

## Baptism

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Eternal Father,  
who at the baptism of Jesus  
revealed him to be your Son,  
anointing him with the 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

Our text may be found in Luke's gospel, chapter 3 and verses 21 and 22:

'the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon, him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased."'

A fortnight ago, I asked the question 'when did Jesus know that he was the Son of God, the Messiah, our Lord and Saviour?' Intuitively, I believe that Jesus had an understanding of who he was from the very beginning. External sources had made Mary and Joseph aware that their son, Jesus, was different, special, key to God's will for Man. Inside himself at the outset, I feel that Jesus would have sensed his relationship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit from the moment of conception, limited only by the growth of his consciousness and his inexperience.

Today, we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus. For us as Christians, it marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. For Jesus, it was an act of obedience to the will of God for Man in general and for him in particular. It culminates in the words of our text today: 'the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon, him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased"' an action and words which provide further proof of just how special Jesus is in God's eyes.

The baptism of John was part of his call to his fellow Jews to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. Rooted in Jewish belief about ritual purity, John called the people to repent of their past wrong-doing and to be ritually washed clean by being totally immersed in the waters of the river Jordan. Christian baptism has developed from this idea of repentance and cleansing but taking on an additional meaning – that our baptism marks the beginning of our lives as Christians. Moreover, it has come to replace the need to circumcise our baby boys as a mark of belonging to the people of God. Baptism is a sacrament, an outward sign of an inward reality: that now we belong to God, that now we are his children by adoption, brothers and sisters to Jesus Christ our Lord.

John is reluctant to baptise Jesus because he knows who Jesus is and what he is and knows there is no need to do so. Jesus insists because he knows it is his Father's will for him and that he is setting an example for others to follow.

Baptised, Jesus is emerging from the water when the dove descends from heaven and the voice speaks. The descent of the dove to alight on Jesus' head or his

shoulder is a mark of him being Spirit-filled, that Jesus is informed and inspired by the Holy Spirit. The voice from heaven is a threefold statement of fact: that Jesus is the Son of God; that he is the Beloved of God; and that God is well pleased with him.

My question – and always there are questions – is who heard, who saw what I have just described: they are set down in Matthew, Mark and Luke's account of the baptism. In John's gospel, John the Baptist tells his disciples that he saw the dove alight and remain with Jesus but John the Evangelist is silent on whether John the Baptist heard the voice of God. If other folk saw and heard the phenomena, then it would have caused a real stir. To see and to hear anything, you have to be watching and listening and then you need to be able to interpret the sight and sound. To be honest, I am not sure if anyone else apart from his cousin, John the Baptist, did but intuitively I feel that the dove and voice were personal to Jesus at the start of his public ministry and that later on through sharing it with his disciples, we too are made aware in retrospect of what happened. At the time, however, I feel that it was fitting confirmation and empowerment for Jesus alone that he was Son of God and that he was doing what God wanted him to do.

So on this Sunday when once again we remember the Baptism of Jesus, what can we learn? That we have, in the sacrament of baptism, an example for us all to follow: the distinguishing sign that we are Christians who repent of past wrongdoing and who want to serve God by following Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. That in his baptism, Jesus had further proof of something that he already knew: that he was in fact the Son of God, the Beloved and that His Father was well

pleased with him. Now that is an exciting way to begin his three year ministry:  
filled with the Spirit of God !

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*

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G: Sermon 27 : re Baptism JC

