

The Baptism of Jesus

Bible Reading: Mark 1:4-11

Bottom Line: Jesus is baptised with us



Picture the scene

You're out in the desert, with a huge crowd of people who, like you, have all flocked to the River Jordan to see this new person dressed in camel hair. Apparently he's announcing the Kingdom of Heaven, or something like that, but you're not really sure what's going on. You have managed to pick one thing up though: it all seems to be about forgiveness of sins. And one by one, everyone is making their way down to the river to be submerged in it.

As you watch, another person wades out into the river towards John. It doesn't look like there's anything different about him, but something *feels* different. John lowers him down into the river, just like he has with so many other people around you.

As he's submerged, something makes you look up to the sky. Before your amazed eyes, the very sky above you starts to tear open. What starts as a small crack quickly turns into a huge rift, dividing the whole sky in two. And out of this, you see something start to descend. At first all you can make out is a bright white glimmer, but as it gets lower you begin to make out the form of a bird.

The bird shape drifts down from the sky, and settles on the man in the water, and at this point you know there is something special about him. And then you hear a voice thundering from above you, which echoes across the desert. “You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased.”

Highlights from the passage

- John is baptising people into repentance for forgiveness of their sins. So for most of the people that come out to see him, they’ve come because they acknowledge their sins and are ready to ask for forgiveness. But then Jesus comes along, who is perfect and sinless, so He doesn’t need to be baptised in the same way as we do. And yet Jesus still chooses to get baptised, because in His humility He has chosen to come to sinners and to join them, not to stand at a distance and judge them.
- John says that he baptizes with water, but Jesus will baptise us with the Holy Spirit. Our baptism today combines these – we are immersed in water as a physical act which represents the spiritual process of receiving the holy spirit. Baptism always comes early on someone’s life as a Christian, and likewise the Holy Spirit is with us from the beginning to guide, help and transform us.
- The events surrounding Jesus’ baptism are dramatic and awe-inspiring. This is how Mark chooses to introduce Jesus to us, and it makes a clear statement about Him – that He comes with divine power and authority, by which even the sky can be torn open.

Going deeper

- The Spirit is described as descending like a dove, which is a very physical picture. It’s important to remember that the Holy Spirit is real and physical, and is often manifested in the world in a physical way.
- The word baptise originally just referred to being immersed. Although it has a very different meaning today, that’s still an important part of it – we’re immersed in water, and also in the holy spirit. This is a helpful image for thinking about the Holy Spirit – it’s something that we’re immersed in and surrounded by, and is always at work.
- The baptism described in this passage takes place in the River Jordan, with a large volume of water flowing through. One of the things which this symbolizes is cleansing from sin – as the water flows over us, our sins are washed away and we are made clean. As well as the flowing away of our sins, it also represent the flowing on of the Holy Spirit, so that we can be guided by God in everything we do.

The point: We are immersed in the Holy Spirit, which empowers us to follow God.

Activity

At some point this week, try to go for a walk somewhere where you can see a river. Stand and watch the river for a bit, and as you see the water flow past, imagine all your mistakes and problems being washed away, and the Holy Spirit flowing over you.