

## **The Baptism of Jesus and the Sojourn in the Desert**

The beginning of Jesus' public activity, the “fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar” (that is, A.D. 27-28), was also when John the Baptist began to preach “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:1-3). Combining the Gospel story with other historical sources of the period (in particular Josephus and the Qumran documents), we see the activity of John as part of a deep spiritual ferment pervading the whole of Judea at that time. John's activity was concentrated in the Jordan Valley, possibly at Bethabara at the fords of the Jordan near Jericho, or higher up the river at Aenon (identified in the fourth century as lying two miles south of Salim; today at Khirbet ed-Dir), south of Scythopolis (Beth-shean). Among the multitudes who flocked to be baptized was Jesus, who came from Nazareth in Galilee. This was the beginning of his ministry. According to the Gospels, his baptism was followed by forty days of seclusion in the wilderness, most probably the wilderness of Judea above Jericho. This has from time immemorial been a refuge for those who have wished to isolate themselves from the world. The sequence of baptism and seclusion in the wilderness was common at the time. Gospel tradition has it that Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert and led by the evil spirit to the “pinnacle of the Temple” in Jerusalem — presumably the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount — which had a sheer drop of 130 feet. Having overcome temptation, Jesus returned to Galilee. John continued to preach and baptize and was ultimately arrested by order of Herod Antipas (Mark 6:14-29; Matthew 14:1-12; Luke 3:19-20)