

Baptism

30 7 17

Lord of all power and might,
the arbiter and giver of all good things:
graft in our hearts the love of your name,
increase in us true religion,
nourish us in all goodness,
and of your great mercy keep us in the same.

Our text, this morning, may be found in Acts chapter 8 and verse 36:

'Look here is water. What is to prevent me from being baptised ?'

I'm going to guess that most of you here today, unless you're like me and were baptised as an adult, will not remember your baptism. Why? Simply because in the Anglican and the Catholic Church, baptism normally takes place when you are a baby or a young child so the memory is rather lost to us.

Today, however, we are fortunate to have the baptism of a mother and her child at the same time, Keri and her son, Caiden, so we have the chance to ask two questions: 'What is baptism and why is baptism important?'

Well essentially, baptism is the initiation rite into the Christian family. Being baptised is the mark of being a Christian. If you are baptised, then you are, by definition, part of the Church, part of the God's family – if you like, you're one of

us. For Jews, the initiation rite for a baby boy aged just eight-days-old is circumcision. Then, at twelve, when the boy becomes a man, Bar Mitzvah – being a son of the Law and proving it by reading a passage of scripture in Hebrew in a service at the Synagogue. But, for us as Christians, we take the Jewish rite of ritual purification, the Mikvah, a ritual bath to cleanse us of our sins and we make that our rite of passage, the ceremony that states publically what we believe in our hearts to be true: that the one God in whom we believe and trust is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that we are sorry for what we do wrong, our sin, and that we want to live a clean life, a pure life, the good life, by following the teaching we can find in the Bible and by coming to church as often as we can.

John the Baptist baptised people by total immersion in the river Jordan. It was a very public and symbolic act to show that they were sorry for past wrong-doing and were looking forward to the coming of the long-expected Messiah. When Jesus turned up and asked John to baptise him, John was understandably reluctant to do so because Jesus didn't need to be washed clean of sin because by definition, as the Son of God, he was himself without sin. But John did do so because Jesus was setting us all an example of what we all should do – namely be baptised, a symbolic act, cleansing us of sin and putting us on the path to salvation and ultimately to heaven.

In the passage, we heard today in Acts, Bartholomew's friend, Philip, is in the right place at the right time. On a road going down to Gaza, in the middle of nowhere, Philip meets an Ethiopian on his way back from Jerusalem trying to make sense of some Jewish scripture he's bought there. And Philip helps him understand by

explaining that Jesus was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that he's just been reading. So the Ethiopian comes to faith because he, too, is in the right place at the right time and God is there to help him in the person of Philip. So the Ethiopian asks to be baptised and Philip does what is asked of him.

So I hope that helps. Baptism is special – it marks the start of a journey we begin in this life and my prayer for Keri and Caiden (and indeed for all of us) is that it will be a journey that will not only bring them strength and joy and sense of purpose but will one day see them end up in the right place together.

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

30th July, 2017

G: Sermons 36 : Baptism

