

Reading the Gospels 2010

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nt16 – Luke 3.1-6

John the Baptist publicly appears

Read Mtt 3.1-12, Mk 1.1-8, John 1.19-28

16-1 When did John appear?

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16-1 When did John appear?

In stating the historical setting of the Christian gospel Luke considers both the imperial and local history.

[a] 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar was clear to Luke but has two possibilities for us. If we count the reign of Tiberius Caesar from the time he shared the rule with Augustus [AD 11/12] then the 15th year would be AD 25/6 or 26/7. If we reckon from the death of Augustus [19th August AD 14] then we come to AD 28/29.

In Syria, the first year of a reign was often counted from the date of accession to the new year. Then the succeeding years of a reign were counted as normal, full-calendar years. This would place the 15th year one year earlier. So, a date of AD 28 is likely to be right.

Tiberius went on to reign until 16th March AD 37. It would be Tiberius' image that appeared on the coins Jesus discusses in Luke 20.22-25 and 23.2; as it would be Tiberius' Kingship that the crowd speak of at the Crucifixion [John 19.12,15].

[b] Pontius Pilate was prefect of Judea from AD 26-36/7. [Luke 13.1; 23.1-24,52; Acts 3.13; 4.27; 13.28]. "Governor" was a word used of any type of ruler. Before the reign of Claudias Judea was governed by a "praefectus"; from the reign of Claudias to AD 66 by a "procurator"; and from AD70 by a "legate".

[c] The "tetrarchies" [= ruler of a fourth part] of Herod Antipas in Galilee, Philip in Iturea [territory along the Lebanon ranges] and Trachonitis, and Lysanias in Abilene [NW of Damascus] are listed.

Antipas, ruled in Galilee and Peraea from the death of Herod the Great

4 BC until deposed by Caligula in AD 39. Luke mentions him often throughout his Gospel [3.19; 8.3; 9.7-9; 13.31; 23.7-15]. Philip, seen to be the best of them, ruled from 4 BC until he died in AD 33/4.

[d] “in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas” is an expression which understands that there being only one high priest at a time, the times of Annas was AD 6-15, when he was deposed by Gratus. Eleazar his son succeeded him from AD 16-17 and then his son-in-law Caiaphas [AD 18-37]. Four more sons succeeded after that. Annas had a lot of prestige [John 18.13-17], and since the high priest keeps his title, Luke names him here and also in Acts 4.6.

16-2 John comes in advance of Jesus

John, as son of Zechariah, is linked with the introductory statements Luke has made about his birth. His father had prophesied about John’s function [Luke 1-76-79] that he would:

- [a] prepare people for the remission of their sins
- [b] give knowledge of salvation to God’s people
- [c] express the tender mercy of our God
- [d] prepare them for visitation of God
- [e] guide the feet of the people into ways of peace.

Luke sees him as a prophet, arising within Israel like the prophets of old did. He comes from the wilderness and operates around Jerusalem and the Jordan valley. He is preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. See more on this **nt17**.

The baptism signifies the washing away of sin. But without the inward attitude of repentance, it is ineffective as a sign. John is calling people to repentance. So his baptism is a sign they will desire, but it will drive them to repentance. John is setting up the conditions, in the minds of people that their sins can be dealt with. The cleansing is accompanied by repentance within them, and this points to the work of Jesus who is the basis for such a gift.

16-3 Preparing Israel for salvation coming

Luke sees John’s coming as a fulfilment of the Isaiah 40.3-5; see **nt18**. Luke gives us the whole verses, Matthew and Mark abbreviate; although Mark points us also to Exodus 24.7 and Malachi 3.1. All three Gospel writers substitute “his” for “our God” in the LXX – the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT; making it clear that John’s ministry anticipates that of Jesus’ and so prepares Israel for Him. [John’s Gospel has John, the baptiser, speaking of himself as the voice in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord. This is in response to those who come from Jerusalem to ask him about himself.] People are to make

a straight road for the coming King, a road into their hearts by being repentant. They need to embrace the ministry of John as preparation for Jesus. We have already had Simeon [Lk 2.30] introduce this idea to us, that the salvation that God has prepared for Israel will move to “all people”.

Father, Thank You that all this happens at a time that can be dated and established in history. Thank You for the care of the Gospel writers to pay attention to this matter. Recover, we pray, this understanding for our own young people. Help us to emphasise this in our generation; lest they think of Jesus as disconnected from history and so not real. Speaking to You in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

16-4 On receiving a person

It may strike us as very strange that a man's life, such as John's, might be given over to the preparation of the people of God for the coming of another Person. But it all depends on who we understand that Person to be.

If we are to receive a person, it is very important that we approach them informed of who they are and where to they fit; we make a response to them in the light of such questions. Whenever a Reception is planned for a great person – it is often the case that there is a lot of preparation laid down so that the appropriate mind set of those who are entering into the presence of the great person will not offend. To give offence may have serious implications for themselves. This is especially true in the ancient world. Great dignitaries were not just to be admired, welcomed and adulated – they were also to be feared, for that was part of their greatness, they carried weight for the rest of the people.

16-5 John is a gracious provision

As a reader of the Gospels, the first matter of the grace of the kingdom of God is to see that John is a personage, rather like a secretary of a great king. Being sent by the kingdom, he briefs you before you enter. This briefing is not primarily for the sake of the great King – although to dishonour them is to depreciate their glory; it is for the sake of the person entering. John is the gracious provision of God for the preparation of the hearts of the people of Israel. If Israel had paid attention to John, they would have been able to recognise, value and appreciate how they might conduct themselves in the presence of Jesus.

John's whole life and reason for being on the earth was dedicated to this “introducing” ministry. That he prepared his people on “how to receive” Jesus appropriately was a gracious provision of God for His people. It indicates the care with which He loved them; that He would provide for them not to err in their reception of His Son.

This was all the more necessary because Jesus was coming humbly, not with a great entourage of people. He was not entering the world with pomp and circumstance. He could be handled in a way that would miss Him for Who He is – unless people were prepared.

16-6 John is a tender mercy of God

And so, in His mercy and kindness, God sent them John. He was dressed in a way that they could recognise was prophetic – like Elijah; living in the wilderness as a Nazarite, dedicated to God – like Elijah. Here was a prophetic figure of an ilk that Israel had seen before. A Roman or a Greek might not pay too much attention to him; but a Jewish person would; he had imposing credentials any Jew would recognise.

In the words of his father Zacharias' prophecy, John would "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" and would prepare the way of the Lord. John was an imposing and stern figure; but he was not a figure of judgment but of grace. We need to know that before we go on to read the strong and uncompromising way he dealt with religious figures who shielded their hearts from God.

We must embrace the person of John the Baptist as God's gracious "preliminary voice". For, although John served his Lord in the historical moment at which he came - what he stands for as the grace of God is repeated over and over again in Israel's history.

For we have many "preliminary" voices to prepare us to approach Jesus with care and not to treat Him as if He were a Person that we could safely ignore. We have had people in our lifetime who have preached the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But even before we heard them we have had kindly, gentle folk we have come across who, by their attentive life to their Lord and Saviour, have actually prepared us to take Jesus seriously.

It is important to listen to these ones who "point" to Jesus. They are the first voices God has placed in our way as a gracious provision for us to handle Jesus ever so carefully. Later, in His ministry, Jesus made much of reminding religious persons of John. "Was he from heaven or not?" he would ask them. The implication was powerful – if you didn't listen to John, you have ignored the gracious "first voice" of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, Lord of heaven and earth. Where is our heart in this matter? Let us take care how we read on.

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nt 17 – Luke 3.7-9

John's public preaching of repentance

Read Mtt 3.7-10, Mk 1.2-8; the elements are similar

17-1 John stands at the end of an era

17-2 The imperative of repentance for religious folks

17-3 A gracious word that may later judge them

17-4 First the gift of grace then the task

17-5 Obedience the shared life, not grounds for acceptance

17-6 The covenant gift of the possibility of returning to the Lord

17-1 John stands at the end of an era

Mark begins what he titles as the “gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God” with the quotation from Isaiah, Exodus and Malachi. He understands the good news really begins with John the Baptist. As we have just been reading, **nt016**, the ministry of the Cousin is fundamental to the end of one era and the start of the new. John the Baptist is the hinge person whose coming makes that division.

This understanding of John's ministry is learned from considering his imprisonment, **nt022**, and his question to Jesus, through his disciples about whether He is Messiah. In his answer, Jesus comments on that **nt078**. We notice also the circumstances of John's death **nt101** and Jesus' comments about where John fits as Elijah **nt117**. John's ministry brings the Law and the Prophets to a close; because Jesus ministry opens to us the kingdom of God.

17-2 The imperative of repentance for religious folks

However, our focus is here is upon the exchange John had with the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming for baptism [Matthew]; an exchange that Luke simply records without explicit reference to them. We may take it that Luke wanted any person to read this exchange and to take it to heart. Matthew's emphasis makes clear what sort of repentance John was looking for; it would mean to change their mind “to” and also “from” attitudes and beliefs that must be left behind.

John insists that his religious questioners are a bunch of snakes. He is very stern with them. “Who warned you...?” He wonders that they are even attending

to him and his baptism. These are significant, influential people. The first group - the Pharisees - are laymen, respected for their separation from things secular and Roman. The second, were known as influential engagers with the state; they were politically shrewd networkers of society. John deals with them as one group of “snakes” who happen to be coming to him as a genuine prophet. They too, find that they are men of Israel.

Repentance is a change of mind that is carried through to an act of will. John is asking of them that they show by their way of life that they have acted, He wants to see “fruit”, that is, a product of their change of mind as something evident in their life. He is insisting that a change of life shows that there has been a change of mind.

The change of mind he wants is that they cease to presume to trust in their fleshly heritage with Abraham. He makes clear that children of Abraham, in the deepest sense, are made so by an act of God; not a matter of simple genealogy and parentage. He anticipates Paul in this matter – children of God are children of promise, they are trustingly responding to what God is graciously doing for them. John is showing that if these old beliefs were still to be held, then the fruit of the impact of his ministry was not there. This implies that John sees obedience to his ministry in a humble awareness of sin, and an embracing of the promise of forgiveness, expressed in submitting to his baptism in water. This is what God requires right now!

17-3 A gracious word that may later judge them

John’s message to all is that there is a forgiveness of sins coming and they should be baptised in water as they receive his ministry. “Baptised” because it was a new start in their relationship with God. In saying this John is aware that there is something new breaking in on the people of Israel. Every prophetic utterance spoken over this boy at his birth made that clear.

But to these folks he has a gracious warning, if they come with unchanged hearts, trusting in their old ancestry for salvation, then they must be warned of the “wrath to come” for those who trust in such things. They should attend to the fact that the one coming after him is, from their position, a coming Judge. He will separate out wheat and chaff. They cannot stay with their current hopes; the grace of God refused will bring them to judgment.

Gracious Father, in the sending of Your Son the gracious action of Your heart is declared to us. Thank you for the ministry of John. Help us to receive it. Let it challenge every other foundation upon which we rely – except that of Your gift to us in Christ Jesus . Amen

17-4 First the gift of grace then the task

The commands of God, right from the beginning of creation, are always spoken to us in a setting. That context always sets out the gift and provision of God, something expressing his grace and mercy to us.

As Creator, He called us into existence in the first place. And then, in the second place, made provision for our life as He would see fit. The man and woman were surrounded by a garden where fellowship with God took place. The garden was productive and made for them, to eat from, to live in and to care for. In such a setting all the commands of God are for their good, reflecting His desires for us as they express His care for us.

He never commanded them to be fruitful and multiply without first granting them the ability and the drive to do so. His command to “fill the earth and subdue it” was a command given on the basis that the earth was already theirs. He left them in no doubt it was made for them. He always gave them the command, the task to do on the basis that He had already provided the gift enabling them to do it. First the gift; then the task. First the being; then the doing. This leads to action on the basis of who they are.

17-5 Obedience the shared life, not grounds for acceptance

In this way, their obedience to Him was never the grounds for their place with Him, or His acceptance of them. The situation was, in fact, the reverse; they were His already, they were living under His blessing; they were acceptable. Their obedience did not establish any of these matters between Him and them. Their obedience flowed from such things, it found its motivation in a desire to please Him because these things were already theirs. Their obedience was a result of their situation, not a cause of it. It was the shared life; not the basis of entering it.

17-6 The covenant gift of the possibility of returning to the Lord

Let us take a step further. When Israel, as a people placed in covenant by the grace and initiative of God Himself, found herself in such an honoured position, unlike any of the nations, she knew God’s favour. And she could see it enacted constantly, simply by making a comparison with the other nations of the earth, who did not have such access and approach to Him. She was blessed, favoured;

she had “found grace in the eyes of the Lord”.

From this position of favour, her flesh chafed as she came in close living contact with such a holy God. When she was disobedient, He disciplined her – another sign of His care – and He refused to abandon her. He often called her back to what she had known. He could say to her, “...if you return to Me, I will return to you”. We must not misunderstand that “if”. For it is not a condition which must be met in order for there to be a relationship in the first place. It was an “if” spoken to those already, by grace, in such a relationship; who when they returned to their God would find reconciliation to Him whom they had already known. It was a command spoken graciously to those who already were in a place of grace. It was the call of a father to children who were already his and who should have known better. We must remember this every time we read the New Testament and particularly the Old Testament.

It is not an “if” which becomes the condition that, when fulfilled, makes the contract possible; and so establishes the relationship. If that is the case it is something earned, merited. Rather, it is an “if” spoken to those in covenant with God, that, when fulfilled [obeyed] brings the relationship back to harmony, an already ‘given’ gracious place to stand. It is addressed to maintaining the peace of the relationship already established by God’s grace.

The call to “repent”; comes as a command but a gracious one. It is coming to Israel, through the mouth of the prophet God has sent; John, the baptiser of Israel. It is the gift of God allowing them to prepare for the coming forgiveness that God has in store for them. It does not address Israel as outside of His love and care; it comes to them precisely because they are within his covenant relationship. It affirms their position. It is for them, as for the shepherds; “unto you this day is born...”, so for the whole of Israel.

God our Father, when we err, You call us to repentance because it is appropriate to do so. Thank you for the life we share with You. Thank You it is a gift. Thank You that you discipline us so that we may share your holiness. Thank You that while we are not always comfortable with You, because of our deeds, we are still your children; and You are our Father. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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nt 18 – Luke 3.10-14

John replies to questioners

Read John 1.19-23

18-1 Repentance as a covenant nation under God

18-2 Repentance concerning their brothers

18-3 Individual repentance

18-4 Repentance from a "me" centred life

18-5 Repentance to an "other" centred life

18-6 Foreshadows a universal gospel

18-1 Repentance as a covenant nation under God

If the offer of repentance was a grace to Israel at this time then it must draw attention to those things which must be turned from, so as to prepare for the even more gracious offer of forgiveness which was coming. John is the announcer of it; Jesus is the bringer of it.

As we follow Luke's text, we see that the matter which the Pharisees and Sadducees must address in their repentance is their reliance on their heritage as securing their relation to God. This amounts to relying on the covenant position without understanding that it is a live relationship; one that requires an exchange between them and God. If they stay with that confidence, they will be lost. This is a gracious message; it is the specific application of what repentance means for these folks. It is a call they must heed. It is a sure sign of God's love and care for them that He would warn them specifically of what stands in the way of their receiving the coming blessing Messiah would bring. To abandon such false hopes is the content of what their repentance would mean.

18-2 Repentance concerning their brothers

Such beliefs about themselves would also have the effect of cutting them off from their neighbours in Israel. It would imply a superior position, since it involved them in judging their neighbour. Repentance about these matters would dissolve a "separated" mentality between fellow citizens of Israel. A theme we shall hear more of in Luke 15, where the treatment of Jesus to these questions is

more deeply revealed.

18-3 Individual repentance

Luke now introduces the “multitudes”. Their question, in the light of the call to repentance in John’s preaching, is to ask “What shall we do?”

The call to repent generates in the mind of the hearer the question, “Repent about what?” It asks that a change of mind be embraced and that this should lead to a change of life; hence the form of the question. Since John has been specific to the Pharisees and Sadducees, the multitude are asking for him to be specific with them. What is the practical response they must make?

Luke gives three examples of those represented in the multitude there; poor persons with only a little surplus; tax collectors and soldiers.

To the poor person who has two under-garments [χιτων], John makes clear that there is someone among them who has none. Similarly with food, they are being asked to turn from a “me only” mentality to the care of their neighbour who is worse off than they. It directs them to a caring of one another, driven from a personal appreciation of the other’s situation, with a call to act in the light of the difference they personally can make.

The tax collectors address John as a rabbi, someone who can direct them as to what to do in their life. These men made a living by first, purchasing the right to collect indirect taxes for a commission - such as customs or tolls - and then made their profit on charging more than was asked. They would then remit the appropriate tax to the authorities, and pocket the difference. To them, John makes clear that their repentance would involve simply collecting what the authorities required, and making their living from their contract. They too, are directed to the relationship with their neighbour; they need to set that on a right footing.

The soldiers were probably those of Herod Antipas, based in Peraea. They not only made war, they also kept civil order. Soldiers were often paid poorly at a base rate, and then made extra money by extortion and opportunities their military and civil operations made available. John directs them to be content with their wages, and directs their repentance to not robbing through extortion, and by not falsely accusing folks.

18-4 Repentance from a “me” centred life

Without doubt, we must read John’s ministry as national. The prophetic words spoken over the young infant John make that clear enough. He has been sent as someone who stands in the line of the prophets of old. In fact, in the teaching and assessment of Jesus, John is the last and greatest of the prophets

of the Old Covenant. He has come to take his part in what God is doing with Israel.

But with this difference; when we see the “repentance” preached by John, it is not a call to a national repentance about some national issue. He does not state a national matter; he simply says that they should repent. It is directed to all, and is accompanied by promises of forgiveness of sins, but for that very reason it is applicable to each heart of each individual. And John’s practical application to different sections of the community of God’s people differs according to where they stand. And the people seem to understand that; for they ask “What shall we do?”; as if to say, how does this call to repent apply specifically to us?

18-5 Repentance to an “other” centred life

In each case of application, John points to an underlying relationship, common to all within Israel. It is the relationship with one’s neighbour. We shall see this turning up in the teaching of Jesus as well [and particularly it is an emphasis of Luke’s gospel]. What is common to all the advice that John gives here in our reading, even for the Pharisees and the Sadducees, is that there is an adjustment which the repentance would have with regard to their neighbour, their fellow Israelite. And, as we must include the soldiers, it may be applied wider than Israel, to their human neighbour; the persons they are in contact every day in the normal course of life and their duties.

We shall see this theme of “responding to the neighbour” as a major drive of the New Testament in general; as it was also of the Law of the Old Covenant. It will continue on into the writings of the Gospel of John [chapter 15], and particularly 1 John, where the proof of anyone’s love for God is expressed through the love they are showing to their brother.

The coming of John, and the coming after him of Jesus, asks that each person in Israel [and others of Gentile heritage as well] make his/her own response to their message as one come from God addressed to the individual within the collected whole of Israel and of all men and women.

If we see John as the “bridge person” that he is, then the “wider” range of his message was first personally addressed in Israel before it went to the Gentile world.

John’s message and application also prepare us for Jesus’ teaching. For He addresses each individual in what he says, calling for a response which may cause them to choose even between family and other social settings in which they are placed.

18-6 Foreshadows a universal gospel

Each of us, whether Jew or Gentile, must listen to John and make our response. For while he comes from Israel, and speaks to Israel, he doesn't address them about a covenant matter of national repentance common to all; but of a personal repentance with respect to a preparation of the Messiah's coming to the whole world. Each person needs to prepare their hearts to receive Him.

Strangely, that preparation concerns our attitude to our neighbour. We are being prepared to turn from a self-centred, self-referred life to the 'other-centred' life. The "other" will first be the Lord and then because of that, our neighbour. So the "good news of Jesus Christ" begins with John, the baptiser.

Father, as You have first sent John to point to Jesus, help us to accept and embrace his direction. Convince us that You will lead us into a life which You have prepared. One like Your own, which is "other centred", as it is within the Trinity of the Godhead, and with respect to us, your creatures, made in Your likeness. Amen.

nt 19 – Luke 3.15-17

John's testimony about his relationship to Christ

Read Matthew 3.11-12, Mark 1.7-8, John 1.24-28

19-1 The desire to understand where John fits in prophetic history

19-2 John draws two generations together

19-3 Contrasts among relatives

19-4 An "old" and a "new"

19-1 The desire to understand where John fits in prophetic history

There are various interchanges between John and his questioners.

John's Gospel says that the questioners are people sent from the Jerusalem. They were "priests and Levites" [John 1.19] and folks from the Pharisees [John

1.24]. They are concerned about John as to whether he is the Christ, or Elijah, or the prophet. In particular, if he is not any of these, why is he baptising?

Luke reports that all men were questioning in their hearts "Is this the Messiah?" [Luke 3.15]

Matthew outlines the discussion that the Pharisees and Sadducees have with the witness of John about Jesus.

Mark simply lists the topic as part of John's preaching.

While there may be continuity in regard to their two families however, there is a deep discontinuity in the contrasting roles between John and Jesus. We learn from Gabriel, and the teaching of Jesus will confirm, concerning John that he is indeed a great prophet, in the eyes of the Lord. From Jesus we learn there is more to this. John is the last of the great prophets of the old era. John is the place where the old moves over into the new; he is the bridging person appointed by God to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Luke presents the arrival of John, within his own family, as a great joy to his mother and father and their extended family. Indeed the whole of Luke 1, apart from the prologue, is set within the domestic life of these relatives. The prophetic things that God causes them to say, one to another, in different settings provide for us an opening into the great themes of the gospel.

19-2 John draws two generations together

John the Baptist's ministry is anticipated for us here, even before he is born. We are told that he will bridge the generations of fathers and sons. He is likened to the ministry of Elijah, but we must wait for the later exposition of that by Jesus **nt117**. But he will meld together the fathers, calling them to admit their sins and seek the forgiveness that is foreshadowed through the Baptist's ministry. And the young, who see their older ones admitting their mistakes, are drawn alike into the baptism which John will call them to share in as they, fathers and sons, prepare for the coming One that John is pointing towards. With John, two generations intersect in his ministry, and the kingdom is to be sought out and anticipated by them as they wait for Jesus.

19-3 Contrasts among relatives

Zacharias and Elisabeth have their shame relieved and their social stigma taken away as the old era closes and their rejoicing is clearly a fulfilment of their longings. Joseph and Mary stand in a different era and place. They, as those given to share in the days of grace bear shame as they make room and welcome the arrival of the baby that God has given them.

Zacharias is rebuked for his unbelief. Both Joseph and Mary are people of

unparalleled faith in the word of God given to them. Joseph will take care of a child he does not sire, and embrace the shame and social stigma that falls to both him and Mary. Joseph has no part in the siring of the Messiah – and in this he stands for us all. We have not had any hand in saving ourselves; the process is entirely one of God's doing and there is no place for a man in the matter.

19-4 An “old” and a “new”

A priest, praying on behalf of Israel, in the course of his normal everyday duties, finds that he will have a son. This son will be the forerunner of another who brings the Kingdom of God in his own Person.

In this way, the good news of the kingdom begins with the closure of something which is going to be shown to be “old” before the kingdom which is come in the Person of the King can be seen to be “new”. One man's ministry will close up the time in which he lives and then, as the other comes on stage the new chapter is opened in such a way as the ministry of two men are compared and contrasted. This theme will operate consistently in all four Gospel writers. All of them speak of the work of John as marking the transition to the new kingdom of God. John is a hinge person, he closes one door so that another may open.

God is working through men to accomplish his purposes. Two “sons” of a related family are pivotal to the purposes of God. One points to the other, the Other accepts the testimony of the former but has a greater testimony as well [John 5.30-37].

Father, help us, as we read the Gospels, to pay full attention to the ministry of John the Baptist. For as your Son taught, those who receive him as called by God to do what he did; are well prepared to receive your only Son. Give us to see this clearly; we ask in your Son's Name. Amen.

nt 20 – Luke 3.21-22

The Baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan

Read Matthew 3.13-17 [17.5], Mark 1.9-11 [9.7] John 1.29-34

Here we present an extended essay which gives a deeper treatment of a very significant place in the life and ministry of Jesus. Along with the Temptation that follows, feel free to take an extended time to read this material at another sitting, or take it in over a number of days.

20-1 What is a baptism? [1 Corinthians 10.1-4]

20-2 Baptism as the way for an exchange of life to take place.

20-3 John's baptism was "from heaven" and not "from men".

20-4 The participation of Jesus, with other faithful people, in the Baptism of John.

20-5 What was the Son doing here?

20-6 What is God, the Father, doing?

20-7 What is God, the Holy Spirit, doing here?

20-8 Baptism, for Jesus, marks the beginning of a traumatic series of events that will work our salvation

20-9 Our participation in His life through baptism in water.

20-10 We must see how God has gone about doing this saving work

20-1 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. To do that we will look at the baptism of Jesus by John and also Christian baptism.

To begin let us consider 1 Corinthians 10.1-4 which presents a description of the Exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt as a baptism. This 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.

[a] Baptism as a shared life experience.

Everyone has participated in some traumatic event which really tested every inner resource that we had. 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 involved. Events overtook us, in that sense we were passive. But we were also active. For we went through it, and it changed our life forever.

In 1 Corinthians 10.1-4 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..."

The fathers had a shared experience of a passive and active nature. Considerable trauma was involved; 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.

[b] 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. Not everyone had 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 in some way. It would have been impossible to have a series of shared experiences and not have powerful awareness of the person who lead them through. It was a baptism into the person as much as it was a baptism in the events. Because their life and Moses' life was entwined. To have gone through the events was to have share the life of the leadership. Moses was their life, and his judgments and ways of doing things often set what it meant for Israel to come 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". The life they had was the life of their leader. In this sense they were immersed into that man Moses. 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.

[c] 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 future cultural patterns of existence. This would deliver them to live 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.

[d] Baptism then, 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.

[e] Baptism as a separating experience.

And further, to have lived through such a time with others, when we all reflect upon that shared adventure, is to discover that 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 was true of Israel that all through her history that she was a people set apart from others who did not know Israel’s God as the One who delivers them from their enemies so that they might serve Him without fear.

Throughout their history there was constant provision made for the next generation to “remember” what it was that God had done with their forefathers.

20-2 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 of Egypt was done by a traumatic series of events that climaxed under the cloud and in the sea. In the case of the Hebrews, they went through the events with the person of Moses at their head.

And we see how Paul explains that series of events as being “baptised into Moses”. Now this principle will be the main way we are to approach the baptism of Jesus.

20-3 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 their hearts open to the access of the coming King. It involved the willingness to change their 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.

20-4 The participation of Jesus, with other faithful people, in the Baptism of John.

[a] Jesus participated by Incarnation

By simply being born of Mary, Jesus was already experiencing what it was like to share in the life of sinners. He too was a person who toiled. He too understood what it was to be involved in business where checks and balances are maintained because we are dealing with fallen people. He too knew what it was to be wearied by the language, thought life and anger of the people all around Him.

[b] Jesus participated in a baptism for sinners

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

At His baptism, Jesus was immersing himself in their baptism; into the life of confessing sinners; he was being baptised into their life. This not just any part of that life such as the Incarnation would have given Him entry, this was a decision to engage on a mission, a course of action.

It was to share that place of open confession where the acknowledgement of sins was 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 went through it with them in that activity; yet not such that He confessed His own faults, for He was lacking sinful deeds. But in that He stood in the midst of them as they did it, He was baptised with them and He took with them the burden of that sin. He entered into participation with them in it, and so shared their life. At the same time He had faith, as they did, that those sins will soon be remitted – He also had faith in John's words.

[c] Jesus, along with them, had faith sins would 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 were confessing their sins in such a way that they had the faith to believe that they shall soon be forgiven and the debt of their sins would be cancelled.

They had faith and looked to their sins, personal and corporate, would be dealt with.; they were believing God to deliver them a gracious benefit – they were looking to receive. Jesus, like them, also had faith in His Father's word that sins would soon be remitted – He was a believer in that Word, for He was the Redeemer, the bringer of the benefit they seek. Jesus had faith in his Father's promise and understood that this was a serious place for Himself – it would call Him to give His life a ransom for many – He was being baptised because He was the grounds and basis of this forgiveness they were seeking. He threw His life away- that they, and we, might have it. He became poor, that we might become rich with his life.

[d] It was the fulfilling of all righteousness

John initially opposed Jesus in his 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 judgment of God? Rather, it was the case that John thought that he, himself, 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 discrepancy between John and Jesus was at issue; it was that everything for which John was preaching and Jesus was coming for was at stake. “All righteousness” here had to be fulfilled here. 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.

20-5 What was the Son doing here?

[a] He was freely subjecting Himself to the will of the Father

He was freely, totally subjecting Himself to the control and Lordship of his Father. He did not choose this act for Himself, it was 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 made Himself ready in his response. 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 was passively obeying the call: so He entered the water praying [Lk3.21]. With empty hands He was trusting in the Father about his response to the call, He was at the disposal of God and men.

He was coming to submit to the work of God, and yet He did not come simply as one who awaited the action of God to follow, but also to actually execute it. His coming was a coming to commit to bring it about.

[b] He was freely associating with men and women.

Being totally submitted to the will of God, He was committed to the solidarity with all men. He was placing himself in the midst of the history of men and women who had fallen victim to the judgment of God. 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 to do.

In doing this, He confessed God as the One whose will was shortly to come on the earth; and he confessed men as the ones whom God had in view. Others, frightened by the coming will of God, were confessing their sins; this One, calmly, as a Son of God and a Brother of men and women, was confessing their sins which He had 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

[c] He was 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.

[d] He was receiving permanently, for our sakes, the Holy Spirit

Among the Israelite sinners where Jesus is standing, they knew that in the Old Testament the Spirit of God comes and goes. Saul would be a good case in point, where the Spirit left because the favour of God had been withdrawn, due to the rebellion of the anointed one.

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 often in Israel's previous understanding of their experience, it is the case that they received the gifts of God so as to lose them again. Here, 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.

[e] As man, he was 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.

[f] Entering upon a costly baptism into death.

As the rest of the Gospel narratives will show, following his baptism, Jesus enters upon a public ministry which will culminate in his death, resurrection and ascension. In the latter period of his journeying to Jerusalem, he spoke of a "baptism" that he would have to undergo - by which he meant his crucifixion. So, we would be right here to recognise, that in submitting to the baptism in the Jordan at the hands of John, Jesus was beginning a mission which would see him submitting himself to the crucifixion at the hands of the Romans, as they carried out the will of his religious enemies within Israel.

20-6 What is God, the Father, doing?

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

Immediately as Jesus was "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].

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.

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].

It is important to see that Jesus' baptism was not a place where He becomes the Mediator on behalf of men. His beginning here on his ministry was a simple act of obedience of one who was "lowly of heart" [Mt 11.29]. He was not grasping at the power to discharge his ministry. He was simply responding to the known will of God. He was simply obeying, as one not having a claim or

seeking anything, not wanting anything as a possession; he just wanted God to receive glory through his obedience. He could anticipate what John or God would do.

Jesus is not then, attempting to seize office. He was not trying some “forcing” of heaven’s hand by his going down into the waters. He was not pretentious 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!

As we have already seen, 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, it won’t surprise us that this baptism of Jesus the disciples will also 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?

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. 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.

20-7 What is God, the Holy Spirit, doing here?

[a] He is descending upon Jesus to remain upon Him: this will be a permanent ministry

[b] He has come to convey the love, and the affirmation of the Father to the Son

[c] He has come to strengthen and comfort Him at the acceptance of such a ministry

[d] He has come to direct the ministry and supply the power for it to go forward

20-8 Baptism, for Jesus, marks the beginning of a traumatic series of events that will work our salvation.

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.

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.

20-9 Our participation in His life through baptism in water.

[a] 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.”

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.

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

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

In chapter 5, after explaining how Adam and Christ are two representa-

tive 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 suggest that we should keep on sinning, so that grace might be seen all the more? 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.

[c]1 Peter 3.13-4.8 Baptism now saves you

Making clear that it is a better thing, if God should will it, to suffer from doing right than doing wrong, Peter goes on to speak of how Christ, the righteous one, suffered so that he might bring us to God. He says that Jesus was resurrected by the Spirit, and through the Spirit preached to disobedient spirits who were imprisoned at the time when God waited patiently during Noah's time of building the ark.

This historical setting, Peter uses to speak of as a time when 8 people were saved "through water". Incidentally, while the water is at the same time the agent of judgment upon the earth. Thus, for the 8 souls, we have a salvation through judgment.

Peter sees this water as symbolising baptism, which now saves us. He explains that the symbolic saving efficacy is not in the water as a washing agent for the body, but as a pledge of a good conscience towards God.

Baptism, Peter says, saves us by the resurrection of Christ. The connection, following Paul, is that as Christ is raised He is justified by the Father. This lays the basis for our justification as we participate in His resurrected life. It is this share in the justification of Christ that gives us the grounds for a good conscience with God.

Peter speaks of the resurrected Christ as ascended into heaven and at God's right hand; a state of affairs where angels, authorities and powers are submitted to him. Thus the historical parallel is connected up between the imprisoning of the spirits at the time of the judgment of the flood and the submission of the spirits to Christ at his resurrection and ascension.

20-10 We must see how God has gone about doing this saving work

First, He has sent us a man, just as He sent the Hebrew people Moses. As Mo-

ses 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.

Second, He has not allowed us, at the time of the great redemption, to participate at all in this select work. For the very thing that disqualified us from having any part in it is the fact that we have gone it alone without reference to 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, making it clear that He is right there involved with us, through a gracious condescension and cost of His own..

Third, 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.

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

Last, all our treasure is in Jesus – have you been baptised either in His name

or in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?

nt 21 – Luke 4.1-13

The Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness

Read Matthew 4.1-11, Mark 1.12-13

Here we present an essay that gives a more extended treatment of a very significant place in the life and ministry of Jesus. Be free to take an extended time to read this material at another sitting, or take it in over a number of days.

21-1 The good news of the Kingdom has now begun in earnest

21-2 Fasting in the desert – a dependant focussed attitude

21-3 "In the wilderness...fasted forty days and forty nights"

21-4 Moses, Elijah and Jesus: 40 days and 40 nights

21-5 Moses on the mountain [Exodus 34]

21-6 Elijah 40 days and nights in the strength of heavenly food [1 Kings 19]

21-7 Jesus comes into the wilderness, and is not eating

21-8 We are temptable

21-9 Temptation and testing: a study in James 1.12-18.

21-10 Jesus was "led by the Spirit"..."to be tempted by the devil".

21-11 Jesus is temptable because He took fallen flesh, for our sakes

21-12 What was He actually tempted to do?

21-13 Does this engagement somehow honour the devil?

21-1 The good news of the Kingdom has now begun in earnest.

We have seen that John the Baptist's appearance and his work of preaching and baptising with water led to the obedience of Jesus to the word of God which was brought through John.

We saw how Jesus, in committing to the word of John, acted in obedience to His Father and that the voice of God broke through and announced the pleasure that He had in his Son. Jesus is now committed to do the work of the kingdom, and has been baptised in the Jordan, and the Spirit of God has descended and remained upon Him. As the One who has received the Spirit without measure, He is also the Baptiser in the Holy Spirit whom John foretold as the one who was "greater than" himself.

It is important to remember this immediate commitment which Jesus has made in his baptism for it makes clear to us the setting of his immediate temptation. Indeed, it is in the light of this stance He has just taken, in obedience to John's preaching, that the temptation is issued.

21-2 Fasting in the desert – a dependant focussed attitude

The Gospel writers stress the temptation of Jesus. But as they do, they make clear that the context in which the first temptation came was in the light of the hunger the Lord was experiencing due to his fasting. Why was He fasting? If we could know this we would understand how to interpret the prior mindset of the Lord before the temptation took place.

Jesus' fasting was not following the typical Old Testament pattern of repentance accompanied with sackcloth and ashes. That was a matter of Israel finding herself under discipline and needing to come back to the Lord after they had strayed. This is not the setting here.

In fact, since the Lord implied in his teaching that fasting was and would re-

main a practical matter for his disciples [nt57], it is helpful to examine what the apostolic men did in regard to fasting.

There are instructive examples in the Acts of the apostles. As the teachers and prophets gathered at Antioch [Acts 13.2-3], their mind was to minister to the Lord. In this aspect of their worship and ministry they fasted, conscious of their need to be focussed exclusively upon Him, and not their own ordinary needs, so as to bring Him pleasure in their worship. Their dependency is deep and, although they had received the Holy Spirit and He dwelt within them, they fasted as they worshipped.

However, while engaged in that worship, the Holy Spirit made known to them all the call for Saul and Barnabas to engage in evangelistic work and church planting. It is in the light of that revelation, as the two men are focussed in their desire to carry through this commission, that the rest of the brothers there "after fasting" laid their hands upon them and sent them out. They were focussed and so were fasting to be empowered for the task for which they had been sent.

21-3 "In the wilderness...fasted forty days and forty nights"

The early commands of God in Genesis connect the word of God and food

At the temptation of Adam and Eve, the issue was that they had already known God as One who spoke to them and had led them into a knowledge of Himself as their Creator and Provider.

To say that they had taken knowledge, in obedience to the Lord's command, mean that they had the experience of it to themselves. Primarily, it was a relational focus; they had obeyed the word of God to eat of the garden. In this act of obedience, the savouring of the food provided is, at the same time, the practical knowing of God in His provision for them.

It was the second word of God about eating which really makes this clear. For here was another word, which alike addressed them about the trees in the centre of the garden; and yet in the negative, the comand is not to eat. If this word was to be obeyed it must mean that the act of not eating would lead them into a knowledge of God as well.

It was in the act of not eating that they would have come to the knowledge of the sonship of God, of knowing God as Father. That was a knowledge which would have been theirs as they lived by every word from the mouth of God. What is common to both events was the word of God. The first word led to knowing what food was; it was experiencing what the word of God had provided by obeying the word to take it up. That is the relational element in the exchange. It links for us the meaning of sonship, with the eating of bread and the not eating of bread, both of which are a matter of obeying the word of the Lord

known as Father.

For Israel, this matter is put to the test very strongly in the wilderness, where Israel found themselves in the desert and very hungry. In the Exodus 16, God make it clear that he will provide for them meat in the morning and the bread from heaven in the evening, “that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in my instruction.” [Ex 16.4].

The manna was at first unrecognized as the fine flake like frosting on the ground. They did not see it as food to eat, until Moses made it clear that “this is what the Lord commanded [Ex 16.15-16]. Later, they found it to be like coriander seed, and to have a taste like wafers and honey [Ex 16.31]. They ate it for 40 years until they came to the border of the promised land. [Ex 16.35].

It was not a delight to the eyes, nor was it materially attractive, it was so unlike any other food that they had eaten that it could only be identified by the source of its coming, it was what the Lord had commanded. In this way it was shown by its sensual unattractiveness to show forth the real meaning of all food. They would live, as all men and women do, by what the Lord commanded.

21-4 Moses, Elijah and Jesus: 40 days and 40 nights

So far we have been led to an understanding of what eating and “not eating” of material food means in connection with the word of God. There are some places, in the lives of Moses and Elijah in particular, where they are seen to not eat. In both cases, Moses and Elijah were in the middle of a powerful time of revelation from God. They were in the process of a rich statement of His word to them. They were attending to what He was saying to them in an intimate and close way. Their attention was thoroughly taken up by the exchange.

The act of not eating is not the basis upon which they entered into the revelation. Rather, it was a result of the revelation – they did not deliberately abstain from food, they did not need it, such was the revelation that they were enduring. It was a feast of the Word of God. We have often confused cause with result; grace with works.

21-5 Moses on the mountain [Exodus 34]

Moses he was on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights. He did not eat bread nor drink water. He wrote on the tablets the word of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. [Ex 34.28]. Notice that this is not portrayed as a fast, in the sense of abstaining from food as an act of will. It is not said that Moses was hungry either; it rather points to the other matter that was engaging him, he was receiving the Word of the Lord as a covenant for Israel.

It was this same word which sustains us materially that points us to the source of all food and life, the word of God itself. This was the point of Moses “fasting”, it was associated with the richness of the feast of the word of God which was being brought forth for the life of Israel. This is what would give them a powerful experience of sonship, to know that God would care for them, and take them into the fellowship of His life. This was the reason He saved them from Egypt, that they might be with Him and serve Him, to share His life. He saved them that He might dwell among them [Exodus 29.44-46].

21-6 Elijah 40 days and nights in the strength of heavenly food [1 Kings 19]

The same issue is shown in the case of Elijah [1 Kings 19.8]. Suffering under the powerful threat of Jezebel that she would take his life to avenge the killing of the prophets of Baal, he fled into the wilderness a days journey, and under a juniper tree, sat down to pour out his heart to the Lord [1 Kings 19.4].

He begged the Lord to take his life. And an angel came to him with a bread cake, baked on stones and a jar of water. Here is a provision of a small meal, and yet the angel advises him to eat and drink for the journey is too great for him. Well, he awoke and ate and drank and went in the strength of that food provided by God for 40 days and 40 nights. Once again, the issue is not fasting, but of being sustained as he is about to receive the word of God in the still small voice at Horeb, the mountain of God.

It was the quality of the intimate relation between Elijah and the Lord which is testified to throughout his life. He was the Lord, “before whom I stand”. Now here, there is no mention of him being hungry, as also was the case with Moses. Scripture makes us focus on the feast of the word of God these men were given. They were men who received wonderful revelation of the Lord, and Scripture makes this clear by the fact that they didn’t need to eat, for they had other food which satisfied them at the time. They were “not eating” for they were sharing in the life of God so richly that they had food of another sort, but from the same source as material food, which was the word of God [John 4.27-42].

Abstaining from food as an act of will of the human being is what we understand as fasting. We sleep and then, after a whole night of not eating we break our fast with the first meal of the day – it is breakfast.

Neither Moses nor Elijah are fasting in that sense. They are not eating because something else is going on, and with such an intensity that they are leaving off eating for the time. They are sustained over this time - 40 days and nights becomes a wonderful expression of the sustaining of these men by the word of God - the primary food of mankind. We live by this word, and when they are

engaged in this way they are so sustained that the lesser food is not required; it may be left untaken.

21-7 Jesus comes into the wilderness, and is not eating

He fasted 40 days and 40 nights and afterwards he was famished [Matthew 4.2 NRSV] Luke 4 strikes a slightly different way of putting it.

This issue of fasting for 40 days and nights draws a parallel from the two OT persons of Moses and Elijah. They figure as central to the Transfiguration as well.

As the heavens have been opened and the Holy Spirit has descended upon Him, Jesus has just participated in a relationally-rich, sonship feast. The intimacy of his Father's word as to him being Son of God had been declared from heaven, to say nothing of the prophecies which have preceded his coming. He goes into the wilderness, the place where the people were alone with their God, and on the strength of the feast of the Father's word to him, he is found not eating for 40 days and 40 nights. And it does not say that he was hungry then, it says that afterwards he was hungry.

It is at that point the devil chooses to attack him, and that through the same way he did Eve, at the point of the satisfaction of her senses. Satan suggests he should turn the stones of the desert into bread to satisfy his own hunger.

All this is background to the reply Jesus gives to Satan on this issue. We do not live by bread alone, but by every Word which proceeds from the mouth of God.

The forty days indicates that Jesus has come from a powerful encounter with the Father, by the Spirit. He has been driven into the wilderness by the express will of God and under that initiative will encounter the devil.

What the devil knows and has seen about Jesus is that of the early prophecies of Zacharias, Simeon, Anna and the angel's words. The devil had already inspired the attempt to kill Jesus just after his birth. John the Baptist's teaching, preaching and at the baptism of Jesus, the conveyance of the title "Son of God" had been made openly. So, the devil approaches this encounter understanding that Jesus is a significant individual, a man with great revelation of God, like Moses and Elijah.

The occasion for the launching of the attack is that after the 40 days. Jesus is hungered and is experiencing hunger then. The devil drives at a man through his fleshly drives.

21-8 We are temptable

From the creation of the world and of men and women, made in God's im-

age, then what comes forth from their heart is shown by their actions.

In this sense each event is a test - and in relation to God, a test of obedience. It is an opportunity to display the work of God; the relation between man and God. In any given situation then, when God sets it up, as it were, He has in his mind to show forth, for his glory, what it is that He has placed within the heart of man. In this way, the obedient action of the man is a manifestation of the character of God, who made him in His likeness.

In the normal course of events in an unfallen world then, for example in the garden, all that God “sets up” - all the ‘givens’ - will be events which will show forth God’s glory through the life of the man or woman.

From the time of the fall, many events in life constitute a presentation of a situation from the dark side, from Satan’s side, with the express intent to not show forth what is in man to the glory of God, but to subvert him to obey some one other than the God for whom he was made.

This is not the glory which Satan himself was made for. Carrying the nature of a cherub [Ezekiel 28.14], he was intended by God to live for God’s glory. Satan was given the opportunity of glorifying God as a cherub as an angelic personage in the heavenlies, rendering obedience to the Lord. Satan’s unauthorised attempts to make man to directly obey him constitutes a stealing of the glory which is only God’s to have from men and women.

Only a personage who has already fallen can tempt another. Knowledge of sin is only gained by doing it. The Scripture presents the rebellion of Satan [Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28] as a given which has already taken place before the tempting of Adam and Eve by the snake in the garden.

Presuming the fallen state of man then, when we are tempted, we are registering within ourselves the power of certain lusts which carry us away and entice us. These lusts are the fruit of the fall within us - they mark us as fallen ones, ones who have already obeyed the devil. They are a sign that we have come under his power - our nature has been subverted to obey Satan. If we are carried away by this enticement, then the lust will be conceived and gives birth to sin, which in turn brings forth death.

21-9 Temptation and testing: a study in James 1.12-18.

Because God is good, indeed the very definition of the word, God tempts no one. He Himself cannot be tempted by evil; so the implication is that He would be acting contrary to His nature and character if He did that to anyone else; on the basis that God expresses Who He is by what He says and does.

God’s character is without shadow upon it, it is unvaryingly good and true. So whatever circumstances we receive from Him we can trust His character that

these are not intended by Him that we should fall over. He never sets us up like that; to believe so is to have confused the work of God with that of the devil, for it is the devil who tempts us so that we might fall over and fail.

So, when the Lord tries or tests his people He is always looking for opportunities to demonstrate the wonderful life which He has implanted within us through the resurrection power of the risen Lord. So we should count it all joy when we suffer various trials [James 1.2-8; Romans 5.1-4, 8.28ff]. They are opportunities to show forth the hidden life within us for his glory - we have been restored to be able to become what we ought to have been in the first place.

We are refined and encouraged when we come through tests that Father has given us.

21-10 Jesus was “led by the Spirit”...”to be tempted by the devil”.

The temptation of Jesus, follows immediately after the Baptism. In this way, the Gospel writers make clear that the temptation mounts a challenge to the commitment which Jesus has irrevocably made in that Baptism.

In Scripture that the normal, recommended attitude of any man or woman is to avoid temptation, to flee [Proverbs 6 & 7] from it, and to ask the Lord to “not” lead us into temptation **nt58**.

All the more surprising then, to find that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus results in Him being led into the desert. And even more so to see that He is not led there for prayer and fasting at the commencement of his ministry; or to contemplate matters He has just taken in hand; but for the express purpose [so Mt 4.1] to be tempted by the devil. Luke 4.1 has Jesus led about by the Spirit in the desert, and all that time being tempted by the devil; Luke then presents the encounter with Satan as a culmination of that period of that forty day temptation.

This leads us to consider this episode in Jesus’ life as a matter in which the kingdom of God took the initiative. It is an aggressive encounter which we see here from heaven’s side. Whilst the devil is seen to be the author of the temptation - nevertheless there is an engagement here which is sought by the kingdom of God; this is, in the Gospel writers understanding, a period of direct confrontation.

There is an aspect of this temptation experience learned from the way sinners usually find themselves tempted by the devil. It is the devil who, while man is in the fallen state, has the initiative. It is the devil who goes out to tempt men and women; they do not come to him in order to be tempted by him; they

may wickedly co-operate when tempted, but as to the initial movement it is the devil's.

But it is not so here! Behind this expression of the initiative of the kingdom of God is the tacit assumption that the devil would not set out to tempt Christ. The devil finds himself confronted by the proper Man; it is the devil who is cornered here, and the engagement is one of God's making, not the devil's. Already there is the dawning upon the earth of a return to right order as a rebellious angel is forced to confront the proper Man and to serve Him in what He is doing. It is Jesus who will plunder the devil's kingdom and set free the captives which the devil had taken. The devil must turn and face Jesus even though it will be to lose the encounter; he must face it because it is required of him by a Man, who in doing this for others, opens a door for all fallen men and women to resist the temptations of the devil.

21-11 Jesus is temptable because He took fallen flesh, for our sakes

Fallen man is always the one who seeks to judge his neighbour, himself and also God. He will not confess his sins, his rebellion, even his own fall. His constant unwillingness to repent is his continuing in sin - it renews his sin over and over again. Jesus' sinlessness is seen in that he does play this game. He took our flesh, the nature of man as it comes from the fall. He is, in his human nature, constantly open to the temptation of sin.

In the likeness he has with us, He was also unlike us in action: He did not yield to temptation. He found the cost of obedience, a suffering in a fallen world: it was something learned in the doing. In his condition - his taking fallen flesh and standing with fallen humanity - he was like all other men, in his action He was without sin.

We have seen before that Jesus, in being baptised by John took his stand with us as people who were under the judgment of God. He committed Himself to the service of God and men. And that he went into the water of the Jordan, confessing His sins [sins which were ours as to their doing] in obedience to the preaching of John. In taking this stand with men and women Jesus acknowledged God to be in the right concerning His verdict on our sinful life that was in need of redemption.

The letter to the Hebrews [Heb 2.11-18] makes clear that Jesus could be tempted. He was not ashamed to call us brethren [2.11] on the basis we are from the one progenitor [whether we think of Adam or Abraham]. Jesus is a true partaker of "flesh and blood" in the same manner as us [Heb 2.14]. It is as one who has suffered being tempted that he is able to be the High Priest, represent-

ing us who are also temptable [Heb 2.17-18]. He can sympathise with the weak and was at all points tempted as we are, but without sin [Heb 4.15].

The Birth tells us that He was a true man, one who took true flesh, from his mother. Jesus came, being born of a real mother, with flesh and blood as real as the sons of other mothers. It is imperative to believe that Jesus Christ came in the flesh [1 John 4.1-2] and not to be half hearted here.

The Baptism tells us that a true man stood with us and was not ashamed to call us brothers. He was an obedient man to the God - full of faith towards the word of God through the prophet John.

The Temptation tells us that we have a real man who is temptable, and is also an obedient man and a true son of God, who resists the devil, who flees from him until another time.

“It was fitting that the devil be defeated in that same human flesh in whose death he had gloried” Hilary.

21-12 What was He actually tempted to do?

The first temptation was to, after being hungry following the forty days, turn the stones around Him in the desert to bread. He is to “tell this stone to become bread” [Lk 4.3].

Notice that the concern for Jesus to eat is not primary. The force of the command is to perform a pretentious miracle. The occasion of Jesus’ hunger is simply used to re-inforce the feeling which He would be experiencing. It is a command presented to a hungry man – but the suggested action would commit Him to a self-centred action.

It is an appeal to use the power of His own word to save and maintain his own life. If He had yielded to this then He would have been deflected from the encouragement of His Father from heaven and the sustaining comfort of the Holy Spirit in his current work in the identification and standing with sinners. He would have, long term, undone the possibility of the cross, the ultimate work of standing with and for them. And all this because He would have fed Himself.

In refusing to do what was asked, Jesus sustained his hunger and trusted in God, through His Word, to bring him sustenance and care of His own provision. His trust is well founded. In resisting the devil, who would deflect him from his obedient course, he sustains course remaining obedient. This is important for, the point of life for the obedient man is not to only resist the devil - such resistance only matters because it is, at the same time, the holding to the form of obedience already engaged in doing the word of God.

In answering the devil, Jesus uses only what a faithful, obedient man can who has just been tempted to use his own word for his own ends - he answers in words of Scripture [Deuteronomy 8.1-10] which are not addressed to

all creatures of God but especially to man.

“Man shall not live by bread alone...” [Deut 8.3] is quoted from a section where God is giving the reason why He tested the people in the wilderness for the forty years. It was to humble them and to test them, and to know what was in their heart. It was to make them understand that they did not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. John 4.27-38 has the same dedication of Jesus to make it his food to do the will of his Father - food in contrast to what the disciples encouraged Him to eat.

The second temptation comes in the suggestion that Satan, to whom all the “kingdoms of this world” [Lk4.5, Mt 4.8] belong, should give Jesus lordship over it, at the price of Jesus falling down and worshipping Satan. It seemed a reasonable and practical solution allied to Jesus’ mission.

In fact, there is a truth behind what Satan says when he puts it, “...it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whom I wish” [Lk 4.6b]. The kingdoms of this world have been handed to Satan by man; in the sense that man had the authority over the earth and by his compliance to Satan’s desires, has given it into his hand. But it is also true, that back of this, God has handed them over to Satan as well. In doing this God cements Satan in his deception that he is “like God”. This is the form of the wrath of God upon him now.

The temptation offered Jesus is the enticement to an easier way to establish the kingdom of God and the salvation of men and women. A way different from standing with sinners, who hope for forgiveness, than seeing evil conquered, than seeing sin dealt with as a power that enslaved man. He was asked to bow privately to Satan, so that the world would then be ruled ostensibly by Jesus but really by the devil - in short, everything would have remained as it had been. All he had to do was nod at the devil. Many men have been ‘successful’ this way.

What Jesus refused to do was to worship an angelic creature of God. Not only because worship was not appropriate for a man towards an angel, but because worship by a man is only appropriately directed to the God in whose image he is made. So Jesus persisted in obedience, achieving righteousness for us.

In answering the devil, Jesus speaks the Scripture again. The section of Deuteronomy 6.10-15 reminds the people that as they enter the promised land they will be receiving lands and cities which they did not build - receiving things easily, and without work. They need to watch themselves God reminds them, lest they forget the Lord who rescued them from slavery; a place of being under lords who causes them to work for no reward. Jesus quotes [6.13] “You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him, and swear by his name.”

The third temptation is that Satan leads Jesus to the Temple, stands Him on the pinnacle and then invites Him to throw Himself down, on the basis that

God will bear Him up.

The setting is significant; there is the implication [in Lk] that the pinnacle of the temple in the city of Jerusalem is of greater issue than the high place from where all the kingdoms of the world can be overseen.

Satan's suggestion, as a Psalm-quoting creature, is that Jesus should now commit an act of supreme, blind, absolute confidence in God. Such an act would be fitting for someone who was a Son of God. Behind Satan's idea is that the obedience required by sons is a blind, unthinking, unknowing obedience. This is consistent with the angelic mind of Satan, which understands that relationally towards God he works on the basis of command and execution of command. But it is not as a man is required to know obedience. Jesus makes it clear that his disciples while freely obedient to their Master and Lord are not slaves but friends - they know what the programme is; they understand the mind of the Master.

Satan's suggestion is also drafted on the basis of the words he has heard from Jesus already: that Jesus is going to live by the word of God and also worship only Him.

What Jesus is refusing to do here has nothing to do with a grandstanding display. There is no hint here of spectators, there are no onlookers who will in some way give acknowledgment or value to this action.

What is at issue is that Jesus is being encouraged to test God out for Himself - to make himself sure of his relationship with God as Son by a headlong plunge which will assure him that God is with him. It is as if a man shall carry the work through in his own faith, to take the work into his own hands. It is to initiate the movement, to be certain of it by having a part in it. It is to make use of God for his own experience and knowledge of his own favour with God. He would have, by an act that looked like great piety and mystical enthusiasm, betrayed the cause of God by making it his own cause for aggrandisement. He would have been forcing God to act in such a way that he would have glory for Himself - it is ultimately a driving of a wedge between the Father and the Son relationship. A relating between them that has the son glorifying the Father by his obedience, and the Father glorifying the Son by acknowledging Him - a matter that ultimately must wait until the resurrection.

What Jesus is refusing to do is to tempt God Himself. [That is, on the basis of this robust faith that Jesus has in God, Jesus would have been demanding that God accept him because he believes so strongly in Him. All this instead of receiving a sinful man in Christ and by Him.] Jesus rejected the ecstasy and the satisfaction of religion; identifying it as the supreme form of sin.

In answering the devil, Jesus continues in Deuteronomy 6.16 where God continues his warnings to the people of Israel. They are not to test God as they tested

Him at Massah. At Massah, over the matter of God providing water to drink, the issue was, “Is the LORD among us, or not?” [Exodus 17.7].

Notice that, because we are in the wilderness, the abode of demons, the presence of Satan, the form of the righteousness Jesus is displaying is negative; that is, He does not sin. We should not miss however that this is the place where He is winning, establishing righteousness for us.

21-13 Does this engagement somehow honour the devil?

Here is one of those places where the humiliation of the Son of God who has taken the form of the servant is the answer to our question. Here, the Son of God, come as man, without ceasing to be God, does all that He does, in encountering the devil, for our sakes.

For, the obedience to the Holy Spirit requires that Jesus confronts and resists the devil, coming under his pressure to be tempted. We shall see this difficulty again in Gethsemane, where the yielding to the adversaries to put Him to death looks like weakness and yielding to their force, when it is an obedience to Father, and to the main purpose of God to go to the cross.

The fact that the kingdom of God is going out to meet the devil, to take him on in the great struggle, should not be misunderstood. It is not that God is, by stooping to engage with him, is lowering Himself, or exalting the devil.

We see this same aspect under the humiliation of the Lord at his Incarnation. It has to do with the fact that the Lord has identified Himself so fully with us in our condition – while we were helpless. He has to do this work for our sakes, it is not for his own sake. In this way He seeks out *his* adversary because he is *our* adversary and master.

Neither should we misunderstand the Lord in allowing the adversary an initiative – He follows the devil’s leading of the discussion not out of weakness but out of patience. Just as we could say that in leading, the devil did not show strength but pride. We need to take into account that the Lord acts and allows Himself to be acted upon to do everything for our salvation. We need to include in our understanding these passive elements – for when voluntarily embraced by someone in humility they constitute an “active passivity”- a temporary yielding necessary to the engagement of the enemy.

12 - Considering the structure of the Gospels: “the devil departed from him until an opportune time”.

Stage 1: Jesus as the Judge - When we come to consider the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness we are demanded to understand where this fits in the

overall theme of the work of the Lord as portrayed in the Gospels. The Temptation is the beginning of the aggressive action of Jesus acting as Judge of those He encounters. He begins with the devil: He judges and pushes him back. He strides on through Pharisees, scribes, leaders, ordinary people, young rulers, judging them all alike, and they can find no sin in Him; try as they might. Even with the disciples he shows that He is their Judge, they are shown to be inadequate and sinful. It confirms the strong picture which John the Baptist preached; of the one who would be a coming Judge; One who would put the axe to the trees, the man with the winnowing fork in his hand.

Stage 2: But at Gethsemane there is a turn taken where it becomes clear that after that Jesus is the person who is judged by them. Jesus is no longer the Subject of what happens, He is the object of what happens. After Gethsemane we have a betrayal, and arrest, trials in various courts, torture, execution and burial. Those who are to be judged are given the space, freedom and power to judge. Even the Barabbas incident is a scandal, and Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry the cross. The oppression, anguish, silent suffering, and friendlessness of Jesus is acute—he is “numbered with the transgressors”.

Stage 3: We have to wait until the Resurrection tells us how this remarkable saga became the Gospel, the good news. The man who is defiled, shamed, mocked is justified, glorified, vindicated, declared Son of God.

These are the three segments of the Gospels that present us with three facets of Jesus’ ministry for us: His active and passive obedience, and His resurrection. Gethsemane is the other “opportune time” of Satan. In Gethsemane, Christ’s temptation turns on His struggle to go through with it. At that time the struggle for the disciples is “what if He does?”