

Now known

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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 today may be found in Matthew chapter 3 and verse 17:

'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

Traditionally, the First Sunday of Epiphany marks the Baptism of Jesus. Baptism is the one thing all of us here at St Bart's have in common. We are all likely to have been baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is the distinguishing badge of being a Christian. Gone the need to be circumcised. Now the need to be baptised. But when we are baptised and how we are baptised will differ. Personally, I favour infant baptism followed by confirmation as and when appropriate. Others may favour adult or believers' baptism. I love the symbolism of total immersion in water but given the logistics of an Anglican church and the size of our font, sprinkling is what we do at St Bart's.

Baptism is rooted in a Jewish purification rite, a mikvah, a ritual bath to wash away spiritual impurity. Just as a good bath washes away the physical dirt of an unclean, sweaty, smelly body, so too does a ritual bath make us smell sweet in a spiritual sense. And there we have John the Baptist's problem. When Jesus comes to him to ask to be baptised, John knows he is the only person in the world – if you discount the Blessed Virgin Mary – who doesn't need to be baptised. In fact, to John, it would be better if Jesus were to baptise him. Jesus' answer may not be clear to our modern ear but it does persuade the reluctant John. Jesus says, **'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.'** Put simply, Jesus saying it's good to do the right thing, to conform to the pattern God wants us to follow. Jesus is making obedience to God the priority here and as such, he is setting an example for us all to follow.

So in baptism we have a purification ritual, a rite of passage whereby we turn away from sin, the devil and all things evil and turn to God as our Lord and Saviour, believing in Him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism marks a new beginning, a fresh start. We are clean and can go on to live the clean life, knowing that daily our sins can be forgiven and we can spread light and love to those around us.

It is a wonderful thought that we as Christians can live a new life, renewed each day by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, by the fact of the life of Christ, and by the universal love of God. That said, I'd like to end today's sermon by looking briefly at our text today, **'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'** and asking – at his baptism, who knew that Jesus was Son of God ?

Well first and foremost Jesus did. I can't imagine a time when he didn't know that he was special. But at his baptism, Jesus was on the point of going public.

Then, of course, John the Baptist did. John was the forerunner, preparing the way for the Messiah. Even in his mother's womb, John had responded to the presence of Jesus in Mary's womb by stirring, moving, giving Elizabeth a baby kick to show he was alive to the presence of someone special.

Then, there are the people witnessing the baptism. Who and how many were on the banks of the river Jordan watching I've no idea. My question is, did they see the dove descend and did they hear the voice of God? Interestingly, Luke and Matthew's account of what was said differ significantly. Luke writes:

'You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased'

and Matthew:

'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'.

In Luke, God is speaking to Jesus; in Matthew, to the onlookers. So in Matthew, certainly, someone else heard and possibly saw.

But to my mind, the real intended audience of the story is us – Christians who over two millennia have heard the words and felt the thrill of God with approbation pointing us to his Son, Jesus.

So let me leave you with two thoughts. Through his baptism, we can know that Jesus is God's Son. Through our baptism, we can have a new life in him.

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: Sermons 29 : Now known

