

a baptism of love, responding to love

a sermon preached on the
the baptism of Christ

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at

st john's

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

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the lections: Genesis 1: 1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19: 1-7; Mark 1: 4-11

Today we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of our Lord, marking another significant moment in the life of Christ. These began with his birth in Bethlehem to the arrival of the magi who offered him precious gifts, and continues today with our recalling Jesus' baptism.

Today we reflect on Christ's baptism, and give thanks for our own baptisms.

As with many of the readings for the seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, prophecies and prophets continue to have an important role, an important voice which herald Christ as the Messiah and directing those who hear them, and us, to Christ.

In today's Gospel reading, John the Baptist continues to prophetically point the way to Christ. A strange figure, wild, clothed in camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey, John prophetically declares that one will come who is more powerful than he, and that is Christ. Having heard his words, many people seek John and ask for baptism, being baptised in the river Jordan in an act of repentance and redemption. This is restated in the Acts of the Apostles, where Paul explains to the Ephesians that John pointed them to Christ, the one who was to come and in whom they should believe.

Jesus travels from Nazareth to be baptised by John in the Jordan. One question that is reasonable to pose is this - why did Jesus get baptised? Or to put it slightly differently - what happened at Jesus' baptism?

The Gospel according to Mark says that John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins, and you could be forgiven for wondering what sort of repentance Jesus would need to make, given that he is the Beloved Son of the Father, both fully human and divine.

So, why did Jesus get baptised?

To answer this question we need to think a little more broadly about baptism and what it means.

The waters of baptism are holy waters, they are like the waters of creation in the book of Genesis. They are waters from which great things emerge and in which wonderful things happen. And they are also waters which take us from moments of genesis, to moments of revelation. Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River was an important moment because it was a moment of revelation. As he was baptised, the presence of the holy spirit and the voice from heaven declared who Jesus was to the world. At his baptism Jesus is declared to be the Son of God, and beloved of God. This is declared to the world, made known for all. This is a public declaration of who and what Jesus already is.

And our baptisms too have a revelatory aspect.

Baptism is said to be an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. They are about what we already are, not what we might become. Baptisms are not the moment when God enters the life of the baptised, but are the

moment when we publicly acknowledge and give thanks that we are all children of God and members of the body of Christ.

So I invite you to reflect on your own baptism, whether as an infant, child, or adult. I invite you to consider it as that moment when you were revealed to be what you already were - a child of God, also beloved, also loved and cherished.

Jesus' baptism is also considered to be the beginning of his public ministry. As it is in our lives, it was a defining moment within his life, a moment when his identity was made known to the world, and which would mark the beginning of his ministry which offered the world a teaching which brings us back into relationship with God through acts of love, hospitality and generosity.

Ultimately, we baptise not because we wish to be cleansed and purified and have a 'clean slate' before a God who is overly judgemental, nor do we baptise to appease a God who requires placation to avoid anger and punishment, but we baptise because it is an act of love in response to the love of God, who gave us the incarnate Christ as our guide and teacher, and who was honoured as the beloved Son of God at his own baptism.

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