

*DATE: January 10, 2021*

*SCRIPTURE: Luke 3:1-22*

*TITLE: The Baptism of Christ*

## Luke 3:1-22 The baptism of Christ

Cotton Mather was one of the most influential Christian thinkers in colonial America. He was the son and grandson of prominent Puritan preachers, but outshined his ancestors in no small part due to the popularity of his 1706 pamphlet *The Negro Christianized*. In this pamphlet, Mather argued with a veneer of compassion and paternalism, that Africans must be enslaved and Christianized for *their own good*. In this pamphlet, he instructed slave owners on how to lead their slaves to Christ, and included this instruction:

*“Tell them; That if they Serve God patiently and cheerfully in the Condition which he orders for them, their condition will very quickly be infinitely mended, in Eternal Happiness. Show them, That it is GOD who has caused them to be Servants; and that they Serve JESUS CHRIST, while they are at Work for their Masters, if they are Faithful and Honest Servants, and if they do cheerfully what they do, because the Lord JESUS CHRIST has bid them to do it; and that, if they give themselves up to JESUS CHRIST, and keep always afraid of Sinning against Him, it won’t be Long before they shall be in a most Glorious Condition; It can’t be Long before they Die, and then! they shall Rest from all their Labours, and all their Troubles, and they shall be Companions of Angels in the Glories of a Paradise.”* (<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/28/>)

Mather and other Christian preachers that claimed that all souls are white, and that slaves with black bodies would return to their “whiteness” in paradise.

Compare this teaching to that of John in the wilderness. He told the crowds to make sure all had enough to wear and enough to eat. He called upon tax collectors and soldiers to treat others with fairness. He called upon the crowds to not depend on their status as favored by God, but instead called them to repent.

Repentance means literally “To turn.” In its most literal sense, the word sin is an archery term that

means “miss the mark.” Thus in the most literal sense, to “repent of your sin,” means “to miss the mark and then re-aim.” At Baptism we are

claimed by God and join in Jesus’ public ministry and mission. This is why we baptize infants. It is why we do not re-baptize. Acceptance by God does not have to be done twice, and it can happen at any age.

It is good to reaffirm our baptism. When United Methodists come to be presented for Baptism, they are asked a few historic questions. I want to look closer at the first question that we ask of those who come to baptism in the Church.

*Do you reject the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?*

In order to “reject the spiritual forces of wickedness,” We must acknowledge that one of the great spiritual forces of wickedness that has existed in American Christianity is that of white supremacy. This evil and racist notion was born in Christian pulpits and has for too long been perpetuated by those who claim to follow Christ. An honest look at Christian history in this country reveals that we have missed the mark of God’s love and need to turn toward justice.

In order to repent, we must acknowledge the ways in which we have missed the mark. White Supremacy is one of the most vile, pervasive, and consistent marks of Christianity in America. It must be rejected and resisted in all its forms.



The Baptism of Christ, by David Zelenka, 2005.  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baptism-of-Christ.jpg>