

# BAPTISM OF JESUS, FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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Today on this Feast day of the Baptism of Jesus, let's consider the events of that day, that is, what happens with Jesus at his baptism, and then what happens with us and to us when God's Holy Spirit fills us for the same purposes, and what that means for a troubled and dangerous world.

O Lord our God, may the Light of your Word shine into the darkness of our world, a world that continues to attempt to cover it up. Amen.

The administration of baptism has taken many forms from its appearance in the bible. Before we talk about baptism in the name of Jesus, we find that the clearest reference to a Jewish baptism is right here in the gospel stories regarding Jesus' baptism. John the baptizer, a Jew and not yet a Christian, is baptizing Jews who haven't yet seen Jesus.

There are two separate instances of this Jewish baptism.

As we look at Mark 1, verse 4, we read that people from all over the countryside of Judea - which included Bethlehem by the way - and Mark tells us clearly that - ALL the people of Jerusalem were going out to John.

What Mark is telling you here is that tens of thousands of people were coming to the Jordan river out of Jerusalem and all over the southern part of the land we would call Israel. Wow. Is this JUST a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? There must have been some electric feel of anticipation in the air, and for what? To me it has the same feel as when, going back to the second Sunday of Advent, the teachers of the law would ask John, Are you the Messiah? But even then, besides this preaching and baptism signaling the coming of the Messiah - which is what was happening - what wilderness itinerant preacher is going to have that kind of immediate draw? Even today?

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In my humble experience, that electric feel and draw is none other than the work of the Holy Spirit saturating the preaching of John. Because, my friends, the THE HOLY SPIRIT Himself was in great anticipation of the beginning of the public ministry of the Messiah. And now here it is, this great moment of revealing, perhaps this unveiling, this epiphany, this shining forth of God's glory through the one named Jesus.

Can you step into that scene, that setting, that environment? You see, baptisms weren't the only thing taking place. And I bet you that the fact that the river Jordan waters were muddy by being stirred up by all those people wading in and out, had no ill effect on anyone. God was present. God was taking place. How strange and exciting. I can imagine the thoughts of some in the crowds, "We have only thought the presence of God's glory to be present in the temple. "

But not so strange for us here in this gathering this morning. We do believe that the Lord is also here with us. So perhaps, thinking again of all those people and the anticipation and expectancy and the hearts seeking God's blessing and forgiveness, you can hear as I do the song being sung,

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place

I can feel his mighty power and his grace

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel.

No wonder all those people were there. The Holy Spirit was working it. And John was doing what he had been tasked to do. That, my friends, is the most powerful of partnerships.

The next Jewish baptism of the Gospel reading was the one Jesus himself submitted to, for the sake of all rightness in God's plan and in accordance with Jesus being the Son of Man, as well as the Son of God. Certainly, Jesus did not receive a washing of repentance, since he had nothing to have to repent for. But it does point to that matter of the relationship that was on display. And it does point out the fact that Jesus was fully human, and would thus immediately and necessarily benefit from that outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

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But in the first aspect, those Jews submitting to baptism did not become any more Jews than they were before by birth and, for the males, circumcision. And Jesus did not become any more fully God than HE was before he submitted to this baptismal washing. But these aspects of this Jewish baptism will prefigure what will be necessary in establishing a relationship with Jesus himself, and God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant. So we pay attention.

By the way, you know that the Book of Common Prayer identifies two methods of Baptism, in this case the manner in how it is administered, by immersion, or by pouring.

The baptism itself is taking place in the river, but then the scripture uses the phrase, “just as he was coming up out of the water”. You will note in ancient Christian art two different understandings. There is the depiction of the Holy Spirit descending with Jesus on the shore, and the depiction of him still in the water, and in some cases with John pouring water over. And so also from our Prayer Book's first inception in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there is the allowance for either immersion or pouring of water for Christian baptism, with immersion being listed as the first option in the rubrics.

And that takes us on then to Christian baptisms, which would be administered first by Jesus' disciples to those not only repenting, but believing in Jesus, that is, who desire that holy relationship with him as the Messiah. It's a new beginning. If we were to read on in the Epistle today we would find Peter momentarily ordering the Baptism of this Gentile house. We read that, having been led by the Holy Spirit to GO somewhere he didn't want to go, he makes a rational change of mind about God's plans, and then lo and behold, the Holy Spirit falls upon these gentiles, that is a baptism in the Holy Spirit, and Peter, overwhelmed, has no other option but to baptize in water these new non-Jewish followers of Christ. Clearly not a Jewish baptism of washing only. But now, a new relationship.

Before going on, let's first round out the description of baptisms in our Christian history and practice. We've had child and infant baptism; there are the non-water baptisms; the baptisms by fire, or by blood. There are the baptisms following a

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lengthy period of study and prayer, called the catechuminate; there are the baptisms administered in the closest body of water as immediate after a conversion to Christ as possible. There are emergency baptisms performed by any baptized person. There are Conditional Baptisms just to make sure in the case of the first never having been recorded or not remembered. There are renewal immersions baptisms, because baptism as an infant or child is just too far away emotionally.

And there are the baptisms we have done with those who haven't REALLY confessed their faith in Jesus Christ, but we're hoping this would be some kind of cart before the horse evangelism.

*The Ol' country Preacher is baptizing down by the river. There's a mom who brings her little boy who's always getting into trouble. She's hoping that if he gets baptized he'll settle down. So the preacher takes the young man's hand and says, "Son, do you believe?" And the boy says, "No, sir!" And so he dunks this little fella once in the name of Jesus and when he comes up gasping for air, the preacher asks him, "Now, do you believe?" And the boy, sputtering, but defiant, says, "No, sir, I don't believe!" So the preacher dunks him again, and holds him down for a slow count on "Father, Son and Holy Ghost". And pulling him up asks, "NOW, son, do you believe?" "Yes, sir! Yes, sir! I believe!" comes the limp answer. "And what do you believe?" asks the preacher. The little boy says, "I believe you're trying to drown me!"*

One of the things I want you to see this morning from this recognition of the Baptism of Jesus is the intimacy. The relationship. Whether it is the baptism of John or in Jesus' baptism for salvation. The Holy Spirit is present in communion. And that we are drawn into it even if by simply wanting to be there ourselves. Make the world go away ----- I just want to be here, with you, in your presence, Lord.

Here in this awesome, stupendous moment of the revelation of the Trinity, not just of Jesus to the World, but of the entire Trinity: Father Son and Holy Spirit.

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In the moment that Jesus rises out of the waters the heavens open, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, and then a voice from heaven speaks, speaking not to Jesus, but to all the people gathered : “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

This moment belongs to God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in an intimate moment of relationship, and proclamation to all witnessing. It’s the kind of relational moment we ALL want to have, of course, not only with God but with our own fathers and mothers, our sons and daughters. and so it becomes even more poignant to us. If there is a modeling here it is this. Perhaps even more so than modeling baptism. This is where the hearts meet. It is another moment of the work of the Spirit making this intimacy of God known.

Here in the presence of God, as so many hymns and songs and spiritual songs have sung.

It’s just that Jesus will not stay here. That presence of the Holy Spirit will anoint him for his public ministry, and then he’s moving.

You know with the world the way it is right now, and saying that in full knowledge of the tragic and dangerous events this past year in our own United States, in Europe, in Asia, in Mexico, in many parts of Africa, and in the US, and in Iraq, and Syria just in the last few days, that I don’t believe the world of Jesus’ time was safer or more stable. Jesus knew that. And he will receive this moment of intimacy at his baptism, he will glory in this moment, and then he will leave that moment and go into that unsafe, unfair world to preach peace, and righteousness and justice and repentance, and that He is the way, the truth and the life, no other.

And he knows that.

But To just come closer, to linger longer, to be wrapped in the cloak of God’s presence and glory? Yes, that is our default human nature, and who will blame us for feeling that way? Let the world go onto its own destruction. But its not to be.

Here is a critical aspect of the Christian life. Dedication and commitment and worship of the Only One Begotten, and then dedication and commitment to carry

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out his work in a world that also desperately needs to come to this moment, and then also share it with the world.

This is the one – hear him. But before his ministry can fully begin – the one who is filled with the Spirit and is affirmed as God’s son shows us that we too need the same.

So then, let us not simply long for one over the other. Let us look for that very relational presence and intimate lingering to carry on with us wherever we go-- and so we see one of the reasons for the Holy Spirit constantly in our lives, overflowing. To remind us and to be with us of the intimacy of God as we carry out his work in a world that may not want us to be there, is not fair, does not provide justice, but still needs to hear what salvation cries.

Our calling first is to repent of our sin, follow Jesus as our Lord and Master, be baptized and following suit, allow for, ask for, seek out the filling of the Holy Spirit so that the epiphany of Jesus is continued to be seen and carried out through us, his disciples.

Let that be you today. As a sign of your intention today to be worshippers of Jesus, and proclaimers of Jesus, seeking His presence in relationship, and his power in ministry in a world desperately in need of coming into the same intimate relationship, I encourage you to stop at the baptismal font today, dip your thumb or forefinger in the blessed holy water and make the sign of the cross on your forehead, In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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