

Baptism of Christ 2020 (13.01.2020)

Acts 10: 34 – 43; Matthew 3: 13 – end

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus. And we do that on this, the second Sunday in the season of Epiphany. And that means that we're looking at this story through the same lens we're looking at all the other stories during Epiphany, asking ourselves the question: what does this story about Jesus reveal to us about the nature of God? Or, what do we learn about God through this story about Jesus? Because, if you were here last week, remember the glorious quote from Bishop David Jenkins: "God is as he was in Jesus – therefore we have hope."

The first thing this story of Jesus' Baptism reveals is an affirmation of that very point: when we look at Jesus, we look at God. Jesus is more than a really holy person; he's more than an inspiring teacher; he's more than a miraculous healer; he's more than someone who points us towards God: he *is* God. Just as last

week one of the gifts the Wise Men brought was frankincense because Jesus is divine, so this week, at the moment of his Baptism, that is affirmed by Jesus seeing the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him, and by the crowds hearing a voice from heaven "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." God is completely identified with Jesus.

The second thing this story reveals, the second part of the epiphany within this story, is that Jesus completely identifies *himself* with the human condition. How so? Because he presents himself to be baptised. Of you think about it, it's strange that Jesus was Baptised. There is nothing that Jesus didn't already have that could be conferred on him through baptism. Not only was Jesus divine from the moment he was born: he was divine before he was born. He was divine before time began. John's Gospel tells us that the Word – Jesus – was in the beginning with God and indeed *was* God in the beginning.

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So if Jesus was God from before time began, there's nothing can be added to him by baptism. He can't get any more divine by being baptised. But he doesn't get baptised in order to get anything conferred on him. He does it so that *he* can confer something on *us*. We do need to be baptised. We need to be born again. We are trapped, living within the limitations of the human condition, which is partial and imperfect and deeply unsatisfactory. We need to be propelled through baptism towards the hope and the assurance of life in all its fullness.

And Jesus, though he was God, did not cling to his equality with God. Rather he put himself in the position of people like us who need to be baptised. He went to see John in order to be baptised - and it was when he did so that his divinity was affirmed.

So, if God identifies himself completely with Jesus, and Jesus identified himself completely with us, that means the epiphany of this story is - and this really is

an epiphany: this is a revelation that knocks us off our feet – the epiphany is that we can cut out the middle bit without losing any meaning that God completely identifies himself with us; and when we're baptised the divine potential within each of us is affirmed.

It takes a moment to let that sink in. Because I suspect that not many of us feel all that divine sitting here this morning. In fact, we don't need our noses rubbing in it to know full well that we're pretty rubbish. But, because of Jesus, it is revealed to us that God is well pleased with us – notwithstanding our rubbish-ness.

And this is precisely what we heard St. Peter preaching in our first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles. He succinctly reviews all that Jesus did – gets anointed by the Holy Spirit at Baptism, preaches, heals, gets crucified, rises from the dead – and Peter says that through this he had come to understand that “God shows no partiality, but in every nation *anyone* who

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fears him and does the right thing *is acceptable to him.*”

Peter adds one other thing, though, to the summary of what Jesus did. He says Jesus “commanded us to preach to the people and to testify . . .” God identifies himself with us through Jesus, he assures us he is well pleased with us, but that leaves us with a command. And we have to decide whether we are going to be obedient to that command and follow it. What follows in this service is an opportunity to do just that. In the same way that Jesus went to the Jordan to be baptised, we are going to face the font, give thanks for baptism, confess our sins and be rededicated to God’s service and receive afresh the free gift of the water of life.

In the Methodist tradition it’s done by praying this wonderful prayer and the Covenant Service that begins the new year:

I am no longer my own but yours.

Put me to what you will,

rank me with whom you will;

put me to doing,

put me to suffering;

let me be employed for you,

or laid aside for you,

exalted for you,

or brought low for you;

let me be full,

let me be empty,

let me have all things,

let me have nothing:

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

And the covenant now made on earth, let it be
ratified in heaven.

We have to decide whether to say Amen. Amen?

Amen!

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