

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 4, Title: The Childhood and Youth of Jesus Section 1 WHO APPEARED TO JOSEPH IN A DREAM?

"And he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene' " (Matthew 2:23). The town of Nazareth where Jesus spent His childhood and youth is about seventy miles north of Jerusalem. It is situated on a large hill (see Luke 4:29) overlooking the Plain of Esdraelon with the beautiful Carmel mountains and the Mediterranean Sea in the distance. Its modern name is Al-Nasira. The Christians of Palestine are still known as Al-Nasara. Not much is recorded in the New Testament about Jesus' early years at Nazareth, but the Gospel writers give us a few clues that are all we need. In lesson 2 Jesus was being taken by His parents into Egypt just in time to escape death at the command of King Herod. Let's now join them in the land of the Nile as they wait for some divine sign that they should return to Palestine.

WHO APPEARED TO JOSEPH IN A DREAM? "After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead' " (Matthew 2:19, 20). When Joseph learned that Herod was dead, he immediately made plans to return to his homeland. He and Mary gathered together their few possessions and, with the young child, started the journey back to Palestine. As we watch them traveling over the caravan trails, we see that the parents are thinking and talking about the future; the safety and welfare of the wonderful Child entrusted to their care is their greatest concern. The return of the family from Egypt had been foreshadowed centuries before Christ was born. "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1), God had declared through His prophet (see Matthew 2:13-15). He did not forget His Son in Egypt, nor the earthly parents of that holy child. At just the right moment the angel spoke to Joseph in a dream, telling him that King Herod was dead and that the time had come for them to return to Palestine.

To What Place Did Joseph And His Family Return? As they journeyed homeward to Palestine, a second message came to Joseph, warning him to avoid the province of Judea and go north to Galilee. "So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee" (Matthew 2:21, 22). Joseph had planned to return to Bethlehem in the province of Judea, for that was his ancestral city (see Luke 2:1-4), but when he heard that Archelaus, the villainous son of Herod, sat on the throne, he went north "to the district of Galilee." This was familiar country, for he and Mary had lived in Nazareth of Galilee before the birth of Jesus. So they returned to "their own town of Nazareth" (Luke 2:39). Matthew tells us that "he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene' " (Matthew 2:23).

The Child Grows In Stature And Wisdom: When Joseph and Mary arrived at Nazareth, they must have felt as we do today when returning home after a long, hard journey. They were glad to be back! Joseph, being a carpenter, turned his attention to his shop and tools, while Mary applied herself to the joyful task of caring for her simple, little home and the young child Jesus. "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). Jesus passed from infancy to childhood as any normal child would. His mind was active; He was thoughtful and wise, patient and courteous, true to principle, loyal to God, and obedient to His parents. He had a pleasant disposition and a spotless character. Although Nazareth was a traders' town and notorious for its wickedness, Jesus was not influenced by the sin all about Him. He was alarmed as He saw men openly transgress the laws of God, and He determined that, as far as He was concerned, He would rather die than violate His conscience. So He committed Himself fully to God and to a life of righteousness. Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 4, Title: The Childhood and Youth of Jesus Section 2 DID JESUS RECEIVE A FORMAL EDUCATION?

During His ministry, the question was asked concerning Jesus: "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" (John 7:15). Christ received no formal education in the rabbinical schools, yet during His lifetime He acquired a general knowledge and wisdom that made Him the world's greatest teacher. His mother was His first human instructor, and from her lips He learned the will of God through the Old Testament Scriptures. And Jesus was a student of nature. The country around Nazareth was rugged and beautiful. He breathed the pure air and basked in the warm sunshine that fell on the mountain meadows. Through God's vast creation, Jesus learned of the heavenly Father's power, wisdom, and love. As He studied, He stored this knowledge in His heart to be used later when He would begin His public work. The education that Jesus received in this way was of greater value than the traditions and human philosophy taught in the synagogue schools.

Dean Farrar makes this observation: The language which our Lord . . . spoke was Aramaic; and at that period Hebrew was completely a dead language, known only to the more educated, and only to be acquired by labor: yet it is clear that Jesus was acquainted with it, for some of his Scriptural quotations directly refer to the Hebrew original. Greek, too, he must have known, for it was currently spoken in towns so near his home as . . . Caesarea and Tiberias. . . . Whether he was acquainted with Latin is much more doubtful, though not impossible (The Life of Christ, page 48).

WHAT TRIP DID JESUS MAKE WHEN TWELVE YEARS OLD? At the age of twelve, Jesus joined His parents in a never-to-be-forgotten visit to Jerusalem. "Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom" (Luke 2:41, 42). Think of how Jesus must have felt making His first trip to the big city so far away from Nazareth. Having passed from childhood into youth, He now wore a different kind of clothes and had greater responsibilities. At the age of twelve, a Hebrew boy was called "a son of the law" and also "a son of God." The Passover was one of the three annual religious festivals of the Jews and was well attended. Peasants and noblemen, princes and servants, all joined in the procession that approached Jerusalem from all directions. Mary and Joseph were accustomed to attending the Passover feast every year, so when Jesus reached the age of twelve He was allowed to go with them. This trip to Jerusalem is the only event recorded in the life of Christ from the time of His return from Egypt until His baptism at the age of thirty.

And what was the significance of the Passover? This feast of the Jews, which lasted about a week, was a commemorative event. Its celebration every year reminded the people of God's deliverance of their nation from Egyptian slavery (see Exodus 12). Like the Independence Day celebrated in many countries, the Passover festival represented Israel's emancipation from Egyptian bondage. On the night that the children of Israel left Egypt and began their long journey to Canaan, a divine judgment fell upon the Egyptians—the slaying of the firstborn. God's people were instructed to sprinkle the doorposts of their dwellings with the blood of a slain lamb. Then, when the destroying angel passed over and saw the sign of the blood, the firstborn within was safe. Death struck only those homes where there was no blood. This blood was symbolic of the sacrificial blood of Christ, which would be shed to deliver us from sin. He was the true Lamb of God. And those who believe "shall . . . be saved from God's wrath through him" (Romans 5:9). The Lamb, after it was roasted, was to be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. "This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover" (Exodus 12:11). So Israel was spared through the mercy of God and left Egypt an independent nation. Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 4, Title: The Childhood and Youth of Jesus Section 3 JESUS SEPARATED FROM HIS PARENTS

For about a week Jesus and His parents joined with the worshipers in the Passover celebration. Then the time came for them to return to Nazareth. "After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day" (Luke 2:43, 44). Why do you suppose Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem? He must have been fascinated by the Passover services in the temple. At least, He did not remain with His parents, whose minds were perhaps occupied more with the ceremonies themselves than with their meaning. We can imagine that as Jesus saw the Passover lamb sacrificed by the priest, the significance of the ceremony began to dawn upon His mind. He, Himself, was represented by the slain lamb. Probably for the first time His work as humanity's Savior began to open before Him.

Later, when Jesus began His public ministry, John the Baptist referred to Him as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This has meaning to us because, as Peter later said: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18, 19). After leaving Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary discovered that Jesus was not with them. "Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him" (Luke 2:44, 45). Can you imagine the thoughts that raced through their minds? At the birth of the Christ child, Herod had tried to kill Him, and no doubt they thought that He might have been destroyed now by some enemy of God. Frightened at the possibility, they retraced their steps and began to look for Him everywhere. Their hearts were filled with foreboding, and they were angry with themselves for having been so occupied with friends and the pleasures of the occasion that they had lost sight of their precious Son.

WHERE WAS JESUS FOUND? Finally, after a long search, Jesus' parents found Him in the temple school, where He was discussing religion with the rabbis. "After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:46, 47). When the rabbis questioned Jesus, His brilliant answers amazed them. Could it be that He, in turn, questioned those scholarly men about the Old Testament prophecies that pointed to the sufferings and death of the Lamb of God? (See Isaiah 53.) The Jews were expecting the Messiah to come and free them from the Romans. Jesus doubtless directed their minds to the words of the prophets which describe the humility and sacrifice of the world's Redeemer.

When Joseph and Mary found Jesus in the temple school, they reprimanded him: "When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.' 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he was saying to them" (Luke 2:48-50). These are the first recorded words of Christ—"I had to be in my Father's house." God was His Father, and He was faithfully attending to His Father's business. But Mary and Joseph had neglected their duty as protectors of the young Jesus and therefore had lost him. What a lesson for us! The reason we lose the Light of life from our lives is that we do not take time to be alone with God. How many there are who make the mistake of assuming that a mere round of ceremonies constitutes religion and that secret communion with God is unimportant. But such mechanical worship is not acceptable to Him. True religion means fellowship with the Creator. It touches the heart and changes the life. If we will make it a practice to pray and read the Bible every

day—not just one day a week—we will have Jesus with us to brighten every step of the way. It is our sincere desire that these lessons will help make religion a living, personal experience for you.. Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 4, Title: The Childhood and Youth of Jesus Section 4 To What Place Did The Reunited Family Return?

"Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51). The return journey to Nazareth was uneventful. For eighteen years after this Passover visit, Jesus applied Himself to the task of preparing for His ministry. His training was not acquired, however, in a parochial school or a theological seminary. By faithfully discharging the duties of a son, a workman, and a citizen, by studying the Scriptures with His godly mother and learning lessons from the book of nature, He acquired an understanding of truth that fitted Him for His mission in the world.

IN WHAT FOURFOLD WAY DID JESUS DEVELOP? The Bible describes the youthful development of Jesus in a few simple but meaningful words: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). He grew intellectually ("wisdom"), physically ("stature"), spiritually ("in favor with God"), socially ("and man"). In this text, we have the only clue to the life of Jesus during the eighteen years between the Passover visit to Jerusalem when He was twelve, and His baptism in the Jordan River when He was about thirty (see Luke 3:23), but the following facts are obvious:

1. The parents of Jesus were poor. Jesus understood the meaning of humility and self-sacrifice. He had to work hard to help Joseph make a living for the family. His was an industrious life, and there were no idle moments to indulge in the pleasures of sin.
2. Nazareth was a wicked place. The world's Redeemer was not reared in what we would call a church town. The inhabitants of Nazareth were notorious for their wickedness. This is proved by the proverbial saying, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46). But Jesus came out of Nazareth—and He was good. This shows that it is possible by God's grace to live a blameless life in the midst of temptation, poverty, and adversity. In fact, these things aid in developing a righteous character.
3. Jesus was an obedient son. Concerning Jesus' attitude toward His parents, the Scripture says that He "was obedient to them" (Luke 2:51). Just think! He had been the Commander of heaven. The angels had found their keenest delight in obeying His will. But now He was a humble youth in a small village, subject to His earthly parents. He worked in a carpenter shop and learned a trade (see Mark 6:3). His dress was that of the common laborer. Though He was divine, He did not draw upon His supernatural power to lighten the load that He carried as a man.
4. Jesus was a perfect workman. In every way Christ was a perfect man. Not only was He perfect in physical form and character, but He did perfect work as a carpenter. No slovenliness or carelessness was seen in His workmanship. His hands were calloused, and His muscles firm and solid. His example is a lesson to the world that physical labor is honorable. It teaches that carpenters and farmers and housewives who are faithful in their everyday duties are honored of heaven.
5. Jesus was a pattern for youth. There would be no juvenile delinquency if all the young people today would follow the example of Jesus. In His home life, He set the example for all children and youth to follow. He taught that humble work is a blessing and that labor is intended for man's good.

One of the most important lessons we can learn from Jesus' hidden years at Nazareth is that a truly great man is always humble. J. Whitcomb Brougner said: True greatness can be humble without loss of power or dignity. Jesus stooped to conquer. The extreme simplicity of Christ's conduct is as difficult to follow as is the greatness of his character. How simply, and how beautifully, does the character of Jesus shine out in all the splendor of his humble service to mankind... Real greatness rejoices in the privilege of doing little things for the good of others. (Treasury of the Christian Faith), page 383. Get acquainted with Jesus.

Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 5, Title: The Baptism of Jesus
Section 1 Jesus Presents Himself To John

"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan" (Mark 1:9). When we last saw Jesus, He was busy at the carpenter's bench in Nazareth. During the eighteen years from His Passover visit to Jerusalem until the time of His baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus performed the ordinary work of a craftsman. In this lesson, we see how He laid aside His hammer and saw and began an entirely new phase of His life. News had reached Nazareth of the great revival caused by the preaching of John the Baptist. This was the prophetic signal (see Isaiah 40:3-5) for Jesus to say goodbye to His mother and make His way with the crowds that were traveling southward to the Jordan. The time had come for Him to begin His public ministry and, as God's spokesman, to announce to Israel the good news of His kingdom!

JESUS PRESENTS HIMSELF TO JOHN: The Scriptures state that Jesus came to the Jordan "to be baptized by John" (Matthew 3:13). That was the immediate reason for His journey from Nazareth. "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John" (Matthew 3:13). Jesus was not baptized because He was a sinner. He was uncorrupted by the sins of Nazareth. He was "holy, blameless, pure" (Hebrews 7:26). He sought baptism because He wished to identify Himself with men and women and to set an example for all to follow. Although we do not know the exact spot where Jesus was baptized, we do know that this important event in His life took place in the Jordan River not too far from the city of Jericho, where John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing. In the original Greek language of the New Testament, the expression "in the Jordan" (Mark 1:9) reads "into the Jordan." So we see that John took Jesus out into the waters of the Jordan River to be baptized. "Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old" (Luke 3:23) at the time of His baptism. Thirty years from the time of His birth in 4 B.C. would bring us to A.D. 27, the year that Jesus was baptized.

WHO WAS JOHN THE BAPTIST? John the Baptist, or Baptizer, was the forerunner of Christ and was the first to announce Jesus' coming kingdom. He was a mighty preacher of righteousness, and the nation of Israel was stirred by his threefold message. He preached repentance, the arrival of Christ as the Messiah, and that the kingdom of God was at hand. Centuries before, Isaiah had prophesied that John would come and do this work. The prophet spoke of him as: "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord'" (Isaiah 40:3). John's work made it easier for Christ to gain the attention of the multitudes and attract them to His wonderful teachings. Being a man of strong personality and filled with the Spirit, John the Baptist made a powerful impression upon the people. His dress was of camel's hair, his diet simple. He rebuked sin and taught the truth in plain, easily understood language.

John's birth was a miracle, but he worked no miracles (see John 10:41). Zechariah, his father, and Elizabeth, his mother, were both elderly at the time of his birth (see Luke 1:5-25, 36, 37). Elizabeth and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were cousins, and John was born six months prior to the birth of Jesus (see Luke 1:26-40, 56, 57). Apparently, John and Jesus never became acquainted until the time of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. John was reared in the silent hills of Judea, many miles to the south of Nazareth of Galilee, where Jesus spent His early life.

JOHN HESITATES TO BAPTIZE JESUS When Jesus requested John to baptize Him, the prophet was doubtful that he was qualified to perform that sacred rite. Never before had John perceived such purity in any human being. The atmosphere about Jesus was awe inspiring, and John felt himself to be a sinner in the presence of this Holy One. The Holy Spirit impressed him that He who stood before him was the Son of God. How could he baptize the Sinless One? And why should Jesus request baptism? He had no sins to mar His record. There was no stain of iniquity upon His soul. So John, in his humility, suggested that the process be reversed and that Jesus baptize him. The Scripture reads: "But John tried to

deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John consented" (Matthew 3:14, 15). So Jesus was baptized by John. As we study Christ's life, we see that every act was filled with significance. His baptism was intended to teach the lesson that all who believe in Him should be baptized as He was. Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 5, Title: The Baptism of Jesus
Section 2 WHAT SIGNS MARKED JESUS' BAPTISM?

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him" (Matthew 3:16). The Spirit of God in the form of a dove rested upon Christ immediately after He came up "out of the water." In this way, the heavenly Father anointed His Son for service. Now Christ would be able to accomplish His work of building God's kingdom of righteousness in the hearts of men and women. With the Spirit's presence, He could discharge His mission as mankind's Redeemer. And He could also, as John said, "baptize . . . with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8). Christ later made the promise, which was fulfilled at Pentecost, that all who receive him as Lord and Savior would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (see John 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-11).

Immediately after the Spirit fell upon Christ, the Father gave another token of His divine relationship to him: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:17). Jesus recognized the approving voice of His Father in the words, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Christ was now about to enter upon His public ministry. The spiritual kingdom that He had come to establish was not the kind of kingdom the people were looking for. They were expecting a political Messiah to deliver them from Roman bondage. Many would be disillusioned by His preaching and teaching. There were great conflicts ahead for the Savior, and the heavenly Father wanted to encourage and strengthen His Son to press forward in His work—hence the Spirit's presence and the voice of God's approval. The Man whom John had baptized was indeed the Messiah, the Hope of Israel, and the Light of the world.

JOHN ACKNOWLEDGES THE MESSIAH These events led John to express his convictions about Christ as follows: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." (John 1:32-34). John discerned the Spirit of God resting in dove-like form upon Christ. He also heard the voice of the Father speaking from heaven, acknowledging Jesus to be His Son. By these two signs John recognized the identity of Jesus as the Messiah whose coming he had been preaching. He knew that it was the world's Redeemer whom he had baptized. His faith was expressed in his open declaration to the people: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). These words of John the Baptist prepared the way for many to accept Jesus as the Messiah, or Anointed One (see Acts 10:38). Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).

From the Pastor's desk: Greetings to you brothers and sisters: Lesson 5, Title: The Baptism of Jesus
Section 3 CLOSING DAYS OF JOHN'S MINISTRY

During the months that immediately followed the baptism and temptation of Christ, the multitudes in Judea turned away from John and fixed their attention upon the One to whom he had directed them as the Son of God. The crowds who followed John became smaller and smaller, but the people flocked to hear Christ. Many openly acknowledged their loyalty to Jesus after hearing Him preach. The disciples of John were troubled about this and complained to him. They looked with jealousy upon Christ and made it known to the Baptist that they did not appreciate the work Jesus was doing. Here is the record: "Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. . . . They [John's disciples] came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him' (John 3:23, 26).

John was not troubled by their complaints, but rejoiced in the Savior's popularity. "To this John replied, 'A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, "I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him." The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less' " (John 3:27-30).

John represented himself to his disciples as the best man at a wedding. Such a person helps to prepare for the marriage and the feast that follows. In this illustration, John pointed to Christ as the groom and to the church as the bride. It was John's work to bring Christ and the church together in the closest relationship. The Baptist had been called to direct the people to Jesus, and it was his pleasure to witness the success of the Savior's work. "That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater, and I must become less."

What a lesson we can learn from John's humility! By nature he was a forceful and rugged character, but he was willing to put Christ first. Jesus later paid this tribute to John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7:24-28).

Dean Farrar, a distinguished Christian writer, said: The nature of St. John the Baptist was full of impetuosity and fire. The long struggle which had given him so powerful a mastery over himself—which had made him content with self obliteration before the presence of his Lord—which had inspired him with fearlessness in the face of danger, and humility in the midst of applause—had left its traces in the stern character and aspect and teaching of the man. . . . His very teaching reflected the imagery of the wilderness—the rock, the serpent, the barren tree. "In his manifestation and agency," it has been said, "he was like a burning torch; his public life was quite an earthquake—the whole man was a sermon; he might well call himself a voice—the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord" (Life of Christ), page 57.

Some time after the baptism of Jesus, John was imprisoned by Herod the Tetrarch, an evil ruler. The historian, Flavius Josephus, tells us that John's imprisonment was in the fortress of Machaerus, near the north end of the Dead Sea. John had rebuked Herod's adulterous life, and he paid for his fearless act with his life. But in the face of death John received a cheering message from Jesus (see Matthew 14:1-12; 11:2-6). In the death of John, Jesus must have seen a token of the gathering tempest that was to grow darker and more violent until He Himself would be crucified upon the cross. The same hatred of righteousness

and truth that caused the wicked Herod to take the head of John the Baptist was responsible later for the cruel death of Jesus. Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).

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Section 4 BAPTISM A CHRISTIAN ORDINANCE

Not long after His baptism, Jesus began to gather about Him a group of twelve men who became His disciples.

Later, He ordained them, and they baptized as John had (see John 3:22; 4:2). Thus Christ set His approval on the Baptist's work. After His death and resurrection, Jesus gave this special group—His disciples—the command to go into all the world and make disciples, first teaching, and then baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:18-20). Only those who accepted the lordship of Jesus, His words and teachings and saving power, and who gave evidence of repentance, were to be baptized. That command of Christ is still in force today and will be until the end of the world. Here are His words: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . . . And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAPTISM?

Baptism represents a threefold experience in the Christian life—death, burial, and resurrection. Paul said:

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3, 4).

To be buried with Christ in baptism signifies: (1) death to the selfish, carnal nature, (2) a spiritual resurrection—living "a new life," and (3) the consent of the mind and heart to follow the example of Jesus in all things that He commands. As we think about these three facts, it becomes clear that immersion perfectly represents this experience of death, burial and resurrection to a new life. Our English word baptize comes from a Greek word which means "to dip" or "to immerse."

Before one is baptized as a follower of Christ, he ought to know what the Bible teaches so that his belief can be intelligent. He ought also to know in whom he believes. A mere profession of Christianity will save no one, even if he is baptized. Christianity is a life, not simply a religious philosophy. That life is Christ's life, which through the gospel is to be reproduced in the Christian. You, too, may live that life through faith in Jesus as your personal Savior.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. . . . As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame' " (Romans 10:9, 11).

God acknowledges as His sons and daughters all who are baptized as Jesus was, with an intelligent understanding of the meaning of baptism and a true heart experience with God. To all who would follow the Lord in baptism, the following promise is made:

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Then God's word is fulfilled:

"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

When an old Christian, who had experienced much joy in his life, was asked about the happiest day of his life, he said, "It was the day on which I was baptized."

A few of the New Testament characters who followed their Lord in baptism are: the believers at Pentecost (see Acts 2:41), the converts in Samaria (see Acts 8:12), the Ethiopian eunuch (see Acts 8:38), Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the apostle (see Acts 9:18), the believers at

Corinth (see Acts 18:8), the disciples at Ephesus (see Acts 19:1-5), and the household of Stephanas (see 1 Corinthians 1:16).

May we all show the willing spirit of the Ethiopian eunuch, who said:

" 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?' Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The eunuch answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him" (Acts 8:36-38, margin). Compiled by Pastor Obadiah M Ngwenya Byo City Center Pastor).