

Sermon for 8.1.17 Jesus baptism

Today we celebrate the baptism of our Lord in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. Liturgically today's feast marks both an ending and a beginning. It is the final celebration of the Christmas period, and it is also the first Sunday of 'Ordinary Time.

It is very relevant that this transition from Christmas to Ordinary time be marked by the feast of the Baptism of the Lord for by nature baptism is about transition from what has past to what is to come.

Historically, baptism by ritual washings were common religious practices in the first century.

They were external rites of purification.

The baptised sought a new way of life, and at the ritual washing, the old way was washed away down the river and rebirth into the community was affected.

The Jewish community had many different purification rituals, but only one baptismal ritual.

John the baptiser was so named because a purification ritual formed part of his prophetic call.

While he was baptising in Galilee Jesus came to him for baptism. John protests and asks Jesus "why do you come to me", and Jesus' answer effectively says,

"That's what I am here for. To take on the contamination - to be affected by the need, the chaos, the darkness of the world and bring righteousness of life to all."

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan is in all four gospels.

Each gospel writer proclaims the main event of Jesus baptism in a very similar way.

Theologically the baptism of Jesus has been understood using the same imagery portrayed in Genesis when the watery chaos is ordered by God.

When Jesus descends into the water at his baptism, he descends into the chaos.

Ever present is the Spirit overseeing and bringing a newness to birth.

When Jesus comes up out of the water there is no longer chaos, the heavens are opened, the spirit descends upon him, and there is the voice of calling from above revealing his identity,

"You are my son the beloved with whom I am well pleased."

In Jesus' baptism, God is ever present in a very personal way, God resolves and remakes out of chaos.

Jesus baptism, becomes a model for Christian baptism, hence in our own baptism, just as Jesus came up out of the water, receiving the spirit and hearing the voice of the Father, so from age to age for the newly baptised Christian the voice of God says, "You are my son or daughter, (which ever applies), as that individual begins his or her new life in association with Jesus.

As the sacramental ritual of baptism began to take shape over time in the early church, the liturgy developed expresses this reality.

Our baptism is a passage, uniting one with Christ in the life of the Spirit.

Rowan Williams suggests that the church saw it as something of the restoration of what it is to be truly human. That In baptism we recover what God first intended for us – that we should grow in our capacity to love God and each other and be sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters in creation.

Through baptism we become a cell in the mystical body of Christ. The same Spirit that dwells in Jesus, the living and glorified Christ, also dwells in us, so we become living members of the body of Christ, the church.

We are living in a world that rejects love and that affirms selfishness as the ultimate value.

The pressure from society is constantly insinuating itself through our upbringing, education, and culture. Society as a whole is saturated with the non-God.

Living the baptised life as the body of Christ in the world is the opposite of this.

For the gathering of baptised people is not a membership of the privileged, who are somehow separated from the needs of the world.

Living the baptised life speaks into society about the self-giving relational love of the Trinity in which we are baptised and belong, and which is at the heart of the Christian mystery. And this mystery has nothing to do with an intellectual puzzle, but is rather about wonder and awe.

This is what living the baptised life is about - worshipping God in awe and wonder, while at the same time living as Jesus did in the Spirit actively touching, communicating, engaging in the heart of a needy, corrupt and messy but wonderful world.

The Lord be with you.