

Reflection January 10th The Baptism of Christ
Harnham Parish Churches

Genesis 1:1-5 Psalm 29 Acts 19:1-7 **Mark 1 v 4-11**

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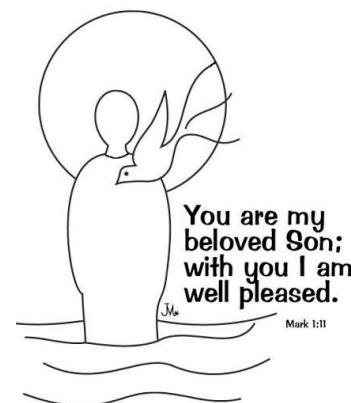
John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism of Jesus

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved with you I am well pleased."

The celebration of the baptism of Jesus Christ draws us into the transcendence of God and the intimacy of God. Our God is awesome *and* personal. God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe *and* we are adopted as God's children.

Jesus' baptism is recorded in all four gospels and clearly shows the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son. The events that occur in Jesus' baptism are all signs of God's presence. A. The heavens are opened- a symbol of God's presence, God's closeness to humanity. B. The Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove- an Old Testament symbol of the arrival of good news and peace- e.g. when a dove brought the news that the flood had ended in the Genesis story of Noah. A sign of the Holy Spirit. C. A voice from Heaven speaks- "You are my son whom I love, with you I am well pleased." This confirmed Jesus' identity as the Son of God referring back to Old Testament promises in Psalm 22 and of his kingdom being of the line of David.



Mark portrays the baptism of Christ as a very intimate personal affair- as if a private conversation is going on between God and Jesus "You are my son" after which, Jesus seems to be the only one who sees the heavens split open and the Spirit descend.

(Some scholars think that the whole of the first chapters of Mark's writing are a deliberate device to illustrate the secrecy around Jesus as God's son. Mark only announces who Jesus is in his writing from Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah in chapter 8. God publically announces Jesus 'This is my Son.' in chapter 9. I wonder why? In the end, the cross is the biggest point of revelation at which Jesus identity is revealed and by the Roman centurion who confesses Jesus to be the Son of God...food for thought! (John 15 v 39)

In our baptisms by water and the Spirit we are adopted. It is personal. We cry 'Our Father.' The Greek word *huiothesia* means, literally, "to be placed as a son." This links to the Roman understanding of legal adoption when sons were given a right to inherit father's property and the Father took responsibility to care for the 'son.' In love God raises Jesus through his baptism of 'death into life', and in this relationship of law and love we too are adopted and raised to new life. This is our inheritance- new life. 'See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!' (1 John 3 v 1)

What does being Baptised mean to you? What in your life helped you to see Jesus as 'God'?
What does an inheritance of new life mean to you?

HYMN REFLECTION Malcolm Sturgess

For two ten-year periods of my life I worshipped in high Anglo-Catholic churches. Sometimes one wondered why all that fuss, all those rules, were necessary, when Jesus and the disciples exercised their ministry tramping over barren hills in sandals, with virtually no visual aids. But now and again I miss all the splendour, the bells and smells, the robes and ritual, which really do, on occasions, make it easier to feel closer to the Godhead. There are some hymns which only seem to appear in that sort of worship, and we are considering one of them this week.

The 8th-century Paul the Deacon, ultimately of Monte Cassino, seems to have written thirteen extant hymns, virtually all about John the Baptist. There is one in the hymnbook AMNS 315, and below is another. They would all have been sung to Plainsong melodies, of course, but today's "modern" tune is one of a select group of early 18th-century French tunes with the unusual 11 11 11 5 metre, all eminently singable.

The original Latin words were translated for the 1906 English Hymnal by Richard Ellis Roberts, briefly Editor of the New Statesman. One can't help thinking that the classically-trained Alfred Noyes, or even John Masefield, might have made a better job of it and produced more felicitous verses. These are relevant to today's theme, but it is the tune which sells the hymn. Or one of the tunes: they are almost interchangeable. We could use *Coelites plaudant*, *Iste confessor 2*, *Christe sanctorum* or *Diva servatrix*.

There are eight of these splendid tunes, which Richard Seal used to call "the French jobs", in the English Hymnal, and still eight, but with couplings slightly changed, in the hymnbook NEH. There are five in the hymnbook AMNS (some with modern words) and only four in the new Ancient & Modern. Enough said. To make them sound complete, they all need a five-note Amen on the end, which links the hymns back to their plainsong origins. Just for once, let's light up the incense and sing

Let thine example, holy John, remind us,
Ere we can meetly sing thy deeds of wonder,
Hearts must be chastened, and the bonds that bind us Broken asunder!

E'en in thy childhood, mid the desert places,
Thou hadst a refuge from the city gainèd,
Far from all slander, and its bitter traces, Living unstainèd.

Often had prophets in the distant ages
Sung to announce the Daystar and to name him;
But as the Saviour, last of all the sages, Thou didst proclaim him.

Than John the Baptist, none of all Eve's daughters
E'er bore a greater, whether high or lowly;
He was thought worthy, washing in the waters Jesus the holy.

Angels in orders everlasting praise thee,
God, in thy triune Majesty tremendous;
Hark to the prayers we penitents upraise thee, Save and defend us. Amen.

Eternal Father, who at the baptism of Jesus revealed him to be your Son, anointing him with the Holy Spirit: grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit, that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Ideas for further study- Revd Becky

God promises healing, deliverance, cleansing and saving- all shown through the symbols of water and the Spirit in the Old Testament and brought into the meaning of baptism in the New. This week why not spend some time reading about the symbolism of the waters of baptism –

- a. the Spirit bringing life and order out of the waters that covered the earth (Genesis 1:1–2, 20)
- b. Noah being saved through water as a symbol of us being saved through the waters of baptism (Gen. 6:9–18; 1 Pet. 3:20–21)
- c. Moses delivers Israel from the tyranny of Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea (Ex. 14; 1 Cor. 10:2)
- d. The Levitical priests cleansed by the washing of baptismal waters held in a laver before they entered the Tabernacle (Ex. 30:17–21).
- e. The Syrian general Naaman was healed through baptism (dipping seven times) in the waters of the Jordan river (2 Kgs. 5).
- f. God's promise through Ezekiel pointed to the cleansing work of water baptism (Ezek. 36:25–27).