

Luke 3: 15-22 The Baptism of Jesus with Acts 8: 14-17 12th Jan 2025

Prayer: Lord may your Holy Spirit rest on us, speak to and inspire us as we look at your word this day. Amen.

Can anyone here remember their baptism?

I imagine that many of you were a little young to remember?

Was anyone baptised as an older child or adult?

Was it important to you?

Is it important to you that you were baptised even if you can't remember it?

As Christians we regard baptism as an important symbol of faith, of choosing to commit oneself to follow Jesus, to be adopted into the family of God, to be forgiven, cleansed and to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We can wonder why Jesus needed to be baptised since he had nothing to repent of, and indeed he was already firmly in God's family being his one and only son!

And yet Jesus baptism was very important. One reason we can identify its importance is the fact that it is recorded in all four of the gospels.

They are similar but there are some minor differences in Luke's version.

I wonder is there anything you noted as you listened to the reading? Any questions you might have had?

Perhaps we should look at the similarities first that corroborate the story of Jesus' baptism.

They all place the event after introducing the ministry of John the Baptist who was calling people to repentance and baptizing people in the river Jordan.

They all say that when Jesus was baptised 'heaven opened or was torn apart, and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove'.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all report that a voice came from heaven saying "you are my son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." These words are almost identical in each of those 3 gospels.

There are lots of similarities in the 4 accounts, but I did find a couple of unique points in Luke's version.

I wonder if you spotted and queried the fact that just before the account of Jesus' baptism, we read that John the Baptist had been locked up in prison for rebuking King Herod for his adultery and other evil things. The other gospels mention this in much later chapters.

Why does Luke put it here, and if you are just reading without having read the other accounts you might query that if John the Baptist is in prison, then who baptised Jesus?

Luke just writes that *when all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too.*

No mention of John here, but we can safely assume that John was the one doing the baptising as confirmed in the other three gospels.

Possibly Luke wanted to emphasize in his account, just like John himself, that the gospel is all about Jesus and once John had 'prepared the way', the focus was to shift to Jesus. John the Baptist himself says in John's gospel that *Jesus must become greater, I must become less.* It's almost like Luke makes sure that we are not going to be captivated by this enigmatic figure of John now that Jesus was on the scene.

At the same time, the mention of John being imprisoned at this point can also foreshadow the opposition and suffering that Jesus will face from the authorities as he goes on to speak the truth and challenge the hypocritical leaders.

Luke's account really points to Jesus identifying with the people as he joined everyone who was being baptised. As I said earlier, we might wonder why Jesus got baptised...

There are possibly a few reasons. Firstly, Jesus is an example for us. He acknowledged that John's preaching of repentance was a valid standard to be followed.

Also, John's baptism was a signal of preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of God. Jesus was signaling his own readiness to do the work of the Kingdom. You could see it as a commissioning. This is his first public appearance and after a time of testing he goes on to begin his ministry in the power of the Spirit.

Most importantly, in being baptised, along with all the other people, Jesus was humbly identifying with humanity. Jesus, the creator of the world, the King of Kings, was identifying with us. While he had no sins to repent, he was preparing to bear all our sins and the sins of the whole world. Later he would go to the cross taking our sins with him. Isaiah 53 says it like this; *He poured out himself to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he himself bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors.*

We then come to another small difference in Luke's account of Jesus' baptism. Matthew and Mark say that it was when Jesus was coming up out of the water that they saw the Holy Spirit descend on him. Luke doesn't mention this, he says it was while Jesus was *praying*.

Prayer is important for Luke, who frequently portrays Jesus at prayer through his gospel, and then in Acts he portrays the church, the people of God at prayer. Prayer is vital in our relationship with God. We pray and ask God to fill us with his Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit was seen in the form of a dove descending upon him as heaven was opened.

Through Jesus the Kingdom of God was breaking upon the earth, God himself had come to be with his people. At his baptism God introduces Jesus as his Son, in whom he is well pleased.

Luke's description of the baptism is brief, but he doesn't skip the part regarding the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also very key in Luke's gospel. The angel told Zechariah that John the Baptist 'will be filled with the Holy Spirit'. He talks about the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary as she conceives God's son, Elizabeth is "filled with the Holy Spirit" as she sings Mary's praises and so on...

As Luke goes on to write the book of Acts, we see that the Holy Spirit is front and centre.

John the Baptist had declared that he baptised with water but that the one coming after him would baptise with the Holy Spirit. And this is what Jesus told his disciples and is what happened on the day of Pentecost. Once Jesus had ascended to heaven (heaven that had been torn apart when the Holy

Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism), that same Spirit then descended on the disciples, and they were then sent out to make disciples of all peoples. It was in the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus began his ministry on earth. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit that we continue his ministry on earth.

There was a difference between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism. John's was a call to repentance, and Jesus calls us to this also – but it is only Jesus who could offer us salvation and restore our relationship with God through his death and resurrection. It is only Jesus who has the power to pour out his Holy Spirit, his presence, and his power to dwell within us.

Luke also points out a couple of times in Acts that there is a difference to being just baptised in the name of Jesus and not in the Holy Spirit. We heard of that in our reading from Acts 8 today and there's another story in Acts 19.

Those who had been baptised in the name of Jesus, had come to faith and to salvation, but it seemed they were missing out on the fuller abundant life and power of the Spirit.

Sadly, over time, there have been those in some quarters of the church who would claim one must speak in tongues or perform miracles to show they were baptised in the Holy Spirit. These things are gifts of the Spirit and Paul is very clear about this in 1 Corinthians. The Holy Spirit is promised to all who believe and put their trust in Jesus. We read that in Ephesians 1...*When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.*

When Jesus commissioned his disciples to go out and make disciples in Matthew 28, he said to baptise in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And this is the model we follow today as we baptise people into the Church.

The Holy Spirit is vital for our life in Jesus. In contrast to those who may try and suggest that you are not baptised in the Spirit if you don't speak in tongues, there are those who have gone the other way and ignore the Holy Spirit and only focus on God and Jesus. Those people miss out on the fullness of life God offers us, like those in Acts 8 who had only been baptised in the name of Jesus.

While you may not remember your own baptism, it was an important event decided by yourself or your parents, choosing to be aligned with Jesus, following his ways, repenting, and cleansing from sin as symbolised with the washing in water, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. If you haven't been baptised and would like to talk about it, please speak to me! It was exciting for me to have a family talk with me this last week, the mother and eldest child had been baptised, now the father and 2 other children want to be baptised as they have been coming along to San Remo church.

Luke's account of Jesus' baptism reminds us that the Trinity is vital in our faith. At his baptism all 3 members of the trinity are present, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father who speaks from heaven.

He also reminded us of the importance of prayer as the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as he prayed.

Our baptism occurs only once, but our decision to follow Jesus, to deny ourselves and to be filled with Holy Spirit is something we can pray every day.

I pray this Trinitarian prayer written by the late John Stott almost every day. As we finish let's say that prayer together remembering our baptism and decision to follow Jesus and invite him to lead us and fill us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Good morning heavenly Father, good morning, Lord Jesus, good morning Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, I worship you as the creator and sustainer of the universe.

Lord Jesus, I worship you, Saviour and Lord of the world.

Holy Spirit, I worship you, sanctifier of the people of God.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence and please you more and more.

Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.

Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity,

three persons in one God,

have mercy upon me. Amen. John Stott.