2; Mark 1:1-3; John				
Scriptures:	1:19; John 1:20-21; Deuteronomy 18:17-18; Il Kings 1:7-8; Matthew 3:4; John 1:22-24;				
	John 1:25; Matthew 3:11a; Matthew 13:6-10; Hebrews 6:1-3; Matthew 3:5-12; Matthew				
	28:16-20	;			

John the Immerser:

For over 400 years, between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament period, God was silent. No prophets, no angels, no burning bushes or other such miraculous appearances of God. God had promised a deliverer would come to rescue His people, and they were waiting for His appearance. He also promised someone would come *before* the Messiah, to "prepare the way for the Lord." In fact, one of the last things said by God was this word to Malachi about John.

Malachi 3:1

¹ "Look! I am sending my messenger to clear the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple. Yes, the messenger of the covenant, in whom you take such delight — look! Here he comes," says ADONAI-TZVa'ot [Lord of Hosts].

Malachi 4:5-6

⁵ Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

We talked before about the amazing story of John's start. In Luke's book he accounts that the angel Gabriel showed up to Zacharias in the Temple telling him of this son he and his wife would have. A son, John, who would "be filled with the Holy Spirit". He would also "turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God ... to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:15-16).

Just like prophets in the Old Testament, John proclaimed God's Word to God's people. He did this in order to warn them of judgment regarding their sin, but also to offer hope regarding the ways in which God would fulfill His promise. People had to see their need for forgiveness. They needed to learn identifying with the One who could forgive their sins was necessary for their salvation. John the Immerser would be the final voice from God before the very Word of God – Yeshua – came to speak to and dwell among His people. John the Immerser is mentioned in all four of the Gospels. Luke gives us a little bit of information about when this takes place.

Luke 3:1-3

¹ In the fifteenth year of Emperor Tiberius' rule; when Pontius Pilate was governor of Y'hudah [Judea], Herod ruler of the Galil [Galilee], his brother Philip ruler of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ² with 'Anan [Annas] and Kayafa [Caiaphas] being the *cohanim g'dolim [high priests]*; the word of God came to Yochanan Ben-

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Z'kharyah [John son of Zaccarias] in the desert. ³ He went all through the Yarden [Jordan] region proclaiming an immersion involving turning to God from sin in order to be forgiven.

Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus became emperor in the year 14 AD. This means that Luke places John's immersion of Yesha in the year 28 AD, about 32 years past the death of Herod the Great, also known as the "King of the Jews."

Herod the Great had a long succession of wives – at least nine of them. Before his death, he repeatedly changed his will, sometimes by writing new versions and sometimes by putting the named benefactors to death. The final version of his will divided his vast kingdom between three of his sons:

- Herod Archelaus
- Herod Antipas
- Philip

Before Herod's sons could take control of their kingdom and receive their crowns, they needed Caesar Augustus to approve the will. After all, their father's kingdom operated as a client state of Rome. Augustus did approve the will, but he refused to let the three heirs take the title of king. As a result, no one claimed the title "King of the Jews" during all the years of Yeshua's life in Nazareth and His ministry among His disciples.

Herod Archelaus (the son of Herod's Samaritan wife Malthace) received Jerusalem and Judea. Augustus granted him the title of "Ethnarch" over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. Archelaus initiated his reign in Jerusalem with the infamous Passover massacre in the Temple. During his short tenure, he added to his infamy with further cruelties and violations of Torah. The Jewish people complained to Rome, and in 6 AD Augustus banished Archelaus from Jerusalem. His territory became the Roman province of Judea and fell under the direct control of Roman procurators. In 26 AD, a man named Pontius Pilate became the 5th Roman procurator to rule over Judea.

Archelaus had a younger brother named Herod Antipus. When Herod the Great died, he received the title "Tetrarch" over the areas of Galilee and Perea, the latter being a territory east of the Jordan River. Like his brother, Herod Antipus wanted the title of King, but Augustus did not grant it. Herod Antipus built Tiberias on the western shore of Lake Galilee and administered his provinces from that city.

Philip, the son of Herod's 5th wife (Cleopatra of Jerusalem), became the Tetrarch over the northwestern territories. Among these territories Luke lists Iturea (the Mt. Hermon area) and Trachonitis. Josephus (Jewish 1st Century historian) adds the territories of Batanea (Bashan area), Gaulinitis (Golan Heights), and Auranitis (Biblical Hauran).

Things in the Temple had changed since the days of John's father Zacharias. When Augustus deposed Archelaus, Roma took control of Judea, Jerusalem, the Temple, and the priesthood. The Romans sold the office of High Priest to the highest bidder and awarded it only to loyal Roman sympathizers among

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the priesthood. They kept the High Priest's garments under lock and key and allowed only the priest of their choice to wear the sacred vestments on certain days. Luke specifically mentions two of Rome's favorite High Priests: Annas and Caiaphas.

Annas, Caiaphas, and the rest of the collaborators who passed for High Priests in those days headed the religious sect of the Sadducees. Luke refers to the sect of Sadducees as the association of the high priests (Acts 5:17). The Sadducees rejected the interpretations of the Pharisees and the traditions of their fathers. They had no love for the sages, the Pharisees, od even each other. Utterly corrupt, sick with political power and clerical greed, the Annas family and the rest of the Sadducees maintained their control in Judea only by means of devout allegiance to Rome and endless intrigues. Throughout much of the first century, Annas held the power behind the Temple and the sect of the Sadducees. In addition to Caiaphas, five of his sons and one grandson held the office of High Priest. His family virtually monopolized the High Priesthood between 6 AD and 66 AD. Annas pulled their strings like a puppet master.

John traveled the Jordan River region of Judea preaching to the people of turning from sin and following God. He often came into conflict with these Sadducees and other Roman sympathizers from Jerusalem.

Matthew says in 1:1-2

¹ It was during those days that Yochanan [John] the Immerser arrived in the desert of Y'hudah [Judea] and began proclaiming the message,

² "Turn from your sins to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!" The desert of Judea (or Judean Wilderness) runs from north of Jericho to the southern end of the Dead Sea. It lies on the western side of the lower Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea area.

All four Gospels quote Isaiah's prophecy about this man who was to come. Mark 1:1-3

¹ The beginning of the Good News of Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of God: ² It is written in the prophet Yesha'yahu [Isaiah], "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare the way before you." ³ "The voice of someone crying out: 'In the desert prepare the way for *ADONAI*! Make straight paths for him!""

This portion is found in Isaiah 40:3. John's mission was laid out about 700 years before his birth. We talked before about his miraculous conception story. There are two (possibly three) people in the Bible who are called from birth to the Nazarite vow – Samson and John (possibly Samuel). Samson did not take this vow, or the reason for it, very seriously at all. He challenged God's authority in his daily life all the time, and eventually lost the gift God had given him (his strength) because of his life's choices. John, on the other hand, took his vow very seriously. He knew from a very young age what God wanted of him – what his mission was.

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John 1:19	Notes:
¹⁹ Here is Yochanan's [John's] testimony: when the Judeans sent	
cohanim [priests] and L'vi'im [L:evites] from Yerushalayim [Jerusalem]	
to ask him, "Who are you?"	
Notice it says these Judeans sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem in the	
south. These were the very traditionalist groups, like the Sadducees. The	
Levite tribe was the only tribe not given their own land when it was divided	
up. Instead, the Levites lived all over in each territory. The ones that live near	
Jerusalem (in Judea) would have had many of the same traditionalist views	
as the Sadducees. However, they had all read (and memorized!) the text.	
They knew there was something different about this man John who came	
out of the wilderness.	
Why was it important that he came out of the wilderness?	
John 1:20-21	
²⁰ he was very straightforward and stated clearly, "I am not the	
Messiah." ²¹ "Then who are you?" they asked him. "Are you Eliyahu	
[Elijah]?" "No, I am not," he said. "Are you 'the prophet,' the one we're	
expecting?" "No," he replied.	
John is being asked some very interesting questions by this group of men.	
First, he is asked if he is the Messiah. They knew what to look for from the	
scripture, and they could see the signs all around them. They knew this	
Messiah would be very soon. John, of course, answers them that he is not	
the Messiah. They ask if he is Elijah the prophet. Again he says no. Then they	
ask if he is "the prophet" that was to come. Again he says no. Who is this	
"prophet"?	
In Deuteronomy Moses warns the people against imitating other nations and	
falling into idolatry. Moses reminds the people of specific practices they	
should avoid and how God would judge the people who engage in them.	
Israel was to be distinct—holy and blameless—gaining their approval from	
God and not from other nations. Those nations listened to falsehood and	
engaged in detestable practices. Israel was not to do that.	
In order to ensure that Israel would know God's direction, He would raise up	
for Israel a prophet like Moses.	
Deuteronomy 18:17-18	
¹⁷ "And the LORD said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. ¹⁸ I will	
raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and	
will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I	
command Him.	
There were many prophets raised up through the years by God to fulfill what	
God needed in their lifetime. However, the final Prophet would be Jesus.	

One of the reasons they were questioning whether he was Elijah was

because of the physical description given for John and Elijah.

Another physical description given is that he would eat locust and wild honey. Matthew 3:4 A Yochanan [John] wore clothes of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Both men were described in similar fashion – hairy and wearing a leather belt around their waist. It is interesting that this would be the description given for John, since one of the Nazarite vows was to not touch a dead animal and leather was made from the skin of a dead animal. I think in this case God is making a connection between Elijah and John, so he allowed them to wear (touch) this leather belt. In the case of Samson, his breaking of the vow was for selfish reasons, not because God was trying to make a note of something. In other words, God looked more at the heart than he did the physical applications of this vow. Another physical description given is that he would eat locust and wild honey. Matthew 3:4 A Yochanan wore clothes of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. When I see weird facts being mentioned for no apparent reason, I always want to dig into it and figure out why these specific facts were given and not others. In this case, we are told two things he ate. As a man who took the Nazarite vow, he would have avoided anything from the vine (grapes, wine, vinegar, etc.). Some types of locust were actually kosher, so the specific mention of that is telling us that he kept to the kosher laws laid out in the Torah. Honoy is a little deeper. If you go all the way back to the time when they were wandering around for 40 years in the wilderness, God provided manna for them each day (except Sabbath). Manna is described as being about the size of a coriander seed, and it tasted like honey. They would gather enough seeds for them to grind it down into a flour and they would use this flour to make pita bread that they would then bake on the hot stones and eat. They would also use this manna as a means of making the bread that they	⁷ Then he said to them, "What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?" ⁸ So they answered him, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah	
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II Kings 1:7-8

If you will remember from our study of the Tabernacle, the bread also	Notes:
represents the Word of God. So it is, of course, what God wanted to draw	
our attention to in mentioning that John ate wild honey. He consumed the	
Word of God and was then able to 1. Know his mission, and 2. Perform his	
mission.	
John 1:22-24	
²² So they said to him, "Who are you? — so that we can give an answer	
to the people who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?"	
²³ He answered in the words of Yesha'yahu [Isaiah] the prophet, "I am	
The voice of someone crying out: 'In the desert make the way of	
ADONAI straight!"	
²⁴ Some of those who had been sent were <i>P'rushim [Pharisees]</i> .	
Remember – the Pharisees were from the Galilee region in the north. These	
men did not believe the same as those from Judea. They were much more	
charismatic in their beliefs. In fact, John could have very well been a Pharisee	
himself (though it is never indicated). Jesus, as we know, was a Pharisee.	
John 1:25	
²⁵ They asked him, "If you are neither the Messiah nor Eliyahu [Elijah]	
nor 'the prophet,' then why are you immersing people?"	
This is a strange question. Why would it matter that he is immersing people?	
Matthew 3:11a	
¹¹ It's true that I am immersing you in water so that you might turn	
from sin to God;	
John tells them that the reason for him immersing people is because of	
repentance. He is the one, as Malachi said, that would "turn the hearts of the	
fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers." This	
was said in more than just the physical human sense. It is also meant on a	
spiritual level of bringing the hearts of the people of Israel back to their	
Father – God. In other words, repentance. That was the message he was to	
always teach – and part of repentance is cleansing in water, or a mikvah.	
Jesus performed a mikvah on his disciples during the Passover dinner just	
before his arrest.	
Matthew 13:6-10	
⁶ He came to Shim'on Kefa [Peter], who said to him, "Lord! You are	
washing my feet?" ⁷ Yeshua answered him, "You don't understand yet	
what I am doing, but in time you will understand." 8 "No!" said Kefa	
[Peter], "You will never wash my feet!" Yeshua answered him, "If I	
don't wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ "Lord," Shim'on Kefa	
[Peter] replied, "not only my feet, but my hands and head too!"	
¹⁰ Yeshua said to him, "A man who has had a bath doesn't need to	

wash, except his feet — his body is already clean. And you people are

clean, but not all of you."

Jesus points out here that the mikvah washing is not for the physical
cleansing of the body, but it is significant for the spiritual cleansing of the
heart. It is an outward sign of what God has done in your heart. That is why it
is important for the message of repentance from John to be followed by the
immersion in water. The "Doctrine of Baptism" is described by Paul.
Hebrews 6:1-3
¹ Therefore, leaving behind the initial lessons about the Messiah, let us
go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of turning from
works that lead to death, trusting God, ² and instruction about
washings, s'mikhah, the resurrection of the dead and eternal

He says that there some foundational doctrines that prove your maturity in Christ, one of which is the doctrine of baptisms (one in water and another in fire – thus the S on the end of the word).

punishment. ³ And, God willing, this is what we will do.

John's whole purpose was to draw people to the repentance that Yeshua would bring.

Matthew 3:5-12

⁵ People went out to him from Yerushalayim [Jerusalem], from all Y'hudah [Judea], and from the whole region around the Yarden [Jordan]. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were immersed by him in the Yarden [Jordan] River.

⁷ But when Yochanan [John] saw many of the *P'rushim* [*Pharisees*] and *Tz'dukim* {*Sadducees*] coming to be immersed by him, he said to them, "You snakes! Who warned you to escape the coming punishment? ⁸ If you have really turned from your sins to God, produce fruit that will prove it! ⁹ And don't suppose you can comfort yourselves by saying, 'Avraham [Abraham] is our father'! For I tell you that God can raise up for Avraham [Abraham] sons from these stones! ¹⁰ Already the axe is at the root of the trees, ready to strike; every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown in the fire! ¹¹ It's true that I am immersing you in water so that you might turn from sin to God; but the one coming after me is more powerful than I — I'm not worthy even to carry his sandals — and he will immerse you in the *Ruach HaKodesh* [*Holy Spirit*] and in fire. ¹² He has with him his winnowing fork; and he will clear out his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn but burning up the straw with unquenchable fire!"

John was fired up about his mission. He didn't want people to only accept one part of his message. He wanted them to accept all of it, because all of it was important. Jesus would be the redemption, but the story doesn't stop there. After redemption, Holy Spirit comes to give fire — or power. We wouldn't need Holy Spirit if we could do it on our own. We can't. That's why part of Jesus (and John's) message is that of redemption, but the second part

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is that of living a holy and set apart, powerful life for God. God's ultimate judgment is coming, and each and every one of us is given the same calling as John the Immerser was. We are called to go and tell.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make people from all nations into *talmidim [disciples]*, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the *Ruach HaKodesh [Holy Spirit]*, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age."

The authority of Almighty God was given to Jesus, and then He gave it to us, with this one purpose – go and tell others, allowing them the opportunity for repentance, and give them the opportunity to be baptized – not only in water, but also with the Holy Spirit. With this baptism of Holy Spirit also comes power – the power we will need to complete our mission in these last days.

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