

**Bromley Baptist Church - SUNDAY BREAK - MAY 4<sup>th</sup> - BAPTISM (1) - FOLLOWING JESUS**  
**Matthew 3 v 1-17**

A sacrament - Dictionary – ‘Outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace’.

Historically Baptists aren't great with symbols and visual images, although things are changing, but in baptism and communion we have the two most powerful Christian images imaginable.

This week focusing on **following Jesus in baptism**.

The first ana-baptists got their name because they re-baptised adults and frequently risked everything to practice their faith as they chose. Opposition came from both Protestants and Catholics. Two were burned at the stake in London. One website described them as ‘the lunatic wing’ of the Reformation. We might not agree with everything they said but they believed in Biblical authority, freedom of conscience, equality, freewill, separation of church and state, pacifism and holiness.

For ana-baptists the point was not specifically *immersion*, but the individual decision about faith. **It was not something to be done to you or for you.**

### **Reading - Matthew 3.**

Jesus comes to John and asks him to baptise him. John tried to put him off. John feels he's not fit to tie Jesus' sandal and here he is asking to be baptised! But Jesus insists and so John baptised him. If baptism is for us a sign of commitment to Jesus, what did it mean for Jesus?

After each of the following points think about God's message for us *and our response*.

**1. It was to fulfil all righteousness.** The words of God as the Holy Spirit descended show that Jesus was both consecrated to and approved by God. God's righteous requirements for the Messiah were all met in this one man.

John must have felt as if he was at the heart of a cosmic upheaval.

The Father, the Son and the Spirit all have a role to play. The Godhead is seen and heard.

John physically baptised the Son of God. Then as they came up from the water the voice of God is heard and the Holy Spirit appears. Nowhere else in the NT where this happens in this way.

Then the OT setting of what was happening in the bigger story of God's relationship with the world.

Isaiah 42 describes the Servant of the Lord and begins with these words.

*'Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.'*

**Jesus was the fulfilment of all that had gone before.**

The prophets, priests and kings had played their part, but now God had come himself. This was the pivotal moment the hinge between the old and what was to come. See Hebrews 1:1-2.

It can be hard to hit the balance between Jesus' humanity and his divinity.

If we lean one way we lose the awareness of him as a man who experienced our life, we can feel that it all just washed over him.

If we lean the other, he becomes merely a good man who was chosen by God.

Here Jesus undergoes a human experience and in the process demonstrates his divinity.

### **Message and Response.**

I guess '**Wow**' would be a pretty good response.

Baptism isn't just a rite of initiation or a funny thing Baptists do. In baptism we are identifying ourselves with this amazing God. We are becoming part of his huge plan for humanity. We're saying that we believe that Jesus wasn't just a good person, that he is God, God as man living among us.

Just as when Jesus was baptised the Spirit appeared so when we baptise someone we lay hands on them and pray that the Holy Spirit will transform their lives as well.

Following baptism some people go through really hard times. So did Jesus!

### **2. Commitment**

John was announcing that the Messiah had arrived; here he publicly proclaims the start of his ministry. Up till this point Jesus had lived at home, the eldest son in the family. He had a trade, ran the business, went to synagogue, had friends, enjoyed parties. In one act all that was changed. There was no way back, *he was committed*. How much did he know of what was to come? This golden moment of affirmation didn't last long because immediately Jesus was led into the desert to be tempted, and his ministry began. Everything he did took only 3 years. Some of us take 3 years just to get started!

### **Message and Response.**

When we were baptised we were called to a life of service, to a *ministry* - a ministry to our family, to our work place, to our street. Our ministry may have changed but our calling hasn't. We may have been serving for far more than 3 years but God has no retirement plan!

What's our response? Perhaps just to offer to God again what we offered him at our baptism, our lives for him to use. Perhaps to ask him for the first time to show us what our ministry is, or perhaps to ask him to put us back on track because we've lost our way.

### **3. Identification with us and our sin and failure.**

2 Cor 5:21 reminds that God made Jesus who was without sin to be sin for us. So Jesus baptism wasn't a mark of repentance or cleansing but an identification with us and our sin and failure.

Why would anyone do that? Why should God, who had at his command all the hosts of heaven would he choose to save a sinful, perverse people by coming to live with them? – **Just love!**

I think John was also overwhelmed by this thought when he wrote how great is the love the Father has lavished upon us that we should be called children of God.

### **Message and Response.**

If Jesus was willing to get his hands dirty for us we should be willing to get our hands dirty for others. It's easy to look at the world and see so much that is wrong, upsetting, disturbing that we want to stay as far away as possible. What a good thing God didn't look at us and think that way. Is there somewhere we need to be, someone we need to be Jesus to?

### **4. An example to his followers**

This was a 'do as I do' moment. If they knew that Jesus had been baptised there was no excuse for them, or us come to that, to try and avoid it.

Steve Gaukroger's book '*Being Baptised.*' He lists some of the reasons people have for not being baptised. Then says 'however none of these reasons carries much weight when compared with the reasons why we **should** be baptised.'

Then gives those reasons. They are

- It's a biblical command.
- The witness of the New Testament where there are no un-baptised believers.
- The example of Jesus.
- The need for obedience to the Lordship of God.

What is God saying to the converted and (mostly) baptised and **how might we respond?**

If we have been baptised perhaps it would be good to remember that, thank God for the way he's brought us and ask him to remind of us of the relationship we had with him then.

Maybe it's a relationship we want to get back to, to experience again the joy, wonder, excitement.

Maybe you've been a Christian for years but never been baptised. What response do you make?

Maybe you know that you've never really made a commitment to God. Well there's no better time than now to do that.

It seems like such an odd way to acknowledge the place of God in our lives, why not something less messy, less embarrassing, less public.

Want to end where we started with the idea that a sacrament is *an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace*. If we've experienced the grace of God in our lives how wonderful that the outward demonstration should be something as glorious, subversive and radical as baptism.

### **Questions for reflection and discussion.**

1. Share your own experience of baptism and what it meant to you. What prompted you to be baptised?
2. If baptism is *for us* a sign of commitment to Jesus, *what did it mean for Jesus?*
3. Where, in this chapter, do we observe the Triune God revealed to us – Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
4. What might God do in you in 3 years? What might you accomplish in 3 years?
5. What is your present ministry?
6. Why do Christians not get baptised?
7. What does it mean to live out our baptism today?
8. Does Baptism mean life is a '*doddle*' thereafter?
9. Pretend you're writing a letter to someone who has just been baptised. What do you feel it's important to include? (For this discussion it doesn't matter how long the letter is!)
10. Is someone who is baptised a better Christian than someone who isn't?
11. Does being baptised help our salvation?
12. How have you moved on since baptism? What have you moved away from? Is there anything you have regretted losing? What might God want you to regain?