

What do Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16 mean with respect to 'baptize you... with fire'?

- Matthew 3:11 "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: **he shall baptize you** with the Holy Ghost, and **with fire.**"
- Luke 3:16 "John answered, saying unto them all, 'I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: **he shall baptize you** with the Holy Ghost and **with fire.**"

I ~learned~ in the mainline Christian denominations that it's about ~tongues of fire~ at Pentecost in the Temple in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. But there is more to it than that.

In the first six verses of chapter 3, Yochanan-the-Immerser was preaching all of the Prophets' main theme, "repent, prepare the Way of YHWH," to the general populace from Jerusalem, Judaea, and around the Jordan River; and they confessed their sins and were immersed. This is **the water immersion of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**. But when the Sadducees and Pharisees showed up [vs 7], it was a different story -- Yochanan made a point to explain to them what his immersion was about:

Matthew 3:8-10:

3:8 **Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:**

3:9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

3:10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

i.e. 'Fruits [or "works" as Apostle Paul wrote in Acts 26:20] meet for repentance' is what James meant when he wrote, "faith without works is dead" [James 2:20, 26].

The Messiah generalized the Matthew 3 situation in Luke 7:29-30:

Luke 7:29 And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.

Luke 7:30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.

And we know that it was a generalization (the Pharisees proudly believed that being descended from Abraham, through Jacob, was all they needed for Salvation unto eternal Life in the Kingdom of YHWH [ref Matthew 3:9]), because there were exceptions (~which prove the rule~) of Pharisees and rulers who believed the Gospel of repentance [ref John 12:42; Acts 6:7; 15:5; in addition to the specific examples of Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus].

So Matthew chapter 3 (and Luke 7:29-30) has two themes or story-lines running through it ('parallelism' is a standard form of communication in the Hebrew language... and the Bible). The repentant who confess their sins and are baptized versus the "vipers" who do not repent with appropriate works (i.e. the good works of obeying the Word of YHWH). This understanding is key to discern what Yochanan says next in verse 11: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you **with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.**" (Remember the dual scenarios.)

The Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost about 2,000 years ago.... But there was NO "fire" -- there were manifestations which "appeared... like as of fire" [Acts 2:3]. There is no (other) direct Berean reference in Scripture to "baptism [with/in/by] fire" besides Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16. In Acts 1:5 the Messiah prophesied, "ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" [cf Acts 11:16]

(without mention of fire being included when the Holy Spirit was to be given to the repentant and faithful believers at that Pentecost). When we look at other major baptisms, such as Yeshua's [ref Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34] and that of Cornelius [ref Acts 10:44-48], **there is no fire mentioned**. When Ananias laid hands on Paul to receive the Holy Spirit and Paul was baptized [ref Acts 9:17], **there was no fire mentioned; nor was fire mentioned** in Paul's recounting of that event in Acts 22:16. **Nor was there fire** involved with the baptism of Apollos -- who was "fervent in the spirit" [Acts 18:25] before he was baptized into Messiah and Paul laid hands on him to receive the Holy Spirit [ref Acts 19:5-6].

We need to consider the Greek, which most translations use, to find the meanings of four key words in Matthew 3:11 "I indeed **baptize** you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall **baptize** you **with** the Holy Ghost, **and** [with] **fire**."

1. Scripturally, 'baptize' (and 'baptism') does not mean a sprinkling (of water) as mainline Christianity leads us to believe. "Baptism/baptize" is from the Greek G907 'baptizo' = to make whelmed [i.e. submerge, or bury] (that is, fully wet); G908 'baptisma' = from G907 baptism; and G909 'baptismos' = from G907 absolution; baptism, washing.

Clearly "baptize" or "baptism" is the Greek reference to the Hebrew 'mikvah' which was an immersion in living (flowing) water as Yochanan-the-Immerser did in the Jordan River and as the pools around the Temple in Jerusalem allowed people to become ritually clean before entering the Temple to avoid defiling it. The Hebrew glossaries define 'mikvah' as: baptism, water immersion, purification, to baptize, to immerse, a ritual bath (for spiritual purification). Mikvah/immersion (baptism) was not new in the first century and is not a Christian Church design or invention. The concept is to go totally under the water (which represents a death where you cannot breathe, as in a tomb or a grave) and then to rise out of it, clean, purified, and "born again" (which is an ancient Hebrew term) to live life anew (e.g. a new man after dying to self and living for Messiah -- with the faith OF the Messiah!).

2. The word "with" in Greek is Strong's G1722 = en 'en' -- A primary preposition denoting (fixed) position (in place, time or state), and (by implication) instrumentally (medially or constructively), that is, a relationship of rest (intermediate between G1519 and G1537); "in", at, (up-) on, by, etc: - about, after, against, + almost, X altogether, among, X as, at, before, between, (here-) by (+ all means), for (...sake of), + give self wholly to, (here-) **in** (-to, -wardly), X outwardly, one, X quickly, X shortly, [speedi-] ly, X that, X there, (-in, -on), through (-out), (un-)to(-ward), under, when, where, (-with), while, with (-in). Often used in compounds, with substantially the same import, rarely with verbs of motion, and then not to indicate direction, except (elliptically) by a separate (and different) prep.

Why did the King James translators choose "with" rather than "in"? For an immersion is "in" not just "with." Did the KJV translators have an agenda to choose "with" for the preposition?

3. The word "and" in Greek is Strong's G2532 = kai 'kahee' -- Apparently a primary particle, having a copulative and sometimes also a cumulative force; and, also, even, so, then, to, etc; often used in connection (or composition) with other particles or small words: - and, also, both, but, even, for, if, indeed, likewise, moreover, **or**, so, that, them, therefore, when, yea, yet.

Why did the King James translators choose "and" rather than "or"? Consider, **He will immerse with the Holy Spirit and with fire** versus **He will immerse you in [either] the Spirit or in fire.** Did the KJV translators have an agenda to choose "and" for the conjunction? The KJV reads as a unified, one-event baptism (of the Holy Spirit AND with fire); but the dual scenario that some "get it" (e.g. those who repent) and some do not "get it" (e.g. the proud and unrepentant), the translation for Matthew 3:11 using Strong's definitions which fit this context is : "He will immerse you in **[either]** the Spirit **or** in fire."

4. The word "fire" in Greek is Strong's G4442 = pur 'poor' -- A primary word; "fire" (literally or figuratively, specifically lightning): fiery, fire.

If we are going choose to believe that a word in Scripture is figurative, we need to be very careful. We are to Live "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD" [Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4]; "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" [2 Timothy 3:16]. To believe that part of it is figurative, when it is not, is a form of self-grandiosity (i.e. idolatry) to minimize (or even negate) a part of the Almighty's will. We are not to add to or take away from the Word [ref Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19]. The literal meaning of 'fire' should be clear by the end of this study, if it is not clear already.

The context of the verses around around Matthew 3:11 is essential for clear understanding. (Bear in mind that the word 'fan' is defined by G4425 as From G4429; a winnowing fork (as scattering like spittle): - fan.):

Matthew 3:10-12 [cf Luke 3:16-17]:

3:10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which **bringeth not forth good fruit** is hewn down, and **cast into the fire**.

3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: **he shall baptize you** with the Holy Ghost, and **with fire**:

3:12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but **he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire**.

In this scenario of Matthew 3, Yochanan-the-Immerser was talking to the common folk of "Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan" [vs 5] and he was also talking to "Pharisees and Sadducees" [vs 7]. He verbally separated the sheep from the goats; the faithful, "His wheat," who repented with "fruits meet for repentance" [vs 8] from the "vipers" [vs 7], "the chaff." Yochanan-the-Immerser prepared the Way of YHWH [vs 3] with a water immersion based on repentance [vss 2, 11]... those who were to be immersed with the Holy Spirit later; the unrepentant he did not immerse... those who were awaiting the wrath to come, which shall burn them with ("baptize" them into) a fiery death [vs 11; cf Matthew 3:12; 13:30, 40-42]. It is a ~terminal baptism~ (immersion), with a similar effect compared to the ~watery baptism~ the evil and wicked people received (immersion in the Great Flood) -- for those who ignored (or taunted) Noah, the "Preacher of Righteousness" [2 Peter 2:5]... but at the end of the age, the world will be purified by fire hotter than a raging forest fire; so hot that even the roots buried in the ground will be consumed!

Malachi 4:1: For, behold, **the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven**; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and **the day that cometh shall burn them up**, saith the LORD of hosts, **that it shall leave them neither root nor branch**.

The Messiah offers immersion in the Holy Spirit for those who truly repent for the remission of sins; the overcomers, the ekklesia [ref Acts 2:38] (those who receive the Gift of Grace); OR immersion in the Lake of Fire for those who receive the free Gift of Grace in vain [see 2 Corinthians 6:1].

I think that an area of confusion is that there are references to 'trials by fire' [ref 1 Peter 1:7; 4:12] as a part of the Sanctification process; such as the analogy of the Master Potter making us as He desires us to be [ref Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 18:6; Romans 9:20] -- with the typical end result for pottery to be finalized in a kiln. And metaphorically, such a trial by fire may not include actual fire, but rather the 'fiery darts' which Paul uses to describe the effectiveness of the Armor of YHWH in Ephesians 6:16 "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the **fiery darts** of the wicked." Do not confuse a (metaphorical) 'trial by fire' with the (literal) 'immersion ["baptism"] in fire!

The Scriptural examples which seem to describe a 'trial by fire' and 'baptism/immersion by fire' help clarify a distinction between the two concepts:

1. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's walk in a fiery furnace is NOT termed a 'baptism' nor 'immersion' in Scripture. They were given a literal trial -- and their faith overcame! [See Daniel chapter 3.]

2. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, were immersed in fire! So were complaining Israelites in the wilderness. And Korah and his band of rebels:

• Leviticus 9:23 - 10:3:

9:23: And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people.

9:24: And **there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat:** which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.

10:1: And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not.

10:2: And **there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.**

10:3: Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.

• Numbers 11:1-3:

11:1: And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and **the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them** that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

11:2: And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched.

11:3: And he called the name of the place Taberah: because **the fire of the LORD burnt among them.**

• Numbers 16:16-21, 35:

16:16: And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, to morrow:

16:17: And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer.

16:18: And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron.

16:19: And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation.

16:20: And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

16:21: Separate yourselves from among this congregation, **that I may consume them in a moment.**

16:35: And **there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.**

cf Deuteronomy 4:23-24; 5:25-26; 9:3; 32:18-22; Judges 6:19-21; 1 Kings 18:36-39; 2 Kings 1:9-15; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3; Job 1:16; Psalm 78:56-63; Isaiah 5:24; Jeremiah 49:27; Ezekiel 22:31

cf Hebrews 12:28-29:

12:28: Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

12:29: For **our God is a consuming fire.**

i.e. **YHWH, the Almighty Elohim of Israel, is a Consuming Fire. ("Don't play with Fire!")**

Immersion (or "baptism") in water is inherently different than being "baptized with fire" is. One can hold one's breath while under water and emerge clean, healthy, and a 'new person.' Water cleans and purifies gently; fire cleans and purifies fiercely! The comeuppance is that in order to complete the cleansing, one needs to stay in the fire until it has done its job... if you just pass your finger through a candle flame quickly, the fire will not have had time to do its job! Except for some specific references which have been made, the only general-for-all (unrepentant sinners) immersion in fire described in Scripture is the Lake of Fire experience for those who did not have faith or believe (i.e. obey with good works). (And the Bible details an extensive list of the sorts of people to whom that applies.) Also, Revelation 20:11-15 (the Great White Throne Judgment; which is for those in the second resurrection unto damnation [ref John 5:29b]) describes immersion (a ~baptism~) into the Lake of Fire as a one-way experience -- "the second death" [Revelation 20:14; cf Revelation 21:8]. **Hell** (i.e. divine damnation) is not a punishment of eternal suffering; it **is everlasting destruction** [ref 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9]; i.e. no one comes out of the Lake of Fire, there is no resurrection from the second death!

The Messiah comes twice:

- The first Advent was as the Ultimate Passover "Lamb of YHWH who takes away the sin of the world" [John 1:29, 36]: **His purpose** (at that time, 2,000 years ago) **was to "do the will" of our heavenly Father** (on earth as it is in heaven) [ref Matthew 26:39, 42; John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; cf Matthew 6:10; John 7:14-17], **to "bear witness unto the Truth"** [John 18:37], **"to minister and to give His life"** [Matthew 20:28] and **"to save the lost"** [ref Matthew 18:11; Luke 9:56; 19:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:15; 1 John 4:14; cf 1 Timothy 1:15]. (But not to judge [ref John 12:47; cf John 3:17] -- at that time.)
- The Second Coming has a different description. **The Incarnate Word and heavenly High Priest will** (then) **"Judge the living and the dead"** [John 5:22; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Romans 14:10; 2 Timothy 4:1; cf John 5:27; Romans 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:10].

Warning: Do not confuse the 'free Gift of Grace' with 'Salvation.'

Salvation is by divine Mercy and Grace [ref Acts 15:11; Ephesians 2:5, 8; 2 Timothy 1:9; cf Romans 5:15-18]. We cannot live up to the standards in the Books of Judgment, and we can't work to save ourselves -- why?, because once one has sinned, one deserves hell and one can't work one's way out of that -- it's like sports: once a base runner is tagged out, he can't play more to reverse that out; and the quarterback who is sacked can't play more to reverse that stat either. The Bible describes Grace as a free Gift [ref Romans 5:15-18; Ephesians 2:8] -- because we all have sinned [ref Romans 3:23] and do not qualify to be in the Kingdom on our own merit, even if we were to repent to the Way of YHWH, **perfectly, for the rest of our lives**. All the Saints described in the Bible with terms like 'righteous' or 'blameless' still needed the Gift of Grace for Salvation. Only the Messiah had Perfect Righteousness to merit Resurrection to Eternal Life [ref Hebrews 4:15; 9:28; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5]. The prior transgression(s) permanently disqualifies one from entering the Kingdom... without divine intervention: the free Gift of Grace.

Today is the day of Salvation [ref 2 Corinthians 6:2] (all that we are promised is the moment, the future is uncertain) -- get it while you may... or be resurrected to face the Great White Throne Judgment where there is **no** Mercy and **no** Grace described, only being Judged by the Books and by one's works [ref Revelation 20:12-13, 15]. The Strong's Greek definition of "to judge" [G2919] is typified by words like: condemn, punish, avenge, damn, sentence to, etc; as is Strong's Greek definition of "judgment" [G2917; G2920] accusation, condemnation, damnation, etc. If someone willfully transgresses the Torah of YHWH, they will be Commanded to "Depart!" (from His presence) [ref Matthew 7:23].

Grace is **free**, but Salvation is **not free** -- it will cost you your life! [ref Matthew 16:24-25; Mark 34-35; Luke 9:23-24; 17:33.] The difference between 'Grace' and 'Salvation' is that everyone receives the

free Gift of Grace (including murderers and adulterers who we are told cannot enter in to the Kingdom of Heaven), but one must be worthy of Salvation [ref Luke 20:35; 2 Thessalonians 1:5, 11-12; Revelation 3:1-5; cf Luke 21:33-36; Colossians 1:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12; Acts 13:46; also see Matthew 21:43-44].

Those who reject the Word of YHWH, judge themselves unworthy of eternal life [Acts 13:46]; **i.e. they receive the Gift of Grace in vain** [2 Corinthians 6:1] **for without the love of the Torah-Truth they will perish as they take pleasure in Torahlessness** [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12]. **Anyway, those who reject the Word will be rejected by the Word/Judge** [1 Samuel 15:23; Matthew 7:23; 10:33; cf Hosea 4:6]. i.e. The corollary to Salvation by the free Gift of Grace is that damnation is self-inflicted!

The deck is stacked - YHWH will win. Our heavenly Father **will be glorified** by everyone -- either **by Grace** unto eternal Salvation, **or by Judgment** unto damnation. Everyone receives that which they choose! [ref Deuteronomy 30:15, 19; Joshua 24:15; Jeremiah 21:8.]

The parallelism in Matthew 3:11 is about Salvation vs Judgment; Baptism in the Holy Spirit (to become begotten of the Father in order to be born again, immortal, upon resurrection) vs Baptism in Fire (the consuming second death)!

We were given freewill; we are given a choice [ref Deuteronomy 30:19] -- we are even given the correct response [ref Joshua 24:14].

Choose well.

And why are so many people claiming to be "Christian" and relying on the name-it-and-claim-it ~feel good~ verses of assurance for their Salvation [e.g. John 1:12-13; 3:16, 18; 10:27-29; 11:25-26; 20:31; Acts 4:12; Romans 6:23b; 10:13; Ephesians 2:8; 1 John 3:1; 5:11-13, 20] ...and yet the Messianic prophesy is that **few will enter into the Kingdom** [ref Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:23-24; cf Matthew 22:14]? There is **no reference** in Scripture to a ~free Gift of Salvation.~ On the contrary, we are warned to "work out our Salvation" [Philippians 2:12; cf 2 Peter 1:10]. The mainline Church does not teach that the Elohim of Israel who is the Almighty One of Covenants offers Salvation as a **conditional** Covenant of Salvation (even though that term is not used in Scripture, the terms and conditions of it are described in the Bible). Most ~James 2:19 believers~ ignore the terms and conditions required for Salvation. The Promise has been fulfilled [ref John 3:15-16]; see Matthew 7:21-23 for a summary of the dichotomy of individuals' responses to the divine offer of eternal Salvation.

Tragically, the Christian Church does not teach that the Gift of **the Holy Spirit has prerequisite criteria** to be met prior to receiving the Holy Spirit. The Church does not explain that **receiving the Holy Spirit is in this life is a necessity to enter into the Kingdom** upon resurrection. And the Church does not teach **how-to receive the Holy Spirit**. No wonder there are few who find The Way!

HalleluYah! Always, halleluYah,

Jim Peterson for Tabernacle of David, Bloomington MN 10/19/10

Commentary quotes by others:

Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible: "...the word 'fire' means judgment or wrath. ...the meaning is that He would baptize a portion of mankind --those who were willing to be His followers-- with the Holy Spirit, but the rest of mankind --the wicked -- with fire; that is, with judgment and wrath. Fire is a symbol of vengeance. See Isaiah 5:24; 61:2; 66:24."

According to Adam Clark's Commentary, the church fathers Basil and Theophilus explain this baptism with fire as "the fire of hell."

Wayne Jackson, writer and editor of 'The Christian Courier' has written: "But what is the significance of the 'fire' in John's statement? The immediate context would suggest that it is an allusion to the final fate of the wicked. Verse ten says that 'every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.' Then, at the conclusion of verse twelve, Jesus continues: 'whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.' Why should the 'fire' of verse eleven be viewed as something different from that referenced in verses ten and twelve, without some sort of compelling justification? Of this expression in Matthew 3:11, J. H. Thayer commented: 'to overwhelm with fire (those who do not repent), i.e., to subject them to the terrible penalties of hell' (1958, 94). W. E. Vine noted regarding the 'fire' of this passage: 'of the fire of Divine judgment upon the rejectors of Christ, Matt. 3:11 (where a distinction is to be made between the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the fire of Divine retribution)' (1991, 308). Arndt and Gingrich speak of the 'fire of divine Judgment Mt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16' (1967, 737). Finally, as J. W. McGarvey observed, the phrase 'baptize you . . . in fire' cannot refer to Pentecost, because there was no 'baptism of fire' on that day. Parted 'tongues,' which were merely 'like as of fire . . . sat upon' each of the apostles. Those brothers were not 'overwhelmed with fire' on that occasion (1875, 38)." [<http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/235-what-is-the-baptism-of-fire>]

The Church of the Great God: "Baptism by fire means immersion into the Lake of Fire. It is the second, and therefore eternal, death for the incorrigibly wicked, who have willingly and persistently rejected the salvation of God the Father through Jesus Christ. All who have blasphemed the Holy Spirit and committed the unpardonable sin will be destroyed [ref Matthew 3:11-12; 12:31-32; Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8; II Peter 3:10-12; Malachi 4:1-3]." --John W. Ritenbaugh [<http://cgg.org/index.cfm/page/literature.booklets.bride/printer/friendly.htm>]

A good article which scripturally differentiates water- Spirit- and fire-baptism is "BAPTISM OF FIRE," available online at <http://www.scripturalhelps.org/Baptfire.htm>.

"John was speaking to both sinners and those to be saved. When he said Christ shall baptize you -- the YOU included both. The saved he would baptize with his spirit -- and the others with the fire!" [<http://www.biblestudy.org/basicart/what-is-a-baptism-by-fire.html>]

Another online source with a review of the various interpretation options, concludes: "What it boils down to is that the Scriptural evidence points to the fire of judgment as the most likely meaning of the "baptism of fire." [<http://www.layhands.com/WhatIsTheBaptismOfFire.htm>]

Note: A couple of common secular expressions for 'baptism by fire' which have no spiritual significance here:

- A soldier's first military fire-fight in combat is colloquially termed his "baptism by fire."
- 'Baptism of Fire' has been used to describe the Nazis' Polish Blitzkrieg.