

## The Baptism of Christ

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Eternal Father,  
who at the baptism of Jesus  
revealed him to be your Son,  
anointing him with your Holy Spirit:  
grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit  
that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children.

My text may be found in Luke 3 verse 22:

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

Our church here, dedicated to the memory of St Bartholomew, is made up of folk from very different traditions, not only within the Anglican Communion but some of us are Roman Catholics, Eglise Reformé, Methodists, Church of Scotland, Baptists and even Open Brethren. What we all have in common, like those first believers in Jesus as the Son of God, followers of the Way, is that all of us have been baptised. And today we are celebrating the Baptism of Jesus.

Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordan. John was reluctant to baptise his cousin. Why? Why, because John knew who Jesus was. His whole ministry was geared to prepare the people for Jesus’ coming. And here was Jesus coming to be baptised. For a start, John did not feel worthy to do so, not even worthy enough to act as the servant who would untie the sandals on a guest’s feet, then

presumably wash those feet, wash off the dust so that with clean feet, the guest was fit to be entertained in the Master's home. Secondly, there was no need to baptise Jesus. The baptism of John was a ritual immersion in the river Jordan, rather in the vein of a Jewish ritual bath of purification, the Mikvah, which the Blessed Virgin Mary would have had after the birth of her son, Jesus; the ritual bath a Jewish bride might have before her wedding. John's baptism was one of repentance, of turning away from past sins, wrong-doing and resolving henceforth to live a righteous life, an upright life, according to the teachings of the Torah, the Jewish legal code. Now since uniquely as a Human Being, if you discount the claim that the BVM herself is immaculate, Jesus is born without sin, then there is no need for this ritual immersion in water to wash away his sin.

What Jesus says to his cousin, John is persuasive; I quote from Matthew 3 v15, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' There are three key words in this English translation of Matthew's Greek:

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|------|---------------|------------|--------------|
| i.   | Proper        | πρεπει     | (prepei)     |
| ii.  | Fulfil        | πληρωσ     | (pleroo)     |
| iii. | Righteousness | δικαιοσυνη | (dikaiosune) |

'Proper' suggests appropriate, that which is right. Jesus implies that there is code of conduct that is good for people to follow, implicitly to obey.

'Fulfil' carries that idea of obedience: of putting into practice that code so it is a reality not only in theory but in practice.

'Righteousness' is a particularly Jewish concept: it means upright living and being. To be righteous is to be a true Son of the Law, Bar Mitzvah.

So Jesus persuades John to baptise him because he appeals to what John is teaching – to be truly obedient to the God-given Law by which all Jews should live their lives!

So John does baptise Jesus despite his scruples and as Jesus emerges dripping wet from the water, a marvellous epiphany takes place. Let me quote the passage in full of which today's text is the essential part: 'Now when all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

This passage is a key text because it marks the start of Jesus' three year public ministry. It is a key text because here is a demonstration of who and what Jesus is, the Messiah, the anointed son of God. It is a key text because it is an early example of the doctrine of the Trinity: God the Son prays while God the Father speaks and God the Holy Spirit descends like a dove.

So today as we once again mark the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan by his cousin, John the Baptist, let us remember too why it is so important an event in the Life of Christ. It is important because it demonstrates that baptism is the distinctive rite of passage which all Christians share. It is important because it symbolises the state of purity to which we are called, that our wrong-doing which defiles and dirties us may daily be washed away through the grace of God. It is important because it is evidence of the status of Jesus as the Son of God and an

implicit statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, a central tenet of our shared Christian Creed.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's Dinard*

*10<sup>th</sup> January, 2010*

H: Sermon 21:Baptism Christ

