

## The Baptism of Our Lord (Epiphany 1) Matthew 3:13-17

Today we fix our focus on Baptism, the baptism of Jesus and as an extension our own baptism and we have just heard 1 account of Jesus baptism, and it is one of those things testified to by all 4 gospel writers with no hint of contradiction – it's a shame the same can't be said of all scripture!

It is almost automatic for us to want to use baptism as a means to mark our life in faith. For many parents it is a part of the rites of passage they pursue for their children, even if they are not regular worshippers at a Church. It has been seen as something of a superstitious practice in families, to get baby baptised is to somehow protect that child for the future, but more often it is about taking time to mark special points in our lives and baptism of an infant does just that – it claims the child early in their lives for Christ. Baptism as an adult coming to faith is equally marking a stage of life – it marks the stage when a person moved from darkness to light, from ignorance to belief.

It was no different for Jesus in that his baptism marked a stage in his life. It was now time for Jesus to begin his public ministry so he goes to John to be baptised. It is only a short passage of scripture but these words contain a great deal of importance for studying the life of Christ. Jesus went out of His way to be baptized, we are told that "Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John". Jesus was about 30 years old, understood to be the age at which public office could be held by Jews. John was about 6 months older and had been baptising for about 6 months. Jesus had spent 18 years from his barmitzvah working and serving at home and suddenly, he makes quite a journey from Galilee to the Jordan River. As the crow flies, that could have meant anywhere from a 30-60 mile journey and as most people walked everywhere they went it is safe to assume that Jesus walked there.

Also, Jesus did not come from a culture where baptism was the norm, Jews simply didn't get baptised. Barclay says, "never in all history before this had any Jew submitted to being baptised. The Jews used baptism, but only for proselytes who came into Judaism from some other faith. It was natural that the sin-stained, polluted proselyte should be baptized, but no Jew had ever conceived that he, a member of the chosen people, a son of Abraham, assured of God's salvation, could ever need baptism. Baptism was for sinners, and no Jew ever conceived of himself as a sinner shut out from God. Now for the first time in their national history the Jews realized their own sin and their own need of God." —Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

Since Jesus went out of His way to be baptised there must have been reasons that he did that. Jesus had a purpose in going to John to be baptised. He was identifying himself with John and his message. John was preaching a message of repentance and a message about the coming Messiah and Jesus was the fulfilment of that message.

The baptism of Jesus can have 4 special meanings for us. First of all the baptism of Jesus showed that he was consecrated to God and that God approved of His ministry by the Presence of the Holy Spirit and the words spoken by God proclaiming Jesus as God's beloved Son. The second meaning is that Jesus' baptism served to publicly announce the arrival of the Messiah and the beginning of His ministry. The 3rd meaning that we see in Jesus' baptism is that by being baptized, Jesus was completely identifying Himself with sinful man. 2 Cor 5:21 says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus was without sin, if the Jews felt that baptism was not required for their salvation then Jesus, surely had the biggest claim to that. But even though Jesus didn't need to repent and be baptised, because he alone was without sin, he wanted to identify himself with us and set an example for us to follow.

That brings us to the 4th meaning, we see that Jesus intended to be an example for his followers. Because Jesus was baptised we know that we should participate in baptism and not just the action of baptism but in its full meaning of repentance of sins and living a life acceptable to God.

If there were any questions before the baptism, as to whether this was appropriate or not, those questions were completely wiped away by what happened next. "He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." For the first time in the Bible, we have a complete and clear indication of the Trinity. As Jesus was coming out of the water, the Holy Spirit was coming down upon Him, and at the same time a voice from heaven says, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." All three persons of the Trinity were there together and offered a glimpse of the perfect whole. The Holy Spirit came and gave Jesus the power and strength to begin His earthly ministry. And God gave public approval and endorsement of Jesus as His Son.

The voice which Jesus heard at the baptism is very important. "This is my Son, whom I love" is a quotation from Psalm 2:7. Jews accepted Psalm 2 as a description of the Messiah. The voice also said, "With him I am well pleased." This is a quotation from Isaiah 42:1, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations"

Jesus' baptism was a complicated affair. What seemed in the beginning to be one man responding to the preaching of his cousin became the event which identified Jesus as the messiah and heralded the start of his public ministry. Through baptism he identified himself with the people he came to save and after his baptism things really began to happen. If some of those who heard John and who were baptised in the Jordan thought that they had by that action done enough to secure their relationship with God, Jesus' example would have proved that was not the case. He began his public ministry, he ministered, he helped, he loved, he served and Jesus serves as our example.

Therefore, we need to think very carefully about our own baptism. We may have invited Jesus into our lives and been baptised by following the example of Jesus but that doesn't mean our work is done. This is not an initiation rite which offers a sure fire ticket to eternal life. Just as Jesus came to tell the Jewish people that their family connections were not in themselves enough for God, that he could make children of Abraham from rocks on the ground, so we should be on our guard about seeing baptism as something that protects us. In fact, what baptism entitles us to do is to recognise the work we have to do in response to God's grace and his love for us.

We need to exercise OUR public ministry, we need to help, and love, and serve just like Jesus did. We have no excuse of ignorance – by our baptism we are members of Christ and inheritors of his kingdom but we also have to work to get that kingdom established. But like Jesus we won't have to do it alone, under our own strength because the Holy Spirit will give us strength and power for our ministry just like He did for Jesus.

And if we remain faithful then we will hear those words from our Heavenly Father, the words which make it all worthwhile, just like Jesus did "You are my child, well done My good and faithful servant I am very pleased with you.