

Matthew 3:13-17, Isaiah 42: 1-9 The baptism of Jesus 11th Jan 2026

Prayer –Lord may we be enlightened by your Holy Spirit as we seek to learn and grow from your word to us today. Amen.

Did anyone see the movie *A United Kingdom*, out a few years ago? It spoke a lot to me as it was set in Botswana and was a story of a black man, Seretse Khama, married to an English girl and the ramifications of that in 1947. I went through Botswana when I was 19 with my Black South African Uncle and white English Aunt who lived in Zimbabwe as they could not be married and live in South Africa at that time due to apartheid.

The man in this movie – based on a true story – was not just any man – he was the heir apparent and was to be King of Botswana. It was while he was studying law in England that he met his wife to be Ruth. They married against everyone's wishes.

His father had died when he was just 3 yrs old and his Uncle was made Regent and ruled until Seretse Khama was old enough to rein. His uncle was to prepare the way for him to take over and rule their Kingdom. As Seretse finished his studies in 1947 his uncle writes to say '*it is time*' to come home and become King.

Seretse was ready to do this. But in the meantime he fell in love and married Ruth.

He took her to his hometown. His uncle pleaded with him to divorce her. Seretse wouldn't. His uncle advised the British Gov't who were 'protecting' this country as it were, not to let him reign. With apartheid in South Africa it was not seen as politically helpful.

My point here is that Seretse was the real King – he was the real deal – and at the right time his uncle should have stepped back to allow him to reign. But because he didn't like his choice of wife, he chose to make things difficult for him and turned others against him.

John the Baptist, a bit like this uncle, was 'preparing the way' for his cousin Jesus to come and be King. John knew that he was just the forerunner to Jesus...previously in Chapter 3 v 11 John had said; "I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

John knew that when Jesus arrived and began his ministry then John's work was done...he was to decrease so that Jesus would increase. He says in John's Gospel "he must become greater; I must become less".

It took a while for Seretse's uncle to recognize that his nephew was indeed the right man to lead their nation, but John recognized and accepted Jesus as King straight away.

These 2 men, John and Jesus, had met in the womb if you remember. When Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth the babe in her womb had leapt for joy and Elizabeth recognized that Mary was carrying the Lord.

After the story of Jesus birth not much is written about his early life...only Luke tells the story of Jesus as a 12 yr old boy staying behind in the temple of Jerusalem when the family went on pilgrimage there. The years after the birth narrative are often referred to as his 'silent years'. But then all four gospels record Jesus' baptism right before he began his ministry, so it is obviously a very significant event.

In the gospel of Matthew, we read that out of nowhere '*Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John.*' It was the first thing he did in his public life. It seems the moment he had been quietly waiting for had arrived.

As I said John recognizes immediately who Jesus is – the greater one he had talking about and he tries to deter Jesus. He knew that Jesus had nothing to repent of, but Jesus says – no this is the right thing to do and John relents. It is almost like the handing over the baton as John baptises Jesus...Jesus then picks up the mantle of ministry he had come to earth for.

Jesus chooses at the beginning of his public life to be identified with sinners as he is baptised, even though he had no sin to be cleansed of. This can be seen as a symbolic anticipation of his full and profound baptism on the cross at the end of his life on earth...where he takes on the sins of all.

He commits himself totally to God's will – which is what we do when we are baptised. By submitting to baptism, Jesus acknowledged God's claim on him for total consecration of life and holiness of character. It is part of his life of obedience to his Father.

Jesus was already righteous and holy and full of the Holy Spirit, but this baptism was a public declaration of this – a confirming of who he was. We read from Matthew 3: 16-17

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

By the Holy Spirit, Jesus is anointed and equipped for the task ahead of him and the voice from heaven affirms him. God is pleased with him and he will be with him every step of the way as he now steps out in ministry – he will be with him to the end...to the cross and beyond.

Now look at the Isaiah passage we heard today...is it referring to Jesus? The one who God will uphold, in whom God delights, in whom he put his Spirit on... It's very similar to Isaiah 61 that Jesus reads out in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4) saying that he fulfilled that prophecy – the Lord's Spirit anointing him to proclaim the good news, open the eyes of the blind and free the oppressed. In today's scripture from Isaiah 42 we read...

"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.

⁶"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,
⁷to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Jesus is the light and salvation for all. He is truly a servant King. He does not seek his own justice – for he did not deserve to die, he suffered silently and willingly – rather he seeks justice for others that we may live. He opens the eyes of the blind and frees the captive.

This baptism of Jesus is unique as he is the only fully righteous and sinless one – so why did he have to be baptised? He was baptised to identify with us the sinful ones; he was baptised to show his submission to the will of the Father; he was baptised to mark the beginning of his ministry – the suffering servant chosen by God – to die for us. And his baptism shows God's approval of him and the sending of the Holy Spirit, in the symbol of the dove, to equip and empower him for the task and journey ahead.

I wonder if many of you consider your own baptism as the time when you were committed to God to do his will...maybe you were just a baby and your parents made promises on your behalf. But if that is so and you are still in Church today then I imagine at some point you owned those promises for yourself and decided you would follow Jesus.

But how committed are we? Do we really know that we are also God's chosen ones – his sons and daughters – equipped with the Holy Spirit, to do his will and to minister to one another in love? To be a servant of Christ with him as our example, to seek justice in our world.

In the service of baptism, we pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we are adopted into God's family, and God is pleased with *us* as we die to sin and rise to new life to continue forever in Jesus Christ.

Some of you who were baptised as infants, may have been confirmed when of an age to make your own decision. At confirmation the Bishop prays for a strengthening of the Holy Spirit to grow in grace, with an increase in the spirit of understanding, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and to be filled with the wonder and awe of God's presence.

Jesus shows us the way to live in his baptism. He didn't need to submit to be baptised by John, he was already perfect. But he identifies with us – he knows our sins and he has taken them all on himself in his death so that we could be truly cleansed as symbolized in our baptism.

He calls us to follow him, to be like him. As we reflect on Jesus' baptism today have a think about your own. Submit yourself to the Father's will and his way, for he has chosen us and he fills us with his Spirit to empower us to be his people, to shine his light. Michael and I attended the Church Missionary Society conference last week, where we were reminded of God's unstoppable mission, a mission Jesus calls his disciples to be a part of. We are called to live like Jesus, holy and righteous, submitting our will to God's, and to proclaim the good news, opening the eyes of the blind and declaring freedom to the captive...that others may see and follow Jesus and live new and risen and free lives in him.

As Jesus honoured his Father, may our desire be to honour him in our lives. In a way like John, we are to decrease (that is, our self-will) as Jesus increases in our lives. We are not to just acknowledge him as the rightful King, (like Seretse's uncle) but we need to allow him to rule and reign as King over our lives, not pushing our own agenda. We are to live according to the promises made at baptism. Rejecting evil and living in the light.

Let's pray: Jesus thank you for the humble example of your submission to God in baptism, your total obedience to the Father, your anointing of the Holy Spirit as you began your earthly ministry, thank you for taking our sins upon yourself as you died on the cross.

As we consider our baptism today, I pray ...That the Holy Spirit will continue to fill and empower us to live and work to God's praise and glory, to be committed to his ongoing unstoppable mission to shine his light in the world. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.