

*Divine Man on Divine Mission*     Matthew 3:13-17

An old saying, found in many sources and contexts is the phrase, “Never send a boy to do a man’s job.” The job is too difficult. He is not qualified or equipped with the knowledge or ability. Here is another variation of this: Never send a man to do God’s job. But I have to qualify that. If that man is also God, a divine man, he is perfect for the job.

In the first chapters of Matthew we are told that Jesus, born of Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit, is that divine man. Paul sums up the divine mission in Galatians 4:4–5. *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law.* Divine man on divine mission.

We see more evidence of that divine humanity in the Epiphany story of the visit of the Magi. That Jesus is a human none can deny. The innkeeper saw Mary about to burst with child moments before His birth. He is still a baby when the wise men found him in Bethlehem. He doesn’t get to hurry up his aging process, but must wait out Herod’s death in human years, not skip forward as if he were only divine. He must endure the bumpy ride to Egypt that starts out as a midnight escape from soldiers who intent on killing him. He can’t transport himself away, but must be carried helplessly by his parents, as must all babies. Born of woman, born under the law. God born as man.

But we see also that in this baby is someone way beyond humanity, a baby boy who is the destination of a star’s journey, worshiped by far away pagan astrologers that followed the star. Matthew has already cited Isaiah, Micah, and Hosea as prophets pointing to this not yet two-year old boy. That tells us he is a boy of destiny and purpose. He is a boy sent by God to do God’s work because he is qualified and equipped to do God’s work. He is the divine man for the divine mission.

Leaping forward 30 years, we move from the Epiphany of our Lord to His Baptism, we see that this Divine Boy is now the Divine Man. And He is about to start His divine mission: *“to redeem those who were under law”*.

Now John had just been baptizing a lot of people under the law that needed redeeming. They came to him in repentance, undergoing the baptism of John, a Jewish purification ritual. It was in anticipation of the One whose death and resurrection would truly purify them by taking from them the guilt and punishment of their sins.

Although John is aware of what Jesus has come to do, he is still amazed that Jesus also comes to be baptized by him, as if he is in need of repentance and purification. John knows that he needs Jesus’ to baptize him. But this is another step toward fulfilling the divine mission of redeeming those under the law. If he is to take their punishment, then he has to assume their guilt.

Isaiah wrote, *we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* (53:6) Jesus tells John that he must be baptized to fulfill all righteousness. Paul told the Corinthians, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (2 Cor. 5:21) In Him we have righteousness credited to us by faith.

At the Jordan, Jesus continues his mission to become our substitute. He had taken on human form in Bethlehem. Now he assumes human failings which he will pay for on the cross and conquer by his resurrection. God wanted all to know that the God who became man in a manger was still fully God. So He sent His Spirit to set him apart for his divine mission. Then He audibly revealed the divine identity of the Christ whom he was sending on his divine mission. *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*

What do we take away from this? Our salvation is all God’s work. For God knows that just as you can’t send a boy to do a man’s job, you can’t send a sinner to do the Savior’s work. He sent the only one who could do it. The divine man, God in the flesh. So the job is complete and needs no improvement or tweaking from us. Our sins are thoroughly forgiven. God sent the One divine man for His one divine mission: and that mission was to save you and me for all eternity. Rejoice and believe. Amen.