

Jesus' Baptism 2 Peter 1:16-19 and Matthew 3:13-17

People went out to John the Bap...from Jerusalem, and all Judea and the whole region...confessing their sins...

Never before in all their nation's history had Jews submitted to baptism. They baptised proselytes, converts, Gentiles, people from another religion but not fellow Jews...members of the Chosen People, who could say "We have Abraham as our father. God's favourites don't need serious repentance. If one slipped up, it was nothing that a sacrifice at the Temple or bit of extra effort at keeping the Law couldn't put right

But here they are falling over themselves, queuing up to be dunked in the river Jordan by this strange recluse with a powerful message.

Something was happening. We have a clue in the story of Anna the old prophetess when Jesus..six days old going out to tell the news about Jesus to 'those who were looking for redemption'. Thirty years on there are people still looking.

Then 'Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised'. We read the story...the Baptist is stumped! He has a HUNCH as to who this Jesus of Nazareth is. 'You should be baptising me!' But he goes along with Jesus.

So why is Jesus lining up to confess his sins? With hindsight we know that Jesus was without sin. So it's a fair question... why has he come to be baptised?

Two answers... 1 To confirm and endorse John's message, and Israel's need for repentance. A token sacrifice isn't enough. They need redemption. They need a redeemer!

2 To identify himself with sinful mankind. Not with mankind's sinfulness. But with mankind. To do that the Word must become flesh and dwell among us. But to some religious minds that couldn't happen.

To 2nd /3rd century Docetists it was unthinkable that God, who is Holy by definition would expose himself to contamination by human sin. But if Jesus was fully human he shared man's sinfulness. He couldn't be divine. One way of getting around the problem was to argue that he only appeared to be fully human (so DOCETIST from the verb 'to appear') - a phantom...how else could He move through closed doors after the resurrection? As pseudo-christians, they wanted to take a big difficulty out of Christology, as it was called. They denied the true humanity of Jesus. But they only created more problems for themselves e.g. miracles, the cross, the resurrection,

Jews and Moslems to this day have the same problem. To them the incarnation didn't prove that Jesus of Nazareth was God. It proved the very opposite. For one thing he died, and to say he was God was blasphemy. You can see what that means. They have what they consider the high religious ground! They're sticking up for God!

And that paves the way for persecution. (e.g in the Middle East today.)

So we can see where the Docetists were coming from, and why the great Creeds of the 4th/5th century are so adamant. He is God of God, Light of light, Very God.

Which brings us back to our Gospel and the baptism.

Jesus's destiny is taken out of his hands. It's God who has the last word. READ v16,17 A voice from heaven...This is My Son in whom I am well pleased. It's Jesus's Moment of truth. (Some have problems with voices from heaven. In the first reading..2 Peter 1 Peter says 'We know. We were there! We were eye witnesses ...we heard the voice!')

The statement is made up of two OT quotations... 1. You are my Son, whom I love - that's from Psalm 2. Taken by Jews to be a refer to the Mighty, Chosen one of God, Messiah figure, who was to come...

2 'In whom I am well pleased' This is a description of someone known as The Suffering Servant of God, who appears in the several passages in the prophecy of Isaiah (8th century), particularly ch 53. Someone whom Christians, with the Gospel records in their hands, believe refers unmistakably to Jesus. (They're so familiar to us...particularly if you know Handel's Messiah. It doesn't take much imagination to make the connection.) It's worth noting that sometimes the Servant's story is told in the past tense, sometimes in the future tense, and sometimes the present tense. making the point that his work as Servant has a timeless significance and relevance. Here's the gist...

Who has believed ... He grew up as a tender plant...(he's a young man)...he has no beauty or majesty, (he's not a charmer, or a celebrity). He is despised and rejected by men, like someone from whom people turn away (an embarrassment!) a man of sorrows, (who knows grief from personal experience)...he has born our weakness and carried our sorrows. All that is mental (psychological) suffering...Then the physical...

Yet we considered him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded our transgressions...crushed for our iniquities... the scourging that brought our peace was on him and with his stripes we are healed..

He was oppressed and afflicted, led like a lamb to the slaughter...

The words come quick and fast, despised, smitten, afflicted, wounded, pierced, bruised, oppressed, scourged, rejected, struck, cut off... is that all?!!

and finally, CRUSHED! v 10 it was the Lord's will (it pleased the Lord, AV) to crush him! i.e. It pleased the Lord (AV) to crush the One in whom he was well pleased! God loved so the world!

Now the Baptist has recognised him ...the next day he points to Jesus and says 'Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.'

verse 12 'because he poured out his life unto death and bore the sins of many.' Mission accomplished! and this morning,

in penitence and faith, as we take communion ..each of us can say 'he was wounded for my transgressions, he was bruised for my iniquities and by his stripes I am healed..