



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Baptised into Christ

Mark 1:1-11; Isaiah 40:1-11; 2 Peter 3:8-15

6th December 2020

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Today is the second Sunday of Advent. As we go through Advent we focus on the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Epistle reading looks forward to the second coming telling us that God's timing is not our timing. Since he is eternal our ideas of time and urgency are different from his. C.S. Lewis writing in one of the Narnia stories has Aslan (who represents Jesus) say, "I call all times soon." God is patient and extends the time of the Last Day to give everyone the opportunity to repent since he does not desire that anyone such perish. Bear that in mind, if you think find the idea of judgment harsh. Our God does not want anyone to perish, he has given himself as Saviour to rescue us from that judgment. He is merciful and full of grace.

The Gospel tells of Jesus coming to public ministry as a man of thirty. About 550 years before Jesus, the Israelites were exiles in Babylon. For many years their prophets had warned of God's judgment if they did not mend their ways. They had ignored those warnings and continued to worship false gods. Finally, the prophesied consequences came about with the exile to Babylon in 586BC. After some time in exile, one of their prophets started to tell them that there would be a return to their land and an anointed leader would be sent to them. Our Old Testament reading today was the turning point in the Book of Isaiah when the messages to Israel turned from warnings to comfort. He told of a messenger who would come to prepare the way for the Lord.

That story is picked up in the gospel, when John the son of the priest, Zechariah, comes announcing that the Lord is coming and saying he is the herald of whom Isaiah spoke. He calls for people to mend their ways, to repent, to confess their sins and to show this by being baptised.

There are three baptisms referenced in this gospel passage. Baptism by John, the baptism of Jesus himself and the baptism by Jesus in the Holy Spirit. Today, we have a baptism service for two of our young people, Chara and Bella. This is a different baptism again.

So what's the deal? Baptism is the English form of the Greek word which means to immerse, dip, to wash, to purify.

Firstly, John's is a baptism of repentance. The metaphor is washing for ritual purification. That was the way it would be seen by Jews of that time. The practice of the Jewish Law required washings – ordinary washing of hands before eating but more significant washings of the whole body to be ritually clean. These whole body washes were the sort that John was doing as a sign of repentance. In Jewish practice the purification bath is called a *Mikveh*. Here are two of the many on the temple steps in Jerusalem. People would go down the steps

and immerse themselves for cleansing. It could also be done in a river. The idea associated is cleansing, washing and purification.

Secondly, Jesus comes to be baptised, it is different because Jesus had not sinned - he had nothing from which to repent. So it was not a cleansing. What we can say is that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and so was launched into ministry.

Thirdly, John says that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit. Now we are talking about baptism as immersion into something. Jesus immerses people into the Holy Spirit, so that we too are empowered and enlivened with the Holy Spirit.

In the Great Commission, Jesus instructed his followers to make disciples and baptise them into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is Christian baptism as we are going to do today.

It is clearly different from John's baptism. There is a scene in the Acts 19 where Paul met some disciples of John the Baptist near Ephesus (modern Turkey). He initially thought they are Christians, but apparently soon realised something was wrong.

Acts 19:2-6 "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them. "No," they replied, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ "Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked. And they replied, "The baptism of John." ⁴ Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus." ⁵ As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in [literally: into] the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied. [New Living Translation]

It transpires that somehow they had heard John's message and been baptised with John's baptism of repentance but had not heard of Jesus and his ministry. Perhaps they were Jews who had made the great journey to Jerusalem for a feast and had encountered John while there but returned to Ephesus without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So Christian baptism is more than repentance although it does include that. It involves believing in Jesus – that is trusting in him for salvation.

Did you notice the wording of baptism used by Jesus and Paul? We are baptised literally INTO the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The name represents the whole character and being. Here, "In the name of the Trinity" is not an authority claim like "open up in the name of the Law." When the New Testament Greek has that meaning it uses the preposition *εν* meaning "in". But with baptism it consistently uses the preposition *εν τω* which normally means into.

Jesus' baptism is an immersion into – it is incorporation. Paul added to our understanding of Christian baptism when he wrote:

1 Corinthians 12:13 We have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

When we are born again, Christ lives in us by his Spirit. We also become part of the Body of Christ. Paul repeatedly refers to Christians being "in Christ". That means what is said of him is said of us.

I think of it like an envelope. The envelope carries documents. Where the envelope goes the contents go. Christ is the envelope, his people are contained within him.

Then Paul explains a profound truth:

Colossians 2:12 [You were] buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Romans 6:3-5 Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we

have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

In baptism, we show that we are one with Christ even into his death and resurrection. When the body goes down under water it like being buried. If you stay there too long you will die. Then coming up out of the water is like rising to life again. We die to the old selfish nature and rise with Christ to new life in him.

So far we have seen that Christian baptism is a picture of the washing of repentance, it is a sign of being in Christ and it models death and resurrection.

Chara and Bella have each made their own choice to follow Christ. They believe he died for them and he is their Saviour. Today, when they are baptised they are declaring their trust in him, their decision to follow him and they are obeying his command to be baptised.

By this action, they show they have turned to Christ, they have repented, they are part of the Body of Christ, they had died with Christ and been given new life.

Finally, some encouragements for all of us who are baptised:-

I just said that being “in Christ” is like being in an envelope. What applies to the envelope applies to the contents. In Christ, we are adopted as beloved children of the Father. Then the words to Jesus at his baptism become real for us as well: “You are my beloved child, my beloved daughter, my beloved son. I am delighted with you. I have great pleasure in you. I am well-pleased with you.”

Can you allow those words to soak into your heart? If you are in Christ, you are in the beloved and you are beloved.

The Old Testament reading ended with the words:

He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.¹

You can take those words to yourself.

Now not only in baptism incorporation into Christ but Christ baptises us in the Holy Spirit. This is the same Holy Spirit who came upon Jesus when he was baptised. If we are to be disciples of Christ, if we are to do what he calls us to do – we need the infilling, the power of the Holy Spirit. I will pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit when I baptise the girls today. But we can all keep asking for more filling of the Spirit everyday. It is not a one-off event. So let’s all keep asking for more of Christ to show through us and more of the empowering of his Spirit.

Know that as a Christian you are a beloved child of God. Know that He delights in you and seek the filling of his essential Spirit to enable you to live the life to which he calls you.

And that brings us back to what Peter wrote in the Epistle reading about how we should live:

What kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. ...¹⁴ Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.²

Amen.

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¹ Isaiah 40:11

² 2 Peter 3:11,12,14