



A REFLECTION ON THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

MARK 1 1-13

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I received a lovely email in the week from one of our congregation who had been in to tidy the church. "Christmas has been cleared from the church". Many of you I am sure have been up in the loft to put decorations away, it was of course twelfth night in the week.

Some people observe the tradition of keeping decorations up until Candlemas. Some churches leave their crib sets up.

In our lectionary readings we have travelled away from Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus to the Baptism of Jesus at the river Jordan, around 30 years later.

Marks Gospel starts here, there is no nativity story.

Over the last months we have watched many ministerial broadcasts haven't we.? In the days of the Roman Empire the equivalent would be a message, an official proclamation. The word that Mark uses in the Greek *euangelion* which we translate good news is just that, an official proclamation, a proclamation that has profound life changing consequences. This proclamation is about the arrival of Jesus the anointed, the Son of God.

After this earth-shattering proclamation, Mark quotes two old testament prophecies before moving straight to the appearance of John the Baptist followed by the Baptism of Christ. All in 11 short verses. This is a life changing, game changing, world changing announcement. This is the moment when God breaks in, where Gods power is revealed and Gods purposes for humanity and the world is revealed.

As we journey into this new year may we not leave Jesus in the manger, or pack him away, may we allow him to grow in our lives, may we continue to encounter him in unexpected places, especially whilst we are not physically in church.

The Baptism of Jesus can be found in all four gospels. Why is the Baptism of Jesus important? We get a real glimpse of who Jesus is by the fact that he was baptized. This is the kind of Messiah that Jesus will be.

John the Baptist as foretold in Isaiah was preparing the way for Jesus. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, confession, and forgiveness of sins. He talks of one who will come after him, one who is more powerful, one whose sandals he is not worthy to untie.

And then Jesus himself comes to be baptized. In Mathew's account we read that John was reluctant to baptize him and tried to deter Jesus. Jesus was sinless, there would have been no need for him to be baptised, no need for him to repent or be forgiven

Jesus by being baptized is this time publicly demonstrating the type of ministry which he has chosen. Baptism is about both putting off the old self and putting on of the new.

So too the baptism of Jesus is not a washing away of the past, but rather a putting on of the new, preparing himself for the great task, setting out his style of ministry.

The baptism of Jesus just like the Christmas story, (the son of God being born as a baby) shows God entering flesh and becoming one of us. At his baptism Jesus goes down into the waters with us. Privilege and power can remove powerful political and religious leaders from the people they are called to serve. The ordinary person can feel leaders live in a very different world. But Jesus being baptized in the waters of the river Jordan comes up close to us, lets the waters that covered the repentant sinners flow over him. Jesus is not found in the palace of the king, he is in the same river as the ordinary people, who were acutely aware of their own poverty, both spiritual and material. Again, Jesus lives up to his name of Emmanuel God with us.

As Jesus comes up out of the waters the spirit descends on him like a dove and the Father's voice is heard *"You are my Son whom I love. with you I am well pleased."*

We see in this moment, the trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit at work. The son is affirmed by the Father and the spirit is upon him.

We too are loved by God and called by name. As we come to Jesus and share in his death and resurrection, we become children of God, part of God's family. May we follow Jesus example and discover the places where God is calling us to be, the things God is calling us to do our ministry.

For Jesus who was baptised in the river Jordan takes what is weak and wavering, makes us his disciples and strengthens with his spirit those who would follow him. May we too hear the still small voice of the Father affirming us.

Heavenly Father, at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son: may we recognize him as our Lord and know ourselves to be your beloved children; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.