

## The Baptism of Jesus

*Please note that this article is also available as an audio file if you wish to hear it read instead of reading it yourself.*

*This week's bible reading is from Mark chapter 1 verses 4 -15.*

### **Introduction**

In this morning's reading from Mark's Gospel, we're reminded that Jesus, before he started His ministry, went out to see John the Baptist on the banks of the river Jordan, and there, along with many other ordinary Jews, was baptised by John.

Now the Baptism of Jesus is a significant event and is recorded in three of the four gospels, and strongly hinted at in the fourth. Jesus' baptism comes at the very beginning of His ministry, it happens just before He is taken into the desert by the Holy Spirit (where He is tempted by Satan). Jesus' baptism is an important part of His preparation for what is to come over the next three years. And, by being baptised in this way, Jesus is also starting His ministry by identifying with the ordinary people of Israel, and at the same time, is by making a very public declaration of commitment to God.

### **Righteousness**

However, Jesus' baptism, even though it was at the hands of John the Baptist, is still quite puzzling to many Christians. Why did Jesus need to be baptised if He was without sin? John's baptism was a baptism of repentance; a sign that an individual was prepared to turn from their life of sin, and turn back to God. So why was this necessary for Jesus? And indeed, it's a question that John himself asks. (recorded in Matthew's Gospel) and Jesus tells John it was necessary "to fulfil all righteousness." (Matt 3:15). But again, it's fair to ask: what exactly did Jesus mean by this? What does it mean, "to fulfil all righteousness"?

### **No Small Matter**

Well in this context righteousness, I believe, refers to the quality of life that God expects from His people. Jesus was still a servant of God and therefore had to live a life of obedience to His Father - all those who profess to worship God, must do. So, by submitting to baptism, even though He was without sin, Jesus was acknowledging God's claim on Him and His life. Before we can exercise authority, we must first learn to submit to authority. Baptism is a sign, a public declaration, that we have made a conscious decision to willingly submit to the authority of God. Jesus was happy to make such a public declaration, even though He was without sin.

Being baptised is no small matter. It's not simply an optional 'rite of passage' with little meaning, and of no real lasting importance – as it's often seen today. On the contrary, in the sacrament of baptism we are making a public promise that, from this day forward, we will live and worship as followers of Jesus, as true disciples Christ. And it's a promise God will hold us to. And so, Jesus Himself makes this same promise and commitment to His Father. Therefore, we who are baptised, will be expected to show forth in our lives, the same level of commitment to Christ, that Christ showed for the Father.

### ***Commissioning***

However, there are other reasons why Jesus' chose to be baptised. Because this was also the moment that John the Baptist reveals to the world that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one of God. It was of course more a symbolic revelation than an actual public announcement - John doesn't publicly declare Jesus to be the Messiah, rather he calls Him "the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29). But such a title was nevertheless of great significance. And those who were wise in the Lord; who were spiritually aware, will have understood the messianic importance of the title "Lamb of God." So, at His baptism, at the hands of John the Baptist, Jesus was effectively being commissioned by His Father to start the work He had been sent to do; to be the Saviour of the World.

### ***The Dove and the Voice***

This significance of Jesus' baptism is further underlined by two important occurrences. The first is the Dove. This of course, represents the Holy Spirit and is a powerful public declaration that the Spirit of God rests fully upon this man Jesus of Nazareth. This anointing of the Spirit, is further underlined by an audible voice from heaven. which said:

*"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

Whether this voice was audible to the people are not, we aren't told, but they were spoken in case anybody was still in doubt about who this man Jesus really is: the very Son of God Himself.

But there is another level of meaning to the voice from heaven – a meaning that also has great significance. At the time of Jesus, the last of the OT prophets had died some 400 years previous, and for the whole of that time, the voice of God had not been heard in the land, but now the age long silence was over. The Word of God had returned to His people, but more than that, the Word of God had become flesh and now dwelt among us. Jesus is the living Word of God, and was ready to bring the Good News of Salvation to all who would believe in Him.

## ***Good News***

This then is what Jesus was being commissioned for: to bring the offer of salvation to the world. Mark reinforces this point, because after Jesus emerges from the desert, following his baptism and temptation, the very first thing Jesus does, is proclaim the Good News. Indeed, the very first words of Jesus in Mark's Gospel are:

*“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”*

Now there is an entire sermon here in just that single verse, but a couple of quick points will have to suffice for now. Firstly, through Jesus, God's plan of salvation had come to fruition. The wait was over, the time had come because the Messiah had now come. In Jesus, God had made His move, and we now have to respond – how do we do that? What response does God want from us?

The response God requires is twofold. Firstly, believe in Jesus, believe. And secondly – repent, turn away from sin and turn to Christ. That's what repentance means: to turn around; to do a 180. Repent and believe. Turn away from sin, and turn to Christ and embrace Him as your Lord. And those that do will enter the Kingdom of God. And I suppose that introduces a third element in Jesus' proclamation: The Kingdom of God. In Christ, God's kingdom had now broken into our reality, and we can enter that Kingdom only through faith in Christ.

There isn't time now to explore the full meaning of “the Kingdom of God”, but suffice to say that God will richly reward those that repent, and turn to Him and believe in His Son, Jesus.

## ***Our Duty***

I'd like to finish by bringing this back to baptism again - but our own baptism this time, rather than that of Jesus. When we are baptised, we too are being commissioned by God to carry on the work of Christ. The idea is that Jesus will continue His work through us, through all those who love, worship and obey Him.

Our baptism is the beginning of something, not the end of something. Baptism is about joining the church, not leaving it. It's about becoming an active member of your local worshipping community. I say this because we can of course, ignore our baptism and the promises we made (or that were made on our behalf by our parents) and we can choose to live as though we were never baptised at all, and sadly many people do. But God gives us that choice; even though we may be baptised, we still have our free will, we still have the freedom to ignore and forget our promises.

## ***Free Will***

How we use our free will; the choices we make and the things we do; how we spend our time – these things say far more about who we really are than any words we may say. But we will have to answer to God directly for the choices we make - He will hold us fully accountable for how we use our free will.

Jesus of course, had free will too, He chose to use His free will to live a life of obedience and worship of God. He lived out His own baptism of obedience, even to the point of being crucified. How far are we prepared to go to fulfil our baptism promises? Are we prepared to go to the point of letting our beliefs actually affect the way we live and worship? For some people that's a step too far – how about you? Amen.