

Baptism of Christ Mark 1:4-11 Acts 19:1-7 - 11 Jan 2015

Today we celebrate the baptism of Christ and in our readings we have two things:

1. Jesus appearing at the river Jordan being baptised by his cousin John the Baptist and
2. the whole nature of the baptism that Jesus brings: as John says "He will baptise you in the Holy Spirit"

Now in Greek there is a word *bapto* which means to dip or immerse something or someone into water or into some studies but the word used here is *baptiso* is more emphatic and means to plunge or drench.

"I have plunged you into water, but he will drench you with the Holy Spirit". Matthew and Luke add "and with fire". "You will be drenched with the Holy Spirit and with fire"

Water has coursed through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation surfacing again and again as a sign of God's provision, God's blessing of his people and of his Spirit

Both the Greek *pneuma* and Hebrew *Ruach* words for Spirit also mean breath or Spirit. Water, wind and fire. We are to be drenched into the very Breath and Spirit of God to be carried forward by the wind of his Spirit and fired up in our daily lives.

Now I wonder what you have been immersed in over the last few weeks. Shopping, Christmas preparations, food, worries of life pressing upon us. I have been somewhat immersed into the worries of the bishop's sleepover next Saturday night and other projects this year, having sleepless nights whilst listening to Anne sleeping soundly. We can yearn to be immersed and drenched in the very Spirit of God but be overcome by the worries of life.

Last week was Epiphany Sunday the Sunday which celebrates the season of the revealing of Christ to the whole world and we join in with the magi coming to worship before Jesus at Bethlehem. That's a wonderful picture and we can imagine ourselves there in worship.

This week we are not just pilgrims in worship at the scene of the Holy child in the nativity; we are lifted up and plunged into the very Spirit, heart and life of God. It rather reminds me of the scene in Mary Poppins where the children are standing and looking at one of Burt's pictures on the pavement and then they are picked up and plunged into it.

We are baptised into the Spirit and Life of Christ at our baptism but Paul tells us in a later letter he wrote to the Ephesians "Go on being filled with the Holy Spirit". Go on being drenched with the Holy Spirit.

We want that desire that in the midst of our weaknesses and the challenges of life we may yet know the presence and breath of God in our daily lives. That can seem most difficult in our own home lives

There was a family returning from the baptism of their youngest child and the older brother was crying all the way home. The father asked finally what was wrong. The boy responded, the priest said that baptised children have to be brought up in a Christian home; but I don't want that, I want to stay with you.

John the Baptist was a widely known prophet and preacher drawing people to seek forgiveness for their past lives and turn around onto a new path. He chose the River Jordan where the Israelites had passed through with Joshua and the arc of the covenant into the promised land; where Elijah had ministered and also parted the waters with his cloak, a cloak of camel's hair before being taken up

into heaven; Elisha had told the leprous Syrian Naaman to wash in the Jordan 7 times and be cleansed.

Everyone had been drawn to the holy city of Zion to meet God but here they are flooding out into the desert to John the Baptist to set their paths straight in preparation for the coming anointed one of God. The one who had God's Spirit poured out upon him.

In our reading from Acts we have Paul in his 2nd visit to Ephesus meeting a group of 12 people. Luke calls them disciples, but it seems that they are disciples of John the Baptist who know that they have to come to believe in the one who is to come. Paul tells them of Jesus and the Holy Spirit and they want to be baptised into Christ. Paul baptises them, lays hands on them and the Holy Spirit drenches them in a spectacular way and they proclaimed and sang the praises of God. Paul was at the start of two years of ministry at Ephesus and the surrounding province. Ephesus was a centre of money trade and power: social and civic power and religious and spiritual power. Paul has a real challenge. He is aiming to turn the centre of great power upside down. We have that challenge and aim to be turning the world upside down, turning it around to face God's love. But here at the start of Jesus' ministry time is set aside to seek the Blessing and baptism of the Holy Spirit

So in our Gospel reading the dramatic language continues. That unknown from Galilee, Jesus comes all the way down to the area of the Southern Jordan valley, is plunged into the Jordan by John and as he was coming out he saw the heavens torn open and the Spirit descended on him like a dove. Jesus yielding to the waters of the Jordan is that expression of desire to join in with the flow of God's Spirit and his purposes. That is our prayer that in our gatherings' services and church life Lord tear open the heavens and come down

and that desire to hear God speak into our hearts, you are my beloved child; I am well pleased with you.

The artist Jan Richardson tells of a lady called Favette who struggled with mental illness and other afflictions. She arrived at a church group and wanted to be baptised and was captivated by the idea of being God's child God's beloved. At her baptism she danced with joy being thrilled to be God's beloved. Two months later she ended up in hospital having been dreadfully assaulted in the street. When church people came to see her they found her totally dishevelled, dirty, torn and bleeding but saying "I am a beloved precious child of God." That image, those words spoken over her, had carried her through the depths and on to serve her God. "You are my beloved" Jesus at the start of his ministry; so much to do in 3 years, so much to plan, so much to endure – his disciples saying – you want to do what? Here we are at the start of a New Year with much that we would yearn might happen in our lives as individuals, families and as a church but our focus before all that is to start with God's anointing on us.

Many medieval artists picture the river Jordan, that river of life rising up to meet Christ in his baptism. And that is a great picture of us as we seek God that drenching in his Spirit, the River of the Spirit rises up to greet us.

We pray that we may be drenched in God's Spirit drenched in the Baptism that Christ brings of his Spirit that we may be open to bring his fire into his world, hearing his calling us "my beloved" drawn to serve his beloved out there in the world.