



The Baptism of Christ

Sunday 10 January 2021

- To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark

All Glory to you O Lord.

John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' *Mark 1:4-11*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

In Advent we heard of John the Baptist. How he was in the Judean wilderness outside of Jerusalem, and that he was proclaiming the way of the Lord, and baptising the people for the repentance of sins. Today, we return to John, and go down by the riverside. What do we see?

We see a man. Rough. Weather-worn. Big for outdoors, and dressed like it, too. Wearing camel's hair. Not what most would call a professional? Certainly not a city-slicker. Whatever he is, he is not a suit. What else do we see? People. Lots of them. And all kinds. Mark writes the whole Judean countryside was there. Farming, country people. Good people.

And who else? Mark writes that not only was the Judean countryside there, but also 'all of Jerusalem' was coming out there too. All of Jerusalem means not only that there were many people from Jerusalem, but that all kinds and types of people were there. Merchants, laborers, and craftsmen. Men, women, and children. But also the society and cultural types: The priests and the Levites, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Zealots. All of Jerusalem was coming out there. From high to low, all kinds were there. So this was some kind of event. It was some kind of event drawing all people. This was some kind of event that all were there.

What was happening? A call to preparation and repentance. A baptism for the repentance of sins. This wild man, this prophet, was new, and was saying new things, 'prepare the way of the Lord.' But baptism was not new, this baptism, 'for the repentance of sins,' was different. But baptism itself was not new. You may recall how the Jews were commanded to avoid all uncleanness. And part of that was washing, or baptism, for purification. One had to wash, or be baptised, to enter the temple area. The priests in particular had to be baptised in the Great Bronze Sea before they could go into the temple itself. And baptism was part of everyday life, even to the point that Pots and pans had to be cleansed before using them. And so that in the account of Christ's miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana, there were large stone jars of waters, for the washing, or baptising, of pots according the law of purification.

It was not an entirely new concept to the people that washing or baptising would have a religious or spiritual meaning. So they received from John a baptism for the repentance of sins. Like the people of Judea and Jerusalem, we, too, have received a baptism with spiritual significance. A baptism for the remission of sins. John himself says that he does not have the last word; he is not the final authority

on baptism. He says, 'After me comes He who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit' (Mark 1:7-8 ESV).

And so it is that this greater one, this one whose sandal's John cannot untie, arrives at the Jordan river. And He was baptised by John. And the holy spirit descended upon him So lets ask ourselves, Why was Jesus baptised? We know that John was baptising for the repentance of sins, and that we have been baptised for the remission of sins. But this is Jesus. He has no sins. Why then get baptised? We don't wash a pot that is already clean. Was He baptised for the repentance of sins?

In verse 5 we see that the people are baptised for the repentance of sin, and that they confessed their sin. They 'were being baptised by [John] in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.' But of Jesus, Mark does not write about confessing sin, or repenting of sin. His baptism was not a baptism for repentance of His sin. And this is not a surprise, as Jesus had no sin to confess, no sins to repent of. So, to what end, or for what purpose was Christ baptised?

This is why: By His baptism, Christ united Himself to baptism, so that, in and through baptism we should be united with Him.

As St. Paul writes, 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.' (Romans 6:3-5)

Because Christ has united Himself to baptism, we in baptism are united to Him. And by this union, we have all the benefits of His grace and goodness towards us. Was Christ baptised for the forgiveness of sins? Yes, but not for the forgiveness of His sin, but of ours.

Had Christ not been baptised, then baptism would remain only a washing for purification. But now, baptism is not plain water only, but water comprehended and connected with the Word of God. And what, or Who, is the Word of God? Christ Jesus, our Lord. He is the very Word of God incarnate. By His baptism Christ makes it His own, so that, in and through baptism, we are not merely purified. We are baptised rather into Christ Himself.

In Advent, as we were preparing for the coming of Christ, it was John who made the announcement, who said that the Lord was coming. Now, however, Christ has arrived, and it is the Father who is speaking, 'You are my beloved Son, in you I have been well pleased' (Mark 1:11). In baptism we are made sons and daughters of God, heirs according to His promises. So we are His beloved children, in whom He

is well pleased. So understand we are God's beloved children. God is well-pleased with us. How can that be? Because we are united with Christ.

We know that we will overcome when we face despair and doubt. Why? For Christ has united Himself to baptism, and in baptism we are united to Him. He has overcome all despair and all doubt. So, because we are united to Him, we, too, shall overcome.

What of shame, and scorn, oppression and shunning? Do we feel ridicule or rejection? Yes, we do. But this we know, Christ endured rejection by the Pharisees, shunning by His own disciples, and shame and scorn on the cross. Should we be surprised by this? No. For Paul tells us that we are united by baptism to Christ's death. He suffered pain, shame, scorn, mockery and rejection. So will we. But even as we are united by baptism with His death, we are united by baptism with His resurrection. He triumphed over the shame of the cross. In baptism, we know that we too shall triumph. For the life that we live, we live in Christ. Why? Because we are united with Him.

When that day shall come, and death stares us in the face, -- our own death, or the death of our loved ones, - we know that we have victory over death. Why? Because in baptism we were united with Christ. United in His death, we, and all believers -- you, me, our loved ones gone and our loved ones to come -- all believers are united to Christ in His resurrection.

In baptism we are united with Our King. Christ lives in us, He rules over us. He guards us, guides, and protects us. United with Him in baptism, we are together forever. Together for now. Together for always. Amen.