

Sermon St Georges 9th Jan. 2022 - Baptism of our Lord Luke 3:15-22

In the season of EPIPHANY, referring to the 'appearance' or 'manifestation' of Jesus Christ to the world; we look at those **special events in Jesus' life**, where His presence was especially demonstrated with power.

Jesus' baptism is one of those epiphanies.

**** **The reading commences** with the people waiting expectantly. The people's interest was now building, and were all wondering in their hearts, if John might possibly be the Messiah.....

However, JB was quite sure, that he was **ONLY the forerunner – that** (Jesus, the Messiah) was still to come, and with Him, would come judgement.

V.15-17 JB was able to reject the notion that he might be the Messiah on several accounts:

Firstly, the Messiah would be **more powerful**; He would **be worthy** of **far more** reverence, and, have a **larger** ministry.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit would work differently in the Messiah's ministry.

The Holy Spirit is purifying, judging, and has the saving aspect - **that JB did NOT have.**

When John the Baptist emerged from the desert preaching repentance and baptism, the people flocked to the Jordan to be baptized. He was baptizing everyone who would change their ways.

Baptism symbolizes the beginning in you, of something new and hopeful.

v.16 'I baptise you with **WATER** – The water baptism identifies us with the family of God, the Body of Christ, the Church.

.....but one more powerful than I, will baptise you with the **Holy Spirit** and **fire.**'

What is baptism of **fire**?

It **does NOT** refer to 'tongues of fire' at Pentecost.

John's use of the symbol of FIRE in v.9 & 17, indicates that he is talking about judgement.

The following verses make judgement quite clear..

v.17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but He will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire'.

******The winnowing fork** was a great flat wooden shovel; with it the grain was tossed into the air.

The heavy grain fell to the ground - and the chaff was blown away.

And just as the chaff was separated from the grain, so the King would separate the good and bad.

John Baptist reminded them, - in the last judgement, the TRUE believers (wheat) will be gathered by God, while the LOST sinners (the chaff) will be burned in the fire.

John's image of the winnowing fork separating the grain for (storage) from the chaff for (burning) is to highlight THE IMPORTANCE – of **the time** for decision-making; **the time** for responding to the call to repentance; **the time** for choosing a new, RIGHT relationship with God.

The time is at hand. The "harvest" of the faithful starts now, with John's preaching and baptism.

He was preparing the people to meet the Messiah, the Son of God.

Are we prepared today????

When JB speaks in terms of Judgement and the winnowing fork and the fire, to separate the wheat from the chaff, - well, it's not exactly the picture of Jesus that many Western Christians want to hear....

However, **judgement** cannot be ignored - and is a vital **aspect** of biblical truth we are to take seriously. And the gospel message of repentance and baptism, and accepting Jesus as their Saviour, will have eternal life. **That's** the Good News....

(Rev. 20:11-15.) All **un**believers will experience a baptism of JUDGEMENT in the Lake of Fire.

John is **not** the messiah - but he is **not** a mere inconspicuous voice in the wilderness either.

His words and his baptism put all who hear and respond - on the way to the Messiah, and His judgment.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Let us go to Calvary to learn how we may be forgiven. And then let us linger there, to learn how to forgive."

Forgiveness is our acceptance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, seeking a changed life, seeking something new, and hopeful.

****I had a very serious discussion with a young man in one of the prisons I attend as a chaplain.

He was wanting to talk. He was extremely thin, and extremely anxious.

He was seeing his life as a shipwreck of disgrace....

He told me he was tired of feeding his drug habit by carrying out robberies, and stealing cars etc. He felt great remorse.....

He said, people worked hard for the things I stole from them.

His eyes were starting to glaze, and he looked around nervously to see if anyone was watching, saying tears are a sign of weakness in this place.

We sat and talked. It was a time for this young man to reflect on his past, to seek forgiveness, and to pray.

What happens when we pray? **The heaven opens. And the Holy Spirit descends.....**

It was a time for me to respectfully listen to his story, showing **God's unconditional, non-judgemental** – love.

The Bible tells us - 'The way of transgressors is hard' . (Prov. 13:15).

Forgiveness is setting the prisoner free...and the prisoner is not only those behind the wire, it is you, and me!

****THE BIBLE SAYS: Baptism is a sign of our relationship with Christ (Galatians 3:26-38).

God is **mighty to save**, and has come to rescue his people as he promised long ago, sending a Saviour, His Son Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

The promise holds for us today. Whatever trouble we may be in, whatever enemies we may be facing in our lives, God is coming to **save His people**, and we can be at peace.

And as for John the Baptist. He's there in every account of the story; out there in the desert, standing waist-deep in the River Jordan, baptising and preaching repentance - pointing the way to Bethlehem.

John the Baptist calls upon us to take our sinning seriously. Why? Because God does?

Repentance is not just changing our minds, or feeling sorry for something that we have done, or even making bold New Year Resolutions not to ever participate in certain behaviours again.

Instead, repentance means to take action – to turn around and go in another direction.

What John the Baptist wanted his audience to hear was: Turn your life toward the One called the Messiah. And in doing so, it breaks the chains of oppression and death, that hold you back.

****A SAVIOUR IS COMING!!!!

******And now in our reading - Jesus steps forward to be baptized.**

Q. Why would the sinless Jesus be baptized?

A. Jesus was there to provide the fullness of salvation John preached. He came to identify with the new gospel of salvation for all people -- Jew and Gentile.

He is the One who will separate the wheat from the chaff.

The One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

****Jesus Christ is the new beginning... **He is salvation.**

Look carefully at what happened: "**heaven opened**," which was a **signal** from God, of the launching of a new beginning.

The Holy Spirit is the **anointing** for public ministry. The coming of the Holy Spirit is to empower the servant for his/her task.

God will equip His people, and empowers them for the calling made upon them....

Jesus' baptism was a sign of **acceptance** of the love and salvation of Christ –

It is still the same for you and me.

When we look at things from God's perspective, we get a whole new outlook on life.

The love of God's Son, is reaching out to you this day, and every day.....

V.21-23 ²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too, and as He was praying, **heaven opened** ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form **like a dove.**

And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love – pride of my life." (Msge.)

**** In all four gospels, the Spirit descends **LIKE a dove** as a metaphor for the Spirit - It is a beautiful metaphor – picturing a dove descending and landing - is a picture of grace.

A dove is gentle and quiet. **And that's the point** being made here.

The Holy Spirit comes to Jesus gently, quietly, and in Luke's version – **privately**.

That is the way the Holy Spirit will enter into our lives.

That is the way the scene is often portrayed in religious art form; especially paintings out of the Middle Ages, - we see Jesus standing waist deep in the Jordan, with JB beside Him – pointing at Jesus **as if to say** –

'This is the One? **Or**, as the gospel says 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world'..... with the symbol of the Holy Spirit, as He hovers above Jesus' head.

For Jesus, baptism was a means to **identify Himself** with sinners, in order that **they** (you and me) might **identify with Jesus, in His** life (Isa. 53:9).

v.22 The events at Jesus' baptism, represent one of the Bible's clearest pictures of the Trinity, with the entire Godhead present.

The Son of God stood in the Jordan River, identifying Himself with the sinful human race.

The Father spoke FROM HEAVEN (You are My **Son**) - (and **the Holy Spirit**), anointing **the Son** for His coming ministry.

The Epiphany, this special presence of God in this event, came to Jesus – when He was **praying**.

This was a PERSONAL AND PRIVATE EXPERIENCE...

Only Dr Luke **emphasis** that Jesus PRAYED at His baptism.

****Baptism is the symbol of a new life.

Most of us, following the example of our Lord, **have already** taken that step of faith and commitment, and have been baptised.....

****Today we are two weeks removed from the beginning of a new year.

This can also be a time for a new beginning for us in 2022.

Let us begin this **new year in prayer**, following Jesus' example; seeking infilling of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and discover anew - that we are indeed, children of God. **Amen.....**