

The Baptism of Jesus

Reading 1 - John Baptises Jesus in the Jordan Mt 3.13-17, [17.5], Mk 1.9-11, 9.7 Lk 3.21-22 Jn 1.29-34

Reading 2 - Jesus' Authority linked to source of John's Baptism Mt 21.23-32, Mk 11.27-33, Lk 20.1-8

Other readings-

Reading 3 - The word of God made flesh Jn.1-1-18

Reading 4 - Healings in Gennesaret Mt 14.34-36, Lk 6.53-56, Jn 6.22-25

Reading 5 - The needy friend at midnight Mt 6.9-13, Lk 11.1-13

Reading 6 - Divisions take place over Jesus Mt 10.34-36, Lk 12.49-53

Reading 7 - Teaching in the Temple Jn 7.14-39

Reading 8 - Sons of Zebedee Mt 20.20-28, 23.11 Mk 10.35-45

Reading 9 - Parable of Great Supper [Wedding garment] Mt 22.1-14, Lk 14.15-24

Reading 10 - Greeks seek Jesus Jn 12.20-36

Reading 11 - Gethsemane Mt 26.36-46, Mk 14.32-42, Lk 22.39-46, Jn 18.1, 12, 27

Reading 12 - Day of Pentecost Acts 2.1-12

Reading 13 - Paul at Ephesus: Twelve Men baptised Acts 19.1-7

The Readings

1 - What is a Baptism?

1 – What is a baptism? [1 Corinthians 10.1-4]

Before we begin to look at the baptism of Jesus we might want to ask what a baptism is. And to do that we will need to look at the baptism of Jesus by John and also what is Christian baptism. You may ask why we didn't start with John's baptism of the people of Israel? Well, it is just that we have a text in 1 Corinthians which 10.1-4 which presents a description of the Exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt as a baptism. And that starts us further back in the history and allows us to come forward in a way that takes John's baptism into that stream of thinking.

1.1 Baptism as a shared life experience.

Everyone has participated in some traumatic event which really tested every inner resource that we had within ourselves. And we often summarise what it meant to us afterwards with the words "that surely was a baptism of fire". We use the word baptism; and by it we mean "an immersion". An immersion not so much into some medium which is outside of us but as an immersion into a shared life experience in which we were caught up. There were events overtaking us, in that sense we were passive. But we were also active. For we went through it, and it changed our life forever.

In our passage this is expressed by the statement "...our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea" and "...all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink..."

Here we have shared experience of a passive and active nature. There was considerable trauma involved here; it was not a mild arm chair ride. Further, they were involved themselves, their lives were on the line and they could not disconnect from the circumstances.

1.2 Baptism into a person.

Often this common experience finds a common focal point in the shared leader who was present and guiding us through the events. Everyone had not always the same set of experiences of the events, but they all lived under the leadership of the one person. Everyone will remember that person, each one will have encountered him. It was impossible to have a series of shared experiences and not have powerful awareness of the person

who lead us through them. It was a baptism into the person as much as it was a baptism in the events. Because their life and your life was then entwined. To have gone through the events was to have share the life of the leadership. They were your life, and their judgments and ways of doing things often meant that you came through the very testing times together.

In our passage we find the words "all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea". Here we see that the life they had was the life of their leader. In this sense they were immersed into that man. The share they had of his life was total and he was committed to them in an unreserved manner. He did not visit them and then go away. He was not some one from the fourth floor, sipping a gin and tonic, lying in his hammock commenting on their life as it was played out on the ground below. He was right with them, involved in every matter, in every way and bearing them as a shepherd bears his flock's needs and caring for them as a mediator between them and God who was the One orchestrating the whole matter.

And they were baptised "into Moses, in the cloud and in the sea". It was because they were in the cloud and the sea" along with him that they were said to be baptised "into" the man who lead them. He was not God to them, but as a man among them and involved in their life and bearing the same conditions as they did, he was the mediator of God's salvation.

1.3 Baptism is a life-changing, event of deliverance.

From our passage we learn that the events were not some conjured up dream, some life rafting experience on a huge river canyon freely entered into with life insurance covered and the best of safety equipment on board. This was a deliverance from slavery being effected. It was a matter of life and death because it was the covenant owner of the people coming to save them when they had cried to Him for rescue. This was a matter which would affect the lives of these people and their very cultural patterns of existence yet to come. This would deliver them into the hands of living with their rescuing God.

The baptism "into Moses" was seen to take place in the rescuing operation. It was pre-eminently at the time of being together in the cloud and in the sea. Later, having experienced that salvation they were to continue to live under the rule of Moses, as he lead them into the shared life of God, who He says, brought them out of this bondage to "be with Him", and to live a shared life with God Himself.

1.4 Baptism speaks of the event of deliverance- a salvation "from"; but afterwards it leads to a shared life which becomes the expression of the goal – a salvation "to".

The immersion into the life of the leader did not stop with the traumatic deliverance and its victory over the enemies – it went on into the shared life of God in the wilderness, and all under the leadership of Moses as well.

1.5 Baptism as a separating experience.

And further, to have lived through such a time with others, when we all reflect upon that shared adventure, we discover it has made us one. We knew it at the time, but later there are shared moments, insights and personal changes which we could assume are understood and known. It gives us a vocabulary, a common knowledge base and experience in a way which others, who have not shared it, do not have with us. It becomes an established difference from us with others. The do not know it because they have not shared it – the immersion has not been there's as yet.

It would be true of Israel all through her history that she would be a people set apart from others who had not known their God as the One who delivers them from their enemies so that they might serve Him without fear.

And throughout their history there was constant provision made for the next generation to "remember" what it was that God had done with their forefathers.

2 – Baptism as the way for an exchange of life to take place.

We have seen that the shared journey of the Hebrews in going through the Exodus as a salvation from the bondage they had in Israel was done by a traumatic series of events that

2 - A way for an exchange of life to happen

climaxed under the cloud and in the sea. And we see how Paul explains that as series of events as being "baptised into Moses". Now this principle will be the main way we are to approach the baptism of Jesus. In the case of the Hebrews, they went through the events with the person of Moses at their head.

3 – John's baptism was "from heaven" and not "from men".

We have seen that John's baptism was, as Jesus later puts it to the religious leaders, "from heaven". It was a kingdom- based call to get ready to make our hearts open to the access of the coming King. It involved the willingness to change our life to what was good – it was a repentance , a change of mind which led to a change of life.

Such a repentance implied that people had seen their need to change, so that meant they had seen they were not right, but wrong – they were sinners.

John asked them to undergo a baptism of repentance leading to the remission of their sins. That is, he gave them the promised hope that their sins would be remitted. And no doubt this was a major incitement to the repentance which he required. He raised their faith that the forgiveness of sins was just around the corner. They trusted this righteous man from the wilderness who could preach judgment so uncompromisingly because he also preached grace by which their hopes were raised that the sins he spoke of could be remitted. No wonder that all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea flocked to John the Baptist.

4 – The participation of Jesus, with other faithful people, in the Baptism of John.

4.1 Jesus participates by Incarnation

By simply being born of Mary we understand that Jesus was already experiencing what it was like to share in the life of sinners. He too was a person who toiled by his labour. He too has the understanding of being involved in business where checks and balances are maintained because we are dealing with fallen people. He too knows what it is to be wearied by the language, thought life and expressed angers of the people all around Him towards one another.

4.2 Jesus participates in a baptism for sinners

But here in the baptism of John Jesus was entering into that life that, under grace, sinners may also come to know and share. They can hear the Word of God and respond to it. They can dare to believe what it is that God is promising. Jesus comes with sinful believers to respond to the current prophetic word. He comes to share faith in God's word.

In the case of Jesus here at His baptism, He is immersing himself in their baptism; into the life of confessing sinners; he is being baptised into our life. This not just any part of that life such as the Incarnation would have given Him entry.

It is to share that place of open confession where the acknowledgement of sins is able to be entered by a shared baptism. This was the people's trauma, if you will, of recognising their own faults and transgressions – and taking the public responsibility, before their fellows, for them. Jesus goes through it with them in that activity; yet not such that He confesses His own faults, for He has no such deeds. But in that He stands in the midst of them as they do it,. He is baptised with them and He takes with them the burden of that sin. He enters into participation with them in it, and so shares our life. At the same time He has faith, as they do, that those sins will soon be remitted – He also has faith in John's words.

4.3 Jesus, along with them, has faith sins will be dealt with.

In listening to the voice of John the Baptist, Jesus was hearing His Father's voice through that man. Jesus then walked into the water to stand with sinners who are confessing their sins in such a way that they have the faith to believe that they shall soon be forgiven and the debt of them shall be cancelled.

They have faith and look to their sins, personal and corporate, to be dealt with.; they are

3 - "from heaven" = it is God's work

4 - A sharing in John's baptism of Israel

believing God to deliver them a gracious benefit – they are looking to receive. Jesus, like them, also has faith in His Father's word that sins will soon be remitted – He is a believer in that Word, for He is the Redeemer, the bringer of the benefit they seek. Jesus' faith in Father's promise and understands that this is a serious place for Himself – it will call Him to give His life a ransom for many – He is being baptised because He is the grounds and basis of this forgiveness they seek. He will throw His life away- that we might have it. He will become poor, that we might become rich with his life.

4.4 It was the fulfilling of all righteousness

John initially opposed Jesus in this readiness for baptism. He wanted to restrain Him. Did the Saviour of his people need to confess Himself as a sinner before God in solidarity with His people? Did Jesus need to submit Himself to the judgement of God? Rather John thought that he needed to be baptised by Jesus.

But this was a serious error; similar to that of Peter [Mt 16.22] "Far be it for you Lord". For it wasn't that some immFreely subject to the will oediate discrepancy between John and Jesus was at issue; it was that everything which John was preaching and Jesus was coming for was at stake. "All righteousness" here had to be fulfilled. That this gracious will of God which John was preaching was to be fulfilled in the life of Jesus was going to turn on this action.

5 – What was the Son doing here?

5 - What was the Son doing here?

5.1 He is freely subjecting Himself to the will of the Father

[a] He is freely, totally subjecting Himself to the control and Lordship of his Father. He does not choose this act for Himself, it is demanded of Him by God through the voice of John in the wilderness. As an Israelite, Jesus heard with all Israel [Lk 3.2] the man "sent from God" [Jn 1.6]. He obeyed it by having Himself baptised.

As John called the people of Israel to readiness for the coming Kingdom of God, Jesus makes Himself ready in his response. And He was also doing this in a way which was not of his choosing; He did not set the type of service He would do for God, His Father set that. In this way He is passively obeying the call: so He enters the water praying [Lk3.21]. With empty hands He is trusting in the Father concerning this action He is making in response to the call, He is at the disposal of God and men.

[b] He is coming to submit to the work of God, and yet He does not come simply as one who awaits the action of God to follow, but also to actually execute it. His coming is a coming to commit to bring it about.

5.2 He is freely associating with men and women.

Being, without reserve, submitted to the will of God, He is committed to the solidarity with all men. He was setting himself in the history of men and women who had fallen victim to the judgement of God. And through the preaching of John they had been referred to God's coming free remission of sins. It was to this that Jesus also directed Himself as the act to be involved in.

In doing this He confesses God as the One whose will is shortly to come on the earth; and he confessed men as the ones which God had in view in doing this will. Others, frightened by the coming will of God, are confessing their sins; this One, calmly, as a Son of God and a Brother of men and women, is confessing their sins which He has caused to be His own.

Karl Barth expresses this confession of Jesus powerfully.

"No one who came to the Jordan was as laden and as afflicted as He. No one was as needy. No one so utterly human, because so fellow-human. No one confessed his sins so sincerely, so truly his own, without side glances at others. He stands alone in this, He who was elected and ordained from all eternity to partake of the sin of all in His own person, to bear its shame and curse in the place of all, to be the man responsible for all, and as such, wholly theirs, to live and act and suffer. This is what Jesus began to do when He had Himself baptised by John with all the others. This was

the opening of His history as the salvation history of all others."

K. Barth, Church Dogmatics IV.4, p. 59

5.3 He is freely entering on a service for God and also men and women

In this act of baptism then, He set Himself to do in serving both God and men, the very thing which He alone could do for men. And as a man, that which He could only do for God. What He set himself in this baptism was a commitment to carry out his mission as Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the world.

5.4 He is receiving permanently, for our sakes, the Holy Spirit

Among the Israelite sinners that Jesus is standing, it is the case in their lives that they receive the Holy Spirit, during the time of the Law and the Prophets, so to see Him go again. In the Old Testament the Spirit of God comes and goes. And in the case of kings and others, the Spirit left because the favour of God had been withdrawn, due to the rebellion of the anointed one. Saul would be a good case in point. In the person of Jesus we have the Messiah, the anointed One, upon Whom the Spirit descends and remains [John 1.] The experiences of sinners was that the Spirit, if He came on someone, could also go at any time, He could be withdrawn.

It is the mark of sinners then, that while the favour of God may be known, such a reception can be lost. For our experience is that we receive the gifts of God so as to lose them again. Jesus receives the Spirit for us, so that we may find that, in Christ Jesus, we shall never have the Spirit leave us or forsake us. It is His reception of the Spirit upon His person which becomes the basis for us being able to know the deep things of Jesus later.

5.5 As a man, he is receiving and living by the power of the Spirit, so that we might.

Throughout the whole of his public ministry, the Gospels will report that Jesus did what He did under the power and the leading of the Holy Spirit. He lived his victorious and miracle-permeated life in service for others by the power of the Spirit.

5.6 Entering upon a costly baptism into death.

6 - What is God, the Father, doing?

6.1 The Gospel writers do not only record Jesus' submission to the baptism of John, they also speak of something which is expressed from heaven.

6.2 Immediately as Jesus is "coming up" [anabainein] from the water, the heaven opened and Jesus saw the Holy Spirit as a dove, [or as Lk has it, "in bodily form like a dove" Lk 3.22] "coming down" [katabainein] upon Him [and remaining on Him according to Jn 1.32ff].

6.3 In this way, heaven is answering Jesus, acknowledging, confirming and approving what it is that He is doing in response to the word of God brought through the prophecy of John. *De facto*, by being baptised He has entered his ministry; *de jure*, heaven is acknowledging that fact.

In the Gospels, these affirmations from heaven occur at important turning points of Jesus' life [eg. the angels to the shepherds with the heavenly host Lk 2.9,13; the Transfiguration Mk 9.2 and parallels; the voice heard in the Temple after Jesus' entry to Jerusalem Jn 12.28ff; and the strengthening angel in Gethsemane Lk 22.43].

6.4 It is important to see that Jesus' baptism is not a place where He *becomes* the Mediator etc on behalf of men. His beginning here on his ministry was a simple act of obedience of one who is "lowly of heart" [Mt 11.29]. He is not grasping at the power to discharge his ministry. He is simply responding to the known will of God. He is simply obeying, not having a claim or seeking anything, not wanting anything as a possession; he just wants God to receive glory through his obedience. He cannot anticipate what John or God would do.

6.5 Jesus is not then, in the light of 4.4 above, attempting to seize office. He is not trying some "forcing" of heaven's hand by his going down into the waters. He is not pretentious

6 - What was the Father doing here?

here - what could he gain by being baptised by John along with everyone else? The only thing could be the free answer of God Himself, and that was not in Jesus hands. The same issue will raise its head in Gethsemane and the cross - with the same answer!

6.6 The beginning at the Jordan is related to the end at Golgotha by the saying of Luke 12.50 which states that the final goal of Jesus' work, his death, as a baptism.

Further, this baptism of Jesus the disciples will share - they also will die in and with him - Mark 10.35-40. Can they drink the cup he is drinking [present tense] or be baptised with the baptism with which he is baptised [present tense]? They say "Yes". He says that it will be so. There is here a deep connection between the life and activity of Jesus and the experience of the disciples. What He has gone through on their behalf will come to be their experience - if it doesn't, how can it effectively be on their behalf?

6.7 Heaven was declaring that Jesus was the one great Receiver of the Holy Spirit - it is on account of this that He is the Baptiser on the Holy Spirit. See John and p.70 Barth

This sheds a new light on John the Baptist's saying that it was for this reason he came baptising, that this Man would be identified as the One who was promised.

7 – What is God, the Holy Spirit, doing here?

- He is descending upon Jesus to remain upon Him: it will be a permanent ministry
- He has come to convey the love, and the affirmation of the Father to the Son
- He has come to strengthen and comfort Him at the acceptance of such a ministry
- He has come to direct the ministry and supply the power for it to go forward

7 - What is the Holy Spirit doing here?

8 – Baptism, for Jesus, is the beginning of a traumatic series of events of our salvation.

8.1 The apostolic witness marks the beginning of Jesus public ministry as the baptism of John [Acts 1.22]. From here on in we shall see that the temptation to abandon this costly way of doing things follows rapidly. Then the public preaching and miracles begin in earnest.

8.2 Little wonder then, that Jesus, in reply to the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, seeking the honoured positions in heaven, asks are they able to undergo the baptism with which He is to be baptised. He is referring to his death, resurrection and ascension of course. We will not be wrong in seeing that it is the whole of the events of the life of Jesus which saves us. For it is the Person in His words and works Who is the Saviour.

8 - Beginning of Jesus' very difficult ministry

9 – Our participation in His life through baptism in water.

9.1 Baptism in water in the name of Jesus means an exchange of lives.

Acts 2.28ff has Peter explaining to a wondering audience of Jewish people in Jerusalem, what the falling of the Holy Spirit means. He makes it clear that the person of Jesus was rejected, and by the foreknowledge of God delivered over to the Romans by the Jewish people. He indicates that God raised Him, vindicating Him from their judgement that He was worthy of death. He has now been exalted to the honoured position at God's right hand.

The listening crowd, under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, is cut to the heart – seeing that they are wrong and that Jesus is in the right. Further, they are alarmed that their promised Messiah has come, and that they have rejected Him. They ask of Peter, "What shall we do?"

Peter, registering the work of the Spirit upon them for conviction and knowledge of their sin in this matter replies, "Repent, and be baptised in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift [of the person] of Holy Spirit."

9 - We share in this baptism

Here we see that the baptism in water, in the name of Jesus immerses them in the exchange of their life for His. They come to immediately register within themselves that their sins are forgiven; they also immediately receive the Holy Spirit who conveys to them the life of Jesus in all its fullness. They come to know God as Father, the way Jesus does.

9.2 Baptism means we have participated in dying and rising with Christ [Romans 6.1-11].

Our central text for the understanding of this wonderful exchange which has taken place for us is Romans 6.1-11.

After explaining how Adam and Christ are two representative men for the whole of mankind, Paul explains that what was lost to us, and what condemnation came upon us, came through the disobedience of Adam. Conversely, Christ, comes in the midst of sins and fallenness, and by His obedience brings us a righteousness [justification]. In doing this Christ defeats the rule of sin, understood as a power, over mankind.

Since this rule of grace abounds in the midst of sin, some folks raise the objection that we should keep on sinning, for it makes no difference. Paul's reply turns on the understanding of our own baptism to show that it is not simply the guilt and condemnation of sin which has been dealt with; but a new life has been entered so that we may be no longer under the power of sin.

1 Peter 3.13-4.8 Baptism now saves you

10 - We must see how God has gone about doing this saving work

10.1 First, He has sent us a man, just as He sent the Hebrew people Moses. As Moses was prepared in the wilderness to know God and to understand His ways, so the sending of the Son of God is the sending of God's own true life. Sending of a select and choice person who alone can bring about the exodus of all men and women from a bondage to Satan, to sin as a resident power within them, and a bondage to themselves as selfish, self-referred people.

10.2 He has not allowed us, at the time of the great redemption, to participate at all in this select work. For the very thing which disqualified us from having any part in it is the fact that we have gone it alone from God since the fall. Well, then, He shall have to save us alone. In that sense, He has delivered us over to our solo operations, and that is a judgement upon us. The fact that Jesus must do it alone is because we cannot have a part in it – God contradicts us here.

He does it alone for He alone can do it. He saves us by virtue of Who He is – as the very Son of God who has taken flesh.

Then He has baptised into the person as a way of bringing His saving work into our lives. To be baptised into Christ is to receive His benefits. To have trusted that what God has accomplished in and through that Man, now we enter in to share because we have come to participate in His life, death and resurrection.

All our treasure is in Jesus – have you been baptised in His name?

10 - How God has worked our salvation