**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MATTHEW-008. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"13. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. 14. But John forbad Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? 15. And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him. 16. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: 17. And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

*Matthew 3:13-17*

When Jesus set out from Galilee to seek baptism from John, He took the first step on His path of public work; and it is noteworthy that He took it, apparently, from self-originated impulse, and not, as in the case of the prophets of old, from obedience to a prophetic call. The Word of the Lord came to them; His Messianic consciousness needed no external stimulus to kindle it into flame. What did He mean by seeking baptism? John recognised the incongruity of His submitting to a rite which professed repentance and promised cleansing. It does not follow that John recognised His Messianic character, but only that he knew His blameless life. The remonstrance witnesses at once to John's humble consciousness of sin and to Jesus acknowledged purity. Christ's answer has a sound of authority, even in its gentle lowliness, and it confirms the belief in His sinlessness by the absence of any reference to repentance, and by regarding His baptism, not as a token of repented transgression to be washed away, but as an act which completed the perfect circle of righteousness, which His life had hitherto drawn. He submitted to the appointed rite, because He would be one with His brethren in all obedience. So, then, the principle underlying His baptism is the principle underlying His incarnation, His life of obedience and identification of Himself with us, and His death. He also Himself likewise took part of whatsoever His brethren were partakers of, and therefore He was numbered with the transgressors in that, needing no repentance, He submitted to the baptism of repentance, and cleansed the cleansing water by being plunged in it.

What was the significance of the descent of the Spirit on Him? Matthew's account implies that the appearance of the descending dove was to Jesus. John 1:32 states that it was also visible to John. The accompanying voice is as if principally directed to John, according to Matthew, while Mark and Luke represent it as addressed to Jesus. Both appearance and voice were the tokens of the Father's approval, and acceptance of the Son's consecration of Himself to the Messianic work. The dove descending on Him was the token that henceforward His manhood should be anointed with the unbroken influences of the divine Spirit, and possess the unbroken consciousness of the Father's good pleasure, lying like sunshine on the stormy sea on which He had launched. How different the conception of the Spirit as a dove, which was Jesus experience of it, from the Baptist's, which was that of fire! Jesus is in this incident, as in all, our pattern and example, teaching us that we too must yield ourselves to do the Father's will, and must identify ourselves with sinners, if we are to help them and to have the Father's approval sounding in our hearts, and the dove of God nestling there, and teaching us, too, that gentleness is the divinest and strongest power to win men from evil and for God.