

Sunday January 12th 2025

When I was asked to take this Morning Worship service I was very happy to do so, but I had no idea at the time what the scripture for today's Gospel reading would be, but God did. When I looked it up I was amazed as it was the third occasion that the subject of baptism had come up for me in recent months. So I feel God has been teaching me something and taken me on a journey to prepare for today. It has definitely given me a lot to think about. Why do we get baptised? What does it mean and what does Jesus teach us about baptism?

I was recently part of a close family baptism which was a wonderful occasion with all family and friends attending, who were all touched by the welcome they received and I would like to think touched by God too. It really struck me how significant this event was. Here were a couple choosing to baptise their precious child, presenting them before the Lord, wanting God's protection on their life and recognising their need for a Saviour. Declaring to all present that they would protect the child and bring them up to know the Lord and to encourage them to walk with and serve the Lord. The importance of choosing the right godparents, people who they love and would want the best for them and their child, who promised to help them in their child's spiritual upbringing and the responsibility for all family and friends present to be involved in this also. It was a wonderful occasion to witness this child being welcomed into the family of the church.

Many of us here today would have been baptised as babies or young children and won't have any recollection of it happening. We will have grown up knowing we were baptised and not thinking much more about it, other than it is a significant part of tradition in Church life. Some of us may have experienced full immersion baptism, our own or witnessed someone else's. But why?

Our Gospel reading from today is taken from Luke. We can also read in Matthew and in Mark about the baptism of Jesus which gives us a fuller picture of the event.

John was seen by people at the time as a great prophet and some people thought he might even be the Messiah they had been waiting for. John's message was to tell people to repent and turn from their sin and instead turn to God. John baptised people with water symbolising the washing away of sins. But he goes on to say that someone who is greater than he was would be coming, who will baptise people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Pentecost!

It was whilst he was baptising people one day that Jesus appeared by the river Jordan and wanted to be baptised by John, but John said that he was the one who should be baptised by Jesus. John didn't feel worthy to baptise Jesus, not even to untie the things of Jesus' sandals, but Jesus tells him that it is proper to do this to fulfil all righteousness. So John is obedient and baptises him.

Why was Jesus baptised? Jesus didn't need to admit to sin, He was sinless. Although Jesus didn't need forgiveness, He was baptised to show support for John's ministry and to identify with us and to give us an example to follow. And to begin His mission to bring the message of salvation to all people.

Our reading goes on to say that as Jesus came out of the water and was praying, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended in Him like a dove and a voice from heaven said 'This is my beloved Son and I am fully pleased with Him.' Here we see God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit all present.

And so, does it matter if we have a sprinkle of water or if we are fully immersed in water? If we were baptised as babies many of us when we were old enough would have confirmed our faith in a confirmation service. We all have to make the decision to follow Jesus ourselves, not just because our parents made that decision for us, but they gave us a good start. It is what is in our heart that is important. There may only be enough water for a sprinkle or there may be a pool or a river or the sea and we can jump right in, it symbolises that washing away of sin and repentance and that is what is important.

Our talk on the first Sunday in advent was about the Hope of Peace as people long ago were waiting for the birth of Jesus, and the Hope of Peace we have as we are now waiting for Jesus to come again. As we wait for that day we have the Hope of peace symbolised at Jesus' baptism in the form of a dove. The peace we can have when we obey God and put our trust in Him.

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