

# 10/01/2021 First Sunday of Epiphany (the Baptism of Christ)

## Readings and Commentaries

### Prayers

### Collect

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,  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Amen**

### Prayer

Keep us, good Lord,  
under the shadow of your mercy  
in this time of uncertainty and distress.  
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,  
and lift up all who are brought low;  
that we may rejoice in your comfort  
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Amen**

'Peace be with you'

I hope you are well.

These commentaries are not meant to be a sermon but hopefully a way to expand our engagement with the word of God.

I hope that as we navigate through the current restrictions of the 'Lockdown', we will be able to open our hearts and minds to the message and truth contained in God's word.

Please continue to love your neighbour and pray for all those who are suffering at this testing time. Prayer cannot be quarantined. Our hope is in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.**

Regards Revd M Orr

## **Preliminary Comments:**

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> January was the start of yet another 'Lockdown' across the country, with all the social repercussions and the usual political recriminations that follow. However, Wednesday also marked the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas also known as Epiphany. Epiphany simply means, a moment of sudden and great revelation or realization. For Christians this is marked by the visit of the wise men to the infant Jesus, bearing gifts of gold frankincense and myrrh. These were items normally given to honour a king, gold as a precious metal, frankincense as perfume or incense, and myrrh as anointing oil. This event is recorded in chapter two of Matthew's gospel. For Christians this 'Epiphany' shows that Jesus was not just the anointed King and Messiah of the Jews but also, the Saviour and King for all of humanity for all of time.

In times of stress, gloom, and anxiety it is good to remind ourselves that ultimately Jesus is King and that all things will conform to his will. As Proverbs 3:5-6, reminds us...

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight.  
In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.

## **Acts 19:1-7**

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup> He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' <sup>3</sup> Then he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They answered, 'Into John's baptism.' <sup>4</sup> Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.' <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— <sup>7</sup> altogether there were about twelve of them.

## **Commentary:**

This passage helps us to understand a little about what kinds of baptism were around in the first century. Baptism is simply a ritualised submersion in water. Gentiles had used ritual washing that included submersion and Jews had a ritual baptism at various times before particular religious events. This was normally done near to the temple in Jerusalem. That is one reason why the Pharisees questioned John when they saw that he was baptising people in the river Jordan. (John 1:19) John was baptising for repentance for the forgiveness of sins and as he said to the Pharisees and the people that he baptised with water but the one who comes after him will baptise with the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 3:11-12, Mark 1:7-8, Luke 3:15-18, John 1:24-28)

The disciples Paul is speaking to in Ephesus had been baptised in the way similar to that of John the Baptist, a variation of the Jewish method. However, as Christians they were now able to be baptised in the Christian concept of Baptism, not only with water but also with the Holy Spirit. This form of baptism was only possible because of the death and resurrection of Christ. Christian baptism is wholly different to the other rituals because it was done with the Holy Spirit through the grace of God, it is done only once and lasts for eternity. Jesus taught a gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47) and before his ascension give us the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...'

## Mark 1:4-11

John the baptizer appeared<sup>[e]</sup> in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

### The Baptism of Jesus

<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

### Commentary:

This reading is typically brief and to the point as Mark's gospel often is; the topic of Christ's baptism is also covered in Matthew 3, Luke 3, and John 1. There are many significant points to take note of concerning the baptism of Jesus. A few are set out below.

- Jesus came to meet John:  
John was generally recognised by many people at the time as being a prophet in the mould of the Old Testament Prophets. Hebrew scripture had foretold that a prophet would prepare a way for the promised Messiah. (Isaiah 40:3-4)
- The baptism took place in the river Jordan:  
Joshua led the people of Israel over the river Jordan, ending their time of wandering in the wilderness and entering the Promised Land. (Joshua 3) The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, Joshua means 'God is Salvation'. Matthews gospel informs us that John felt unworthy to baptise Jesus, then Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15).
- After the baptism The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus 'And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'  
When Joshua crossed the Jordan the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant went before the people and the waters parted so the people could pass over safely to the promised land. When Jesus came up out of the water the heavens parted and the Spirit came upon Him. Jesus with the power of the spirit also opens the way to the promised land in heaven.

It is worth remembering that Jesus was a Jew living in the Jewish culture of the first century AD. In that tradition the priests that served in the Temple of Jerusalem would conduct a ritual cleansing to prepare them for their duties in the temple. When Jesus came to John to conduct a ritual bathing/baptism he was also preparing himself to carry out his duty. Where the priest would prepare himself to be able to conduct the ritual sacrifices for the people, Jesus would not only act as the high priest, he would also be the sacrifice. That is why he said, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness."

When we hear of the Baptism of Christ, we often see this event from the Christian perspective of baptism but for Jesus in that time and place there was a Jewish perspective to deal with. Jesus did not need to be forgiven for sins, he is God after all, he was fulfilling the Old Testament requirements to conduct his righteous duties and it was witnessed by the people around him.

The Baptism of Christ marks the start of his earthly ministry and his journey to his ultimate sacrifice on the cross, "A full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world."

## **On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry**

1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry  
announces that the Lord is nigh.  
Awake and harken, for he brings  
glad tidings of the King of kings!

2 Then cleansed be every life from sin:  
make straight the way for God within,  
and let us all our hearts prepare  
for Christ to come and enter there.

3 We hail you as our Savior, Lord,  
our refuge and our great reward.  
Without your grace we waste away  
like flowers that wither and decay.

4 Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,  
and make us rise to fall no more.  
O let your face upon us shine  
and fill the world with love divine.

5 All praise to you, eternal Son,  
whose advent has our freedom won,  
whom with the Father we adore,  
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

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