



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 3:21-38  
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## Are You Credentialed?

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

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About four years ago, George O'Leary resigned as Notre Dame football coach five days after being hired. O'Leary had claimed he earned a master's degree in education from New York University in 1972 and to have played college football at the University of New Hampshire for three years, but checks into his background showed it wasn't true. O'Leary never earned a letter playing football at New Hampshire even though his biography says he earned three. In fact, the school said he never played in a game. And although he was a student NY University, O'Leary never earned a degree there as stated on his resumé.

It's the kind of thing we hear about a lot. It's about false credentials. Most of the time, if you're trying to get a job, you need to have the credentials, and you typically write those on a resumé. Perhaps it's a degree. Or sometimes it's a certain kind or amount or kind of experience. It might even be who you know.

The issue of authentication comes up in the spiritual realm as well. What gives me the right to stand up here and teach the Scriptures? Is it my degrees? Is it my experience? Is it my ordination? I recall when Ray Stedman came to preach at my ordination. The first thing he did was comment on how strange it was that he was asked to do that since he himself had never been ordained! I wonder how many people there that afternoon had a hard time with that?

Scripture says that each of us is called to be an ambassador for Christ. That means we represent him. This world is not our home. Our citizenship is in heaven, but we're on assignment. Our King has sent us here to speak for him and act on his behalf. But what is it that really authenticates us as his ambassadors? How do we show our credentials?

This is an issue that even Jesus faced. We're studying the gospel of Luke. In Luke 4 Jesus was in his hometown in Nazareth. He stood up in the synagogue on the Sabbath and claimed to be the Son of God. But the people of Nazareth heard that and said, "Wait a minute, we know this guy. He lived here for 30 years. Isn't he the carpenter? Isn't he Joseph's son? Why should we believe him?" The same issue

came up when Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. One of the things the devil said to him out there was, "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread." Notice the challenge: "*If you're the Son of God...*" In other words, "How do I know you're God's Son? How do you even know it? Prove it; show me your stuff; authenticate yourself."

### I. Jesus is baptized and the heavens are opened.

That's why the baptism of Jesus is so significant. Last week we saw how John's ministry prepared the way for Jesus. John preached about repentance. He invited people to be baptized as sign of change. Submitting to baptism was a way of saying, "I'm dirty. I need a bath. I need forgiveness. I want to change my ways."

So it was so shocking for Jesus to emerge from the throng of people and offer himself to John for baptism. In 3:21 Luke writes, "**Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized...**" This is like Tom Brady, QB for the Patriots, coming to a Pop Warner practice and asking for instruction from a 12 year old QB. This is like Mother Theresa approaching Jessica Simpson for lessons on charity. This is Jesus, the one who had no sin but who came to save us from our sins. But how would he do that? Here we get our first big hint. He would do that by somehow identifying with us. He would somehow take our sin upon himself. His baptism was a shadow of the cross. To save sinners, he would need to identify with them. He would take our debt and make it his own. Then, through the cross, he would pay it off in full.

What's interesting about Luke's account of this is that he downplays the act of Jesus' baptism in order to highlight what happened subsequent to his baptism. He says nothing about John or the conversation that took place between John and Jesus. For him the important thing was not what John did, or even what Jesus did, but what God did. Look again at v. 21. It says that "**while he was praying, heaven was opened.**" The significant thing to Luke about the baptism was not the baptism but the fact that the heavens opened! I don't know what

that even looked like or how people would have known it was happening. But I do know what that means. The prophet Isaiah once cried out, **“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down...”** (Isa 64:1). Well, here is the answer to his prayer! The heavens are now ripped apart, the curtain is pulled back, and God is making an appearance.

By the way, notice all this happened as Jesus was praying. Throughout Luke, Jesus is seen praying. Before he chooses his disciples, he prays (6:12). Before he reveals to his disciples that he came to die on the cross, he prays (9:18). The transfiguration takes place on the mountain while he prays (9:28). Before his arrest, he goes into the garden of Gethsemane and prays (22:41). Prayer was not an afterthought for Jesus, it was the mainstay of his life, as it should be of ours.

What happened next is what we can call the authentication of Jesus by God the Father. Some have seen this as Jesus' calling to public ministry. Occasionally, I get asked about this issue of calling. People want to know, how can they know if they're called to ministry? Once again, we're back at this question of authentication. It was at his baptism that Jesus' call to be the Savior of the world was authenticated. But what about us? How are we authenticated? What gives us the right to act as God's ambassadors? What gives us the right to speak for God?

## **II. The authentication of Jesus and his followers.**

**A. By an endowment with the Spirit:** Verse 22 says that after the heavens opened **“the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.”** Jesus is authenticated, first of all, by his endowment with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit came down in a way every one could see—in bodily form like a dove. Of course, we read that and think, “How wonderful. A dove. A sign of peace.” But, as far as I can tell, the dove wasn't really a symbol of peace in Jesus' day. They were even used along with pigeons for bloody sacrifices! We should probably think back to Genesis 1:2, where the Spirit of God is said to hover over the waters of creation. The Jews likened the hovering of the Spirit over the waters at creation to the fluttering of a dove. So the dove at the baptism may mean that Jesus is ushering in a new creation. That's why when he preached he would said, “The kingdom of God is here.” A new day; a new creation has dawned with the coming of Jesus and the Spirit is bearing witness to that. From now on, the Holy Spirit will

mark his ministry. You can see that just by looking over at chapter 4. In 4:1 it says that Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was led into the wilderness. Then in 4:14 it says that he returned to Galilee **“in the power of the Spirit.”** And then in 4:18 when he stands up for his first sermon in Nazareth he starts out by saying, **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...”**

Jesus was endowed with the Spirit. But we also know that he would endow us with the Holy Spirit. Some of his last words to his disciples before he returned to heaven were “Wait here in Jerusalem until I send the Spirit. When he comes you'll receive power and you'll be my witnesses...” (cf. Acts 1:4,8). They waited and the Spirit fell. The rest of the book of Acts shows how the Spirit worked through them. Generations of believers since that time are given the gift of the Holy Spirit when they come to faith. In Ephesians Paul writes, **“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance...”** (Eph. 1:13-14). There is no hocus pocus involved in receiving the Spirit. It happens instantaneously when we believe.

I was watching the news on Friday evening and saw President Bush at the prayer service that was held after his inaugural. Billy Graham spoke. And then they passed the offering plates around. When the plate came to President Bush and his wife it was clear that they weren't really prepared. He didn't have money on him. His aides scrambled. He looked a little embarrassed—until a hand gently reached over his shoulder from the pew behind him with some cash to put in the plate. A relieved President took the cash and put it in the plate. The funny thing is that the hand over his shoulder was that of his father. Some things never change.

It struck me that that is a great picture of you and me. As we try to make a difference for Christ, we face things that we're not prepared for. We don't have what it takes. Sometimes we scramble to find an answer. But right at our moment of need, God the Father gently reaches over our shoulder and offers us the Holy Spirit. Actually, first he endowed his Son, and then his Son endows us. One thing is for sure, without the Holy Spirit our pockets are empty; we have nothing to really offer. His help comes only in our need. We must empty ourselves to receive his help.

What's true of individuals is also true of churches. Without the Spirit we as a church are empty-handed. We don't have what it takes. We've talked about our vision to impact enough lives for Christ here on the Peninsula that we would be

forced to start a new church in five years. That should make all of us gulp! But that's good! We don't have what it takes. But God reaches over our shoulder and gives us his Spirit in our need; he endows us with everything we need to fulfill that vision.

On a resumé, you normally put down something about your talents; what you bring to the table in terms of ability. Well, this is what Jesus brings to the table and through him what we bring—the creative power of the Spirit. The One who fluttered over the waters of creation has landed on the man from Galilee, but he has also landed on us!

**B. By an endorsement from the Father:** But you also need an endorsement. You need to put a name down on that resumé that will impress everyone, someone who will say of you, "He's good. He's got what it takes. I recommend him." And in a way, we need to know that too. We need to know that someone feels that way about us.

Apparently, Jesus needed to know that as well. Because in the second part of v. 22 it says that **"a voice came out of heaven, 'You are my beloved Son, in you I am well-pleased.'**" I don't know what God sounded like. He probably had a British accent. I don't even know what language he spoke, but I do know that this is heavenly endorsement! God the Father is saying, "You're my Son. I love you. I'm delighted with you."

Every Jew would have recognized in these words echoes from the OT Scripture. In Psalm 2:7, at the coronation of the King of Israel, God says to the King, **"You are my Son, today I have begotten you."** And then in the book of Isaiah, God says, **"Behold, my Servant, whom I uphold; my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations"** (Isa 42:1). So in these words God is saying Jesus is both sovereign King and suffering Servant. He's the one you've been waiting for. That's quite an endorsement.

But what about us? When God the Father said to his Son, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well-pleased," he also says this to us who are in his Son. I've always been struck by the fact that the Father said this to Jesus before he healed one single person, preached one single sermon, or even went to the cross. God affirms him BEFORE he did all of that. Apart from any works on our part, he affirms us as his beloved.

Do you know that he is well-pleased with you? Do you really believe that? How much do you love your son or daughter? Why do you love them? Because they do the right things? Or just because they're your son or daughter? Most of us live with a lingering feeling that we're a disappointment to God. We see so

many flaws and inconsistencies in our own life. How could he not be disappointed?

Mary Anne Bird was born with a cleft palate. When she started school her classmates wouldn't let her forget her misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth, and garbled speech. When classmates asked her what had happened to her lip she told them she had fallen and cut her lip on some glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born that way. She was convinced that no one besides her family could ever love her. But her 2nd grade teacher, Mrs. Leonard, was different, and Mary Anne adored her. Mary Anne remembers, "Each year we had a hearing test. Mrs. Leonard gave the test to everyone in the class, and finally it was my turn. I knew from past years that as we stood against the door and covered one ear, the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something, and we would have to repeat it back—things like "The sky is blue" or "Do you have new shoes?" I waited there for those words that God must have put into her mouth, those seven words that changed my life. Mrs. Leonard said in her whisper, "I wish you were my little girl."

You see, every one of us has been deformed by sin, yet to us who cling to his Son, he says, "You are my beloved daughter. You are my beloved Son. With you I am well-pleased." And armed with his approval, we can go out and make a difference in the world, as Jesus did.

**C. By an extraction from Adam:** That should be enough. But it's not. Right after the baptism of Jesus Luke pauses and gives us a little family history. You won't find the next 15 verses embroidered on many plaques and hanging on living room walls! In vv. 23-38 we have the genealogy of Jesus. Luke starts it with these words in v.23, **"When he began his ministry, Jesus himself was about 30 years old, being as was supposed the son of Joseph..."** He says, "as was supposed," because of the virgin birth. He also says Jesus was 30. In the OT it wasn't until age 30 that a priest could begin to serve God. And it was at age 30 that King David began his reign. It's normal then that Jesus would start at 30.

Then he goes on and traces Jesus ancestry through David and Abraham, all the way back, not just to Adam, but to God himself! Pick it up in v.38, **"...the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God."** So we have 77 names between Jesus, the Son of God, and Adam, the son of God. So what? This seems to us like a lot of

needless information. But this is the Word of God. It's interesting that in Matthew's gospel there is another genealogy of Jesus. That one starts with Abraham and moves forward through King David to Jesus. Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience and he wanted to prove that Jesus was part of the royal line. But Luke goes all the way back to Adam. Remember Luke wrote for non-Jews. Some people might say, "Well, he just came for his own little subset of humanity. He just came for the Jews." With that in mind, Luke wants to show that Jesus is related not just to Jews but to all people everywhere, because we all come from Adam. He is a universal Savior. That's another credential. Put that on his resumé, too.

What about us? What kind of family line do we have? All of us are sons of Adam, too. Adam was a perfect man created in the image of God. But in his freedom Adam fell into sin, which like a domino effect caused all of us to fall as well. No one since Adam has ever been born with that perfect image. No one except Jesus. He's the new Adam. He's the head of a new race. When we trust him as our Savior, we're adopted into his family, and we can trace our spiritual lineage to him.

Where do you look for your sense of identity? Is it from your family line? Martha Taft, great-granddaughter of William Howard Taft, the 27th President, had an interesting way of introducing herself when she was a schoolgirl in Ohio. She would say, "My great-grandfather was President of the United States. My grandfather was United States Senator. My daddy is ambassador to Ireland. And I am a Brownie." Most of us don't have those kind of credentials, but even if we do, how much better to be able to say, "I am related to Jesus Christ, and through him I'm a child of God."

We rely on so many false props for our sense of identity. What do you depend on? Your education? Your line of work? Your level of prosperity? Your politics? Your marital status? Your volunteerism? The clubs you belong to? The people you know? The people who know you? The books you've read? The trips you've taken? Our culture and our flesh say that's what it's all about. That's who you are. But the word says, "No! This is who you are. You're endowed with the Spirit, endorsed by the father, and extracted from the Son."

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