

JANUARY 30 ~ BAPTISM OF CHRIST

READINGS: Matthew 3:13-17; Acts 10:34-43 Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29

SERMON A

Peter's brief but full testimony in Acts 10 about the life and work of Jesus follows the groundbreaking visit and vision concerning Cornelius. This event has completely changed the way Peter looks at things. Peter asserts that Jesus is the one sent by God.

Jesus' baptism isn't about confessing sin, as the other baptisms that John carried out were, and the ones that we continue today. This baptism was about fulfilling all righteousness. This sounds very good and proper, but what exactly does that mean? Here's how Blomberg puts it in his commentary: 'Jesus identifies with and endorses John's ministry as divinely ordained and his message as one to be heeded'. So Jesus is showing that what John is doing is right; it should happen and people should do as John is telling them. Jesus has already been linked with fulfilling scriptural prophecy, Israel's typology and now 'all righteousness'. To do this Jesus will be baptised. This isn't for any sin to be removed but because it is the right thing to do. This is how this promise from our Matthew reading is attained, through everything about Jesus: "Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true."

The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, filling, strengthening, anointing, commissioning. And the voice from heaven echoes these words from Psalm 2: "I will announce," says the king, "what the LORD has declared. He said to me: 'You are my son; today I have become your father.'"; and these words from Isaiah: "The LORD says, "Here is my servant, whom I strengthen – the one I have chosen, with whom I am pleased. I have filled him with my Spirit, and he will bring justice to every nation" to show us the divine son and the suffering servant motifs. The whole Trinity is involved in the event.

Matthew has already shown us that Jesus is God's Son and so we shouldn't see this as simply an indwelling of the Spirit – which we can all experience – but a commissioning; the public ministry begins and God makes it clear that Jesus is his Son.

SERMON B

A – Arrived

Jesus' journey on earth began with his birth which we celebrated at Christmas. Last Sunday we celebrated Epiphany, when the wise men arrived and worshipped him. Then Jesus grew from baby to boy, and from boy to man. Now Jesus has reached the point on his journey where he has arrived at the River Jordan to be baptised by his cousin, known to many as John the Baptist. In our reading from Acts, Peter talks of the message that John the Baptist gave, warning everyone to prepare for the arrival of one greater than him. Of course, that person was Jesus and now, at last, he has arrived.

B – Baptised

Let's try to imagine the conversation that went on between John and Jesus. John didn't want to baptise Jesus because baptism was a sign of repentance – being deeply and really sorry for sin and turning away from it. John knew that Jesus was God, and that he had never done or thought or said anything wrong, so he didn't need to be baptised! But Jesus was determined to show what should be done, and insisted that John should baptise him. He identified himself publicly with the sinners he had come to save, while the symbol of being 'washed clean' by baptism clearly showed that he would be the one who would take away the sins of the world. The one who had no need to repent became for our sake and in our place 'the one great Sinner who repents' – to use Karl Barth's daring phrase.

Jesus probably went into the river, and John may have poured water on him, or Jesus may have gone fully under the water as a sign of his baptism. It was a dramatic moment, because as it took place we read that the heavens opened and the Spirit of God came down like a dove. Awesome!

C – Chosen

After Jesus had been baptised, the voice of God announced from heaven, 'This is my own dear Son, in whom I am pleased,' which echo these words about the Lord's Servant from the passage from the prophecy of Isaiah we read earlier: "The LORD says, "Here is my servant, whom I strengthen – the one I have chosen, with whom I am pleased. I have filled him with my Spirit, and he will bring justice to every nation." These words were fulfilled at Jesus' baptism. Jesus, God's own dear Son, was not going to lord it over people but be the Servant King.

In our reading from Acts, we find Peter saying that this was the beginning

of Jesus' work, because afterwards he 'went everywhere, doing good and healing'. God gave Jesus the Holy Spirit's power – Jesus was truly the Son of God. Wow!

A, B, C. Arrived, Baptised, Chosen. Jesus arrived at the River Jordan, he was baptised, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and went on to do the work he had been chosen to do. This amazing event was the start of his earthly ministry, and the fulfilment of God's plan for his people.