

Matthew 3v13-17 - What is Baptism?

Sometimes there is more going on in an event than we realise from our observations. Things look simple but there's a much deeper significance. **Take a man who bends down and hands something to a lady, it could be he's just picking something up she's dropped or it could be that he is making a life changing proposal. Knowing which matters. Or sometimes it's the opposite; social media in South Yorkshire was abuzz last week trying to find out who the visiting VIP being driven round in a black limo with a police escort was. Until South Yorkshire police revealed that there was no VIP and it was just protection duty training.**

Sometimes in order to understand what we see we need to understand what we can't see to know how significant the event is. As Brad, Kerry, Verity and Joel get baptised this morning. There is an observable event. They will go down into the water, answer three questions about what they believe, go under the water and then come up out of the water. Baptism is that simple. But it is an outward sign of something much more significant.

I want to take a few minutes to think about that. What is baptism? Why get baptised? And what is this saying about them? We're going to do so by looking at Jesus baptism in **Matthew 3v13-17**.

Matthew was a follower of Jesus. A former tax collector who left everything he had in order to follow Jesus. And Matthew's gospel is his account of what he and others saw as eyewitnesses of Jesus life. Matthew writes so we can see who Jesus was.

In **Ch3v1-12** we meet John the Baptist. A messenger from God with an unusual fashion sense and favourite meal(4). As he preaches he causes a stir among the people. Jews flock to him and repent at his message – confessing that they have lived life rejecting God even though they were supposedly God's people. They repent – that means they change who they are living for, the direction they are going, it stops going away from God and instead they start moving towards God. That helpfully tells us baptism isn't a family thing. It's not that you are born into a family who go to church and then at a certain age you get baptised. Baptism is about confessing, repenting, and changing no matter your upbringing. Some of those getting baptised this morning have been brought up in believing homes, but that is not why they are being baptised.

John has specifically come to get people ready for someone else's coming. He's a herald, going through the streets and cities and wilderness declaring that someone really special is coming. Someone who the Bible promised was coming for hundreds of years. Someone powerful (11-12) with God's authority and full of the Holy Spirit. The Lord come to purify a people for himself.

(13) Begins **“Then Jesus came...”** Here he is. This long promised one, the one John's been waiting for, getting people ready for. But he looks ordinary, he doesn't stand out in the crowd, there's no halo, the water doesn't part, a choir of angels doesn't sing, there's no fanfare of trumpets, he doesn't even have a T-shirt with a slogan on. He looks like just another face in the crowd. But both John and Matthew know there is so much more to Jesus and as his baptism unfolds Matthew records it.

Jesus is the obedient Son of God

The first thing we see is a surprise. Jesus comes to be baptised and what is John's reaction? **"John tried to deter him..."** John tries to stop him. Why? **"I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?"** John doesn't think he is worthy to lace Jesus trainers let alone baptise him. He is Lord and Messiah, John is his messenger, his get ready guy.

But also baptism was a sign of confession of sin and repentance. An admission that you'd lived life your own way and Jesus simply hadn't. Jesus had always perfectly obeyed God the Father, he had no sin to confess or repent of so why would he need baptising? (15) Jesus answers **"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness."** Jesus isn't baptised because he has sinned but as a sign of his obedience to his Father. And it is proper for John to do it because it helps prepare the way for Jesus ministry.

John agrees and Jesus is baptised. Jesus is the Son who delights his Father, something God speaks to confirm in (17). And this is just the start, this is a sign of his willingness to do everything he and his Father have planned for all eternity.

The obedient Son is also the suffering servant

Jesus obedience isn't momentary. He has come to completely fulfil the Father's will, and the Father in turn delights in Jesus (16-17). As Jesus comes up out of the water the Holy Spirit descends on him and God speaks **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** Jesus comes on a mission and God's words echo that mission from **Isaiah 42v1**. This servant figure promised in Isaiah God would delight in and put his Spirit on. And Isaiah goes on to tell us what he would do, what his mission was. He would bring justice and his teaching will bring hope to the world, he will open blind eyes, free prisoners, release those in darkness.

That's a pretty big mission. As Jesus is baptised God confirms here is the one I delight in and put my Spirit on. Jesus is my Son and the servant; come to bring freedom, release, justice and hope to the world. But the question is how?

There is a clue in Jesus name. Jesus name isn't Mary and Joseph's decision. They didn't thumb through baby name books, or name him after a favourite Uncle, TV character or Bethlehem FC's star striker. The angel tells them to name him Jesus **"because he will save his people from their sins."** That is how Jesus will bring freedom, release, justice and hope to the world. Because the Bible accurately diagnoses what is wrong with the world – sin. Life lived saying Shove off God, I'm in charge, No to you and your ways. That is what is behind every injustice we see and experience, from the terrorist attack and the horror of war to the selfish action or cutting put down.

At his baptism Jesus is reaffirming that he has come to fulfil the plan of God Father, Son and Spirit to save the world from sin. How does he do it? Well not the way we would. The servant figure appears again in Isaiah as a suffering servant, pierced for our transgressions, his life an offering for sin to bear the sin of many.

Jesus is God the Son obedient to his Father committed to saving his people by becoming the suffering servant and bearing our sin.

Jesus identifies with us so we can identify with him.

Jesus is God the Son made man; born in shame into a low income family, learning a trade and with the splinters and callouses to prove it. Experiencing thirst and hunger, grief and joy, friendship and loneliness, laughter and tears, love and hatred. God with us, alongside us, identifying with us without divine diplomatic immunity or an angelic get of suffering or temptation free card. Jesus identifies with us so he can represent us if we choose to identify with him.

Three years after his baptism, Jesus, God the Son in whom the Father delights full of the Spirit is betrayed, arrested, falsely convicted, condemned and cruelly crucified. Why? Not for any wrong he has done, even at his trial Pilate declares him just as innocent as the Father does here. Yet on the cross he bears the punishment we deserve for our sin, for our rejecting God and yet cries out **“Father forgive”**. He hangs there as our representative.

He takes our stained, failed, record and pays for it and if we identify with him we are credited with his perfect sonship. He dies our death and gives us his life. He pays for our rejecting God and we are given the benefits of his perfect relationship with God. He is cut off we are adopted.

Jesus identifies with us so we can identify with him.

Each of those being baptised has come to realise and believe in Jesus for themselves. That he is God the Son come to be their representative as he goes to the cross, dying for their sin, taking their punishment. And as they have confessed their sin and rejection of God and repented and asked Jesus to be their Lord and Saviour they are cleansed from their sin, credited with his perfect record, filled with the Spirit and adopted as God’s children.

As they are baptised they are identifying outwardly with an identification that has already happened inwardly. They are showing that they cannot perfectly obey God but Jesus does so in their place, that they deserve punishment but Jesus bore it for them, and that they want to live life for Jesus. Not perfect but forgiven, not immune to suffering and struggle but facing it confident in God’s Fatherly love and care. Not sinless but cleansed and Spirit filled and striving to follow where Jesus leads and live how he lived more closely day by day. Not living for themselves but alive in Christ.

Who do you say Jesus is? This morning their baptisms declare Jesus is alive, he forgives and makes right with God and invites you to come to him for forgiveness and cleansing and welcome.

Baptism becomes the norm for believers. Jesus disciples do it, and Jesus mission as he passes it on to his followers is to make disciples and baptise them. Maybe you are here this morning and you too trust Jesus but haven’t yet been baptised. What is stopping you?

Perhaps you’re here and its years since you were baptised. Here is a reminder of all Jesus is and all that he does for us his grateful people.