

Reflection - The Baptism of Our Lord
07-01-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 1: 1-5 God Said – Let there be Light
Psalm 29 In “The voice of the Lord” there is Power
Acts 19: 1-7 Baptism in the Name of Jesus
Mark 1: 4-11 The Baptism of Jesus

Introduction

Good Morning everyone and welcome to worship on the first Sunday of 2024.

Today we remember the day Jesus was baptised. This day of commemoration is known as, “The Baptism of Our Lord”, and in our current church calendar, this day is celebrated on the Sunday after Epiphany.

(Epiphany is celebrated on the 6th of January or on the Sunday before.)

Today I would like us to reflect on the baptism of Jesus and its significance of letting us know who Jesus is. The baptism by John the Baptist. And I would like to recap on the purpose and meaning of our own baptism.

Baptism of Jesus

Let's begin with the baptism of Jesus.

Whilst Jesus was probably baptised in a physically similar way to all the other people who were coming to John the Baptist, there was a very different spiritual significance to the event.

Firstly, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. We hear this in both the readings from Mark's gospel and the Acts of the Apostles today. Jesus was God, so Jesus actually had nothing to repent of. Logically Jesus had not sinned, so he didn't need John's baptism. In Matthew's gospel we hear how John the Baptist actually says to Jesus, “It should be you who is baptizing me!”, but Jesus encourages John to continue, and John baptizes him.

Secondly, we have the Holy Spirit coming like a dove, and then there is the voice from heaven,

‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’

In these words, we have both a visual and audible affirmation, that Jesus has been sent by God, and God is happy with all that Jesus is about to do.

Jesus' baptism by John is clearly quite different to the baptism that John was offering to the people who flocked to hear him preach, and the Christian Baptism that we receive today.

Some theorize that it was used by Jesus, to acknowledge and approve of what John was doing, and to identify with the people.

Jesus' baptism has been looked at by scholars and theologians for its meaning and purpose, but what we can say is that it was a symbolic act used to mark the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus.

Baptism by John the Baptist

John was preaching a baptism of repentance. But he wasn't saying that this was something that he himself, would accomplish. John was saying that the one who is to come, has a much more powerful and much more significant baptism.

John's baptism was about repenting and turning back to God, but it was in the context of preparing for the significant event that was about to happen.

In Jesus, what John had been telling the people to expect, had come to reality.

Jesus was the fulfilment of John's prophecy, and we heard of John preparing the way for Jesus during the lead up to Christmas, in the Advent Bible readings.

Christian Baptism

Those who followed Jesus, continued to affirm baptism as the rite of Christian initiation. This baptism was different to John's baptism. Yes, it still involved repentance, but it was no longer in anticipation of a more important one to come. Jesus had come, and the Holy Spirit was now available to all who accepted Jesus.

We hear this distinction clearly in the reading from chapter 19 in the Acts of the Apostles today.

In Christian Baptism, the first question that is asked in our Anglican liturgy is, "Do you turn to Christ?" and the response to be given is, "I turn to Christ."

In other words, I accept who Jesus is, and what he came to earth to do, and I want to follow Jesus in my life.

Generally, Christians acknowledge Baptism as the first of two Sacraments, given to the church by Jesus, in the Gospels. Baptism is the first Sacrament and Holy Communion is the second. Baptism is something we do once as a rite of initiation, and Holy Communion is something we do again and again to be strengthened in our faith.

In baptism we commit to follow Jesus until our life's end. At the end of Matthew's gospel, we hear the words of Jesus,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

It's a big commitment, but it's also a commitment filled with promise, as after this Jesus says,

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Those first disciples knew the presence of Jesus in their lives, and they also knew that after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came to all who confessed Jesus as Lord and were baptised. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they knew that Jesus was still with them.

It is the same with us today. We can't see Jesus as they did, but we can still be assured that Jesus is with us, through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives.

As Christians today we have the same promise, that through baptism, the Holy Spirit enters into our lives to be with us and assure us of God's presence and of God's peace.

Conclusion

So, as we remember Jesus' Baptism today, may we recall God's words to Jesus, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

May we also be reminded of our own Baptism, the symbolism behind it, and the life it calls us into. A life assuring us that we are loved by God, and a life in which we are called to share that love with those around us. In all that we do, and in all that we say. Amen.