

The baptism of Jesus

Please read Mark 1 v 1-11 and pray;

Lord, may your Word always be a light for my path, a bright lamp to safely guide my footsteps into the future; in Jesus name. Amen.

The season of epiphany celebrates the **unveiling** or the *revelation* of the glory of Jesus Christ. Of all the events in the life of Christ – two stand out for their “epiphany” moments. Those two events are the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9-11) and the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2-8). Jesus is revealed to be God’s beloved Son. There is an unveiling of his glory and uniqueness on both occasions. The first event, his baptism, marks the beginning of his ministry. The second event, his transfiguration, marks the mid-point and turning point in his ministry – the point where Jesus begins the long road to Jerusalem under the shadow of the cross.

Jesus’s baptism is different from any other that has ever taken place. He was not the first to be baptised by his cousin John. Many others had streamed into the wilderness of Judea in order to be baptised by the rough and ready John. They had come from all directions (v 5) with the same hunger and need, the need to be spiritually cleansed, washed and renewed. And there would be many others who would come after Jesus seeking to undergo this baptism of repentance which John offered as part of his “preparing the way” ministry.

But Jesus’ baptism proved to be different – although as he came to be baptised there appeared to be no difference between him and all the others who queued to be immersed in the Jordan. He was “one of them.” He approached John with the needy crowd. Jesus waited with them. He identified with them. He came from a backwater village of no reputation – a typical northerner. Nothing special came out of Nazareth (John 1:46) – but that’s where Jesus came from – an ordinary village. He was going to identify with ordinary people all his life. He was going to live among the poor. He would even come alongside and touch lepers. He would mix with sinners, outsiders, people on the margins of society and those viewed as rebels. He determined to be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12), not so that he might also sin and fall, but so that he might identify with them who had sinned and fallen, and go on to die on their behalf, and for their sins. For Jesus, it was all about **identification**.

Jesus’s baptism was preparation for his ministry as the suffering servant of God who would be “pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.” (Isaiah 53:5). As he went forward to be baptised, he didn’t go forward to confess his sins like everyone else did (Mark 1:5) – he instead stepped forward to begin a journey which would see him “giving up his life as a ransom for many”. (Mark 10:45) There was no repentance from sin on the part of Jesus, but rather a willingness to bear it. And this is where Jesus *dramatically differs* from all the crowds and from us. The contrast between verses 5 and 9 in Mark’s opening chapter could not be greater. Read them again. No confession of sin from Jesus, just a purposeful stepping down into the water. He was baptised in the same way as all the others, **but not for the same reasons**.

It is only after Jesus obediently steps out of the water that the epiphany occurs.

Mark’s gospel is highly dramatic, and we now have the climactic moment of what may be described as scene 1. **As soon as** Jesus steps up out of the water, something **immediately** happens. Mark is to use this Greek adverb “euthys” 41 times in his gospel to heighten the drama that surrounds Jesus Christ the Son of God. The word can be translated “immediately” or “at once” or “without delay”. As soon as Jesus emerges from the waters of the Jordan – immediately – **heaven was torn open**. This is something Jesus saw with his own eyes; the separation or tearing open of the heavens. The heavens

were opened up in order to send Someone down! The Spirit came down upon Jesus, dove like, to **rest** and **remain** upon him throughout his ministry which would now commence in the power of the Spirit.

Something is torn open (the heavens) at the beginning of his ministry, (Mark1:10) and something else is torn from top to bottom (the great Temple curtain) the moment or **immediately** after Jesus' death much later on in our story. (Mark 15:38) Heaven is opened up on both occasions as God's Son embraces God's will. At his baptism, Jesus offers the Father his life; on the cross he offers back his spirit.

Down falls the Holy Spirit upon Jesus; to **rest** and **remain upon** the One declared to be the Son of God. Jesus sees the Spirit coming and welcomes the Spirit's presence and power upon him. John the Baptist also testifies to what he saw;

*I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not **have known him**, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit". **I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.** (John 1: 32-34)*

The Spirit coming down to rest and remain upon Jesus was the **visual** testimony for Jesus and John. Jesus was the Son of God upon whom the Spirit now rested upon without limit. But there was also the **verbal** testimony of the Father from heaven which immediately followed the visual descent of the Spirit. The voice was for Jesus's benefit and blessing. Confirmation of the Sonship of Jesus followed the descending and sealing of the Spirit. (John 6:27, Psalm 2:7)

You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.

The sequence of events for Jesus was therefore;

- Baptism by John with water.
- The tearing open of the heavens.
- The descent of the dove-like Spirit which remained upon Jesus.
- The declaration and confirmation that he was indeed God's beloved Son.

And so, we have what one biblical commentator describes as "one of the great Trinitarian passages of the New Testament." (R. Alan Cole) There is Son, Spirit and Father moving and combining together at the outset of the ministry of the Son of God. This has God's mighty **stamp of approval**. We can marvel at;

- The dedication of the Son (to the will of the Father)
- The descent of the Spirit (to empower the Son)
- The declaration of love by the Father (for the Son and Servant of God)

Jesus, the Son of God, can now move out and about the land of his ancestors *in the power and with the anointing of the Spirit*. As Jesus will soon declare in one synagogue;

The Spirit of the Lord is ON ME, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4: 18-19)

(see also Isaiah 11:2, 42:1, 61:1, John 1:32-33, John 3:34)

Every aspect of Jesus' kingdom ministry, from the initial descent of the Spirit, is to be empowered and directed by the Spirit of God to the glory of the Father. The Spirit's power will **light up** all Jesus's words and deeds of power and compassion. (Acts 10:38)

And as we consider the implications for ourselves, and the life of the Christian and the Church, **two** things stand out.

Firstly, as Christians (sons and daughters of the living God) and as the Church (the body of Christ upon the earth), we are to move out and about **in the power and with the anointing of the Holy Spirit**. Jesus received the Spirit upon him to work to God's glory. *We too* receive the same Spirit upon us for the work of God's kingdom. We are endued with the power and presence of the same Spirit.

Remember the message of John the Baptist. His testimony is so significant;

I baptise you with water, but he will baptise YOU with the Holy Spirit. (Mark 1:8)

The baptism with the Holy Spirit given by Jesus to his own followers is what will make all the difference for the true mission of the Church. This baptism with the Spirit is precisely what empowers us today for mission and evangelism. This is the power and the anointing that enables the Church to take the gospel of the kingdom to the very ends of the earth. (Acts 1: 5, 8). This was the empowering presence of the Spirit received on the day of Pentecost as promised by John the Baptist (Mark 1:8) by Jesus (Acts 1:5) and by the Father (Acts 1:4). This is our gracious inheritance. This is what fires the Church into action and life! We have the baptism with the Spirit! Let's rejoice in the Spirit, move in the Spirit, serve in the strength and power of the Spirit, and speak under the special anointing of the Spirit.

Secondly, as Christians, the Spirit is not only "upon us" so that we can live and serve in His power and love, the Spirit comes to live **in us** so as **TO CONFIRM** that we are indeed God's children. At his baptism, Jesus was declared to be the beloved Son of God. Christians are given the Spirit of sonship. We become confirmed as God's own children, "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:17)

Because those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry "Abba" Father. THE SPIRIT HIMSELF TESTIFIES WITH OUR SPIRIT THAT WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.... (Roman 8: 14-17)

The Spirit is given to empower us for service, as He empowered Christ on the day of his baptism; but He is also given as a **seal and a guarantee** to confirm for all time that we are indeed God's own beloved children. God says to us through the gift of his Spirit; *You are my child - with you I am well pleased.*

One of the greatest gifts I give thanks for as a servant of Christ is the sealing of the Spirit, for it guarantees my sonship and my eternal life. Listen to some of the great Scripture promises relating to the sealing of the Spirit;

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put HIS SPIRIT IN OUR HEARTS as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, see also 2 Cor 5:5)

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. (1 John 4:13, and 3:24)

On the day of his baptism, and later on the day when he was transfigured, Jesus received the greatest possible personal assurance that he was God's Son, specially loved and highly favoured. We too, receive a personal assurance that we are God's own beloved children through the gift and seal of the Spirit within our hearts. His Spirit speaks to our spirit and says – "you are mine for all eternity." God's Spirit comes upon us to empower us to serve and live for Christ. God's Spirit lives within me to assure and comfort me of my adoption into God's family, my joint inheritance with Christ, and my eternal life with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit! Sealed! Guaranteed! Fully assured!

There is a most beautiful and assuring symmetry about the gospel and about the way the Holy Spirit works. We see it in the life of the Son of God conceived by the Spirit in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:35) and then later anointed with the Spirit for the work of the Kingdom (Luke 4: 14, 18). ***We now see and experience*** the gracious work of the Spirit in the life of the Church. Those who follow the Son are "born anew of the Spirit", and enjoy as Christ did, the knowledge and blessing of God as "Abba" Father.

Is it any wonder that the Spirit is so often referred to as the Comforter? What comfort there is through the presence and power of the Spirit, and the confirmation of eternal life that the Spirit brings and guarantees!

To God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit – be all glory and honour. Amen