

The Christian year moves quickly, doesn't it? Beginning with Advent, we travel a journey reflecting on the Incarnation, God with us in the birth of the baby, Jesus. We then move into Epiphany, as the identity of Jesus the Christ is revealed to various people in the gospels, notably as we heard last week, to the wise men who worshiped the child. Suddenly, the scripture fast-forwards us to our reading today. Jesus is around 30 years old, and we are spectators at his baptism.

And the Baptism of Christ is placed within the season of Epiphany, because it falls into the category of manifestation or revelation, what 'epiphany' means. The description of the baptism here in Luke's gospel is brief, but a fundamental element in Matthew, Mark and Luke's re-telling is that all three members of the Trinity show up at this event: Jesus, the Son of God in human flesh presents himself for baptism. God the Father is present in voice, declaring love for the Son. God the Holy Spirit is present in bodily form like a dove, descending upon Jesus, anointing him and empowering him to kick-start his public ministry.

Jesus submits to being baptised by John, which in Matthew's gospel we're told was a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.' John the Baptist's mission was to call a sinful and self-righteous people to return to God before the coming judgment. But Jesus wasn't a sinner – he didn't need to repent. Yet Jesus still presented himself for baptism. The word "Baptism" is a transliteration of the Greek word **BAPTIZO** which means *to immerse* – and by this immersion to effect a permanent change.

One of the purposes of the baptism of Christ was to mark his immersion or his identification with his people. By this act, Jesus immersed himself in the human condition – it was a sign of his willingness to take on the burdens that we have of life in the flesh. St Paul says, in 2 Cor 5:21, 'God made the One who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' Because of this, Jesus is able to remove the barrier between humanity and God.

The baptism of Christ was also a sign of his willingness to do the Father's will. In his baptism, Jesus identified himself with the Father's will to redeem humanity – to break down the wall that exists between people and God due to sin. No one else will ever undergo the same kind of baptism that Christ went through - his baptism was unique in this way. The baptism of Christ symbolises his mission to die on the cross for the sins of the whole world, and to be raised from the dead in victory over both sin and death.

So if Christ's baptism was unique, what does our baptism mean? Our baptism symbolises our immersion or identification with Christ. In Romans 6:3-4, Paul says:

'All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.'

At our baptism, we're publicly stating that we accept Jesus and what he's done for us (or in the case of infant baptism, the parents and Godparents are accepting this on our behalf). We may not understand it all fully, but we choose to have faith in the redemption of our souls to God through Jesus Christ.

Christian baptism identifies us with Jesus Christ in his death, his burial and his resurrection. It's an acknowledgment of our faith and trust in Christ, and we make some serious promises to God. We die to our old way of life and rise to a new way of living. We accept our commission into his service. Our life's purpose becomes about serving Jesus, rather than serving our selves. That doesn't necessarily mean everything we do changes, but it means that the reason or purpose for what we do changes.

And our baptism also identifies us with Jesus Christ in his 'sonship' – not that we are sons of God in the same way that Jesus is, but as it says in John's gospel, chapter 1, *'Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.'* God created us for a purpose – to live in loving relationship with him, in joy, peace, holiness and justice – this is how we become children of God. It's a new life and this new life begins when we say 'yes' to Jesus in faith – to the invitation he gives us to participate in the mission of God.

Our baptism is an acceptance of our identity as beloved children of God and an acknowledgment of our solidarity with the mission of God in Christ. What might this look like? We know the greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbour. We know we're not only to believe in Jesus, but also to follow him – making an impact in the world through compassionate, sacrificial service.

Every generation and every parish context presents different opportunities to serve. Here at Grace, we want to offer a genuine, caring, loving and beloved community to those who come looking to experience God among us. There are various ministries to get involved in, according to your talents and sense of calling – the choir, visiting the sick, the altar guild, Eucharistic ministry, hospitality, the vestry – among other opportunities to serve the church. There are also outreach activities – ways in which we can serve the community: giving school supplies and coats to Fairview Elementary; participating in the Health and Wellness Fair with the city of Fairfield; the annual Yountville BBQ. We have begun the process of entering into the city's "Adopt-a-Street" program, whereby we will be trained and provided with everything we need to keep one of our local streets tidy – the vestry and I have agreed that the street we want to 'adopt' is First Street. When I called the city to start this process, the organiser told me that a small portion of First Street has already been adopted – by a lady in her 90's who lives in the street!!! What an amazing, caring person – I'm looking forward to meeting her and working with her in our local community, and who knows – maybe we will get other neighbors involved!

The other day, Gregg sent me an article about how many Christians are quitting the church as they don't see the church's ministry as relevant to the concerns and the needs of the world. The article refers to these people as the "dones" – they're done with being affiliated with an irrelevant church. Well folks, we aren't meant to be irrelevant! Through our baptismal covenant we're meant to move out in applicable ministries, serving God and serving our neighbour.

Jesus has walked the way before us; he is alongside us and within us. May we move forward trusting in the knowledge that we are beloved by our creator God, anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to live out our faith with relevance and hope in the future. Amen.