

# *“Travelers on the Mystery Highway”*

Matthew 3:13-17

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“We’re all travelers on the mystery highway...” So says a song I like by Phil Keaggy. Phil’s a musician and a follower of Christ whose guitar playing is considered some of the best of the last 40 years or so.

He sings, “I fell in love with music when I got my first record, My dad brought home a guitar that he bought from Sears – it’s been my ticket around the world, trying to squeeze out the music between my ears.” Here’s his point: something happens in your life and it doesn’t look like much at the time – like getting a cheap little guitar from Sears, but, looking back on some events, you can see later—they’re life-changing. Keaggy became a guitar player, famous around the world.

## **Crossings**

How do these events happen? Where is God in all of it? As this song says “We’re all travelers on the Mystery Highway...” There are a LOT of mysteries in life. How these events change us are mysteries; there’s more going on than we can understand or explain – they might look small, but they turn out to be huge – like crossing over from one existence to another. It’s like this story in Matthew –

John the Baptist is calling the people of Israel to repentance and they are responding in huge numbers. He baptizes them in the Jordan river as a way of identifying with God.

The Jordan River is significant in the Bible – it was a boundary marker. At the very end of the 40 years of wilderness wanderings, right before they entered the promised land, the nation of Israel camped for a few months on the other side of the Jordan. After Moses died, they crossed the Jordan and went from one existence to a completely new one. Do you remember the story in Joshua? The

Priests went ahead of the people carrying the Ark of Covenant – which symbolized the throne of God – and as they stepped into the water the river stopped flowing – even though it was at flood stage. It was a new crossing, just like the Sea of Reeds when they were delivered from the Egyptian army.

The Jordan, which had been a boundary, even a barrier, became the marker of the passage from one kind of life to a new kind of life.

Ever after that, the Jordan river was seen as a boundary – though there were some tribes of Israel that lived on the other side of the Jordan, it was as though they never really were a part of things.

If you crossed that river, things changed.

When and where have those crossing places been for you– those boundaries that, when you went past them, even though you may not have known it at the time, things were never the same again?

I was sort of embarrassed by the pictures of me that were around during the very kind reception regarding my recently completed graduate studies. Boy am I glad that's all done! Looking at pictures of me, I mean. But one of them I'd almost forgotten about. Here it is. That's my mother and me. We're standing in the sunlight that used to hover above our driveway at our home. It's one of my favorite pictures of my Mom—her name is Web. And it's a crossing over picture – a Jordan picture. Both my Mom and I in this picture can be seen as travelers on the mystery highway, because about five minutes later, my two best friends, Doug Myers and Paul Lemon drove up, loaded up my skis and luggage and we drove off to college. That's a picture of the day I left home. I came back to visit. But from then on, I entered a new life – it was never the same again – it's all been good! But what a change that was... I didn't have a clue! But my mother did...maybe that's why she's smiling so beautifully!

Travelers on the mystery highway. Those places and times and events where one day turns to the next, but nothing is ever the same. That's what happened to Jesus the day he came to the Jordan. It was a crossing over from one way of understanding and experiencing God to another.

Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

Baptism signifies a complete identification with whatever you are dipped in. For example: if you wanted to paint something completely in a certain color, you'd dip it in a bath of paint. To baptize means to dip – or submerge in something. If you just brush paint on a chair, it covers it, but if you dip it in a big vat of paint – it does a whole lot more than that! It gets all inside the seams and the wood – it sort of changes it!

Baptism was a way of saying “I want to immerse myself completely in God. People were so hungry for a new life – for a new identity.

When Jesus showed up, John is the only one there who knows who Jesus really is – he's the Messiah. John says what you would expect... “You're asking ME to baptize YOU? YOU should be baptizing ME!” What John is really saying to Jesus is this “You ARE God! You don't need to be baptized! You have no need to identify with God – we all have the need to identify with you....” But Jesus goes ahead and is baptized by John in the Jordan river as a way of identifying himself completely with US. It's the reverse of what we do. It's God taking upon himself all that we are. And the world has never been the same.

### **The Triune God**

That day, the nature of God was revealed more clearly than it had ever been revealed before. God was shown to be triune. It's one God, but clearly there are three persons involved in the Godhead: Jesus, the Spirit, who descends like a dove, and the voice that comes out of heaven calling Jesus his beloved Son – the One whom Jesus called, ‘Father.’

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One God – in three persons. We do not believe there are three gods who make up one God – nope. It's one God, who exists in three persons who are co-equal, co-eternal, co-existent.

Talk about travelers on the mystery highway! How do we explain this? We don't. It really is a mystery. Remember, remember... a Christian mystery is a good thing, not a bad thing. Our culture treats mysteries as problems to be solved, it treats truth as anything that can be measured or completely explained. What a shallow view. Most of life is filled with beautiful mysteries that cannot ever be explained. Like the eggshell blue of the sky next to a white cloud at sunset. What

IS that? Why do such sights cause us to stop and stare? Because they point to a deeper mystery that we know is real, but can't explain. There are things beyond this existence that are the ground of everything – There is a God and this God is revealed as One utterly beyond us, who loves, redeems, is holy beyond reckoning and who knows us.

We can know that God existing in this triunity is true, even when we can't explain it.

It's beyond our ability to comprehend – it's a mystery – which means that it's MORE truth than we can grasp, not less. The point from this passage is that it affirmed by the apostolic witness of this scripture as telling us what God is like. God is the great three –in one.

More importantly, the day this was revealed, the whole world crossed over the Jordan from one understanding of God to another. God had always BEEN triune, but from this point forward it became more clear.

### So What?

So why is this so important to grasp? There are so many reasons—we could fill a book! Let me point out a few:

- **The Triune nature of God is real knowledge.** This story is merely one instance of God revealing something to the world about God's being – or God's nature – who God IS and what God is LIKE.
  - This means that what we know about God from the scriptures is real knowledge. That statement may surprise you, but it's key:
    - So many think that matters of belief, like the triune nature of God are not REAL knowledge – that they are matters of faith and faith a matter of opinion, or personal or group conviction, or profession – but not real *knowledge*.
    - It is assumed that something like the belief in God as triune – which is also saying that we believe that Christ is God AND human, and that the Holy Spirit is fully present to encounter us AS GOD with the risen life of Christ, who makes the heart of

the Father known to the world – *that this belief is a human creation, but not actual knowledge that must be reckoned with.*

- But if this story is proclaiming something that is real knowledge about God, then it becomes the center out of which all of life must be lived, or it will be missed altogether.
  - E.g. – let’s say you wanted to wire a house. What would you think of someone who said, “Doesn’t really matter how you do it.. just throw the wires in there and hook it up to the grid...”
  - Wiring a house is not a matter of conviction, or opinion, but real knowledge – you better get it right or either nothing will work at all, OR it will hurt somebody. Or burn the house down.
  - The same is true of God.
- And what do we learn? **God is the God who sends** – God the father sends the Son, and both together send the Spirit, who sends US.
  - As we live in Christ, in the power of the Spirit, receiving and entering the Kingdom of God by faith, we are a people sent by this God into the life of the world for the sake of the world.
  - *“As the Father has sent me, so send I you...”*
  - What does it mean to be God’s church in light of this? It means that being a church is seeing ourselves as a group of people sent on a mission – not a place where certain things happen.
- **God works EVERYTHING through relationships of love and trust** –
  - The Western image for the trinity is a triangle – and it sort of gets in the way, because it makes us think that there’s a hierarchy and it’s limiting – God isn’t like a triangle!
  - The Eastern Orthodox view of the trinity is a circle dance of mutual love and trust – rather than a triangle, they picture the triune God as a dance of love and trust between father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - God calls and brings us into that dance...
    - We are included in Christ through faith – actually brought into his very life.
    - This is the work of the Spirit

- We are invited into the circle dance

When we accept and receive this, we find ourselves on the mystery highway, at the crossroads where life is always the adventure of God taking us across the boundaries of life – into the Jordan and out to the other side:

- WE see ourselves as SENT
- WE enfold the world around us in that same dance of love and trust – through which God works everything that is grace.

Let us bow before the mystery.