

Bennochy church: 12th January 2020

For about 30 years, Jesus had been a nobody. In the gospel stories it's as if, someone has hit the pause button. There is total and utter silence. In the obscurity of Galilee, he is just another carpenter's son. Hidden away and incarnated in the midst of his people. What a secret for Mary and Joseph to keep. Were they dying to share who their son really was? Would anyone have believed them? As time went on, did they ever lose faith in the promises of God, about their son, 'Emmanuel'. "God with us". What I was wondering was much more mundane, was Jesus any good with wood? How good a carpenter was he?

Bethlehem seems so long ago. Remember all the fuss just a few weeks back? Well now, suddenly, Jesus bursts back onto the scene. John is baptising people and Jesus comes to him for baptism at the river Jordan. John doesn't allude to Magi following stars or shepherds hearing angels or signs saying, 'no room at the inn'. He doesn't say, *'are you not that child of Bethlehem?'*

It is interesting to ponder, who did John think Jesus was? What had he heard from his mother, Elizabeth about his birth? What John says is this, 'you come to me for baptism. You should be baptising me'. There is a recognition, here is a man greater than I, and he tries to get Jesus to change his mind. 'Fair enough', says Jesus, 'but for the moment, let's just do it my way, because that is what God requires'. So, John agrees.

That little dialogue is filled to the brim with theology. Theology about who Jesus is. What baptism is all about and how what is about to happen, is all part and parcel of what God requires. There is a lot going on here.

So what has John been up to. Remember Jesus and John are cousins, sharing the same kind of birth story. He had been hanging about in the desert and now he is baptising people. The Jewish people already had a purification ritual of immersing in water, which was required for, among other things, converting to Judaism. So this form of baptism, was not new. It was not invented by John. And John quite clear about what he is doing. He says to the crowds, this baptism, is about 'repentance'. Repent means 'to turn away'. He is saying the people, turn away from your sins, so you can be baptised. I don't know what inspired this mass confession and baptism, but it has attracted Jesus to the river's edge ?

We need to make one thing absolutely clear, this baptism of John is not the same as the baptism of Jesus. This is what Paul says at the beginning of Acts 19;

"The first thing he said was, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? Did you take God into your mind only, or did you also embrace him with your heart? Did he get inside you?"

"We've never even heard of that—a Holy Spirit? God within us?"

³"How were you baptized, then?" asked Paul.

"In John's baptism."

⁴"That explains it," said Paul. "John preached a baptism of radical life-change so that people would be ready to receive the One coming after him, who turned out to be Jesus. If you've been baptized in John's baptism, you're ready now for the real thing, for Jesus.""

Jesus in accepting the baptism of John, not only makes links with the deep history of his people; he is one with them, but initiates a new beginning. Something fundamental has changed here. He would do it again, as the ancient act of the Passover meal, in the upper room in Jerusalem, is transformed. "*This my body*".

I believe at his baptism, his calling by God is made clear. This is the moment, not in his birth, this is the moment when Jesus identity is confirmed, to himself. "*This is my own dear son, with whom I am pleased.*" Once again, Matthew grounds his story in the ancient scriptures of Israel.

"I will announce," says the king, "what the LORD has declared. He said to me: 'You are my son; today I have become your father.'" (Psalm 2:7)

I think, it is because of this moment of revelation, that Jesus knew, deep down, that he had to be baptised. Did he know what was about to happen? I am not sure. There is no doubt that something special is happening. The prophecy of John's words; he said in verse 11,

"I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. The real action comes next: The main character in this drama—compared to him I'm a mere stagehand—will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out." (Matthew 3: 11, Message)

these words, and the voice of God come together, to confirm who Jesus is.

We have met the dove before. As the world was about to be recreated after the great flood, it was the dove who returned with a sign of new life. In this water story, the Kingdom of God is bursting onto the world stage. Jesus is the spirit bearer, who will bring new life. I wonder if it is too much to say, that the baptism of Jesus changed the world?

Should it not make us think? What is it that God requires of us? Are we to immerse ourselves into deep waters, wondering what will happen next? And when did we last heard the call of God upon our lives, and in that moment, know who we are, in the presence of God. Amen.