

talents at work or at church or around the home and as we worship and sing to Jesus.

Today we remember and celebrate Jesus' baptism and are encouraged to recall what baptism is for us: Be filled with peace. Be assured of your adoption. Know that you are loved. Feel and know God's pleasure. Through communion and in our baptism, we recall how we have died with Christ, we have risen in Christ, we have ascended with Christ and are seated in heavenly realms with him and one day when he comes again, we will appear with him in all his glory!



Sermon  
07 January 2024

## Benefits of Baptism

Mark 1:4-11

© 2023 The Revd Warren Watson

I was Born in Ponsonby and grew up in Mt Roskill. I have a family history of alcoholism and addictions. In my teenage years until my mid-twenties, I was addicted to alcohol and drugs. As for Jesus, his name was a swear word in my family. I eventually began travelling around the world. Christianity was completely irrelevant to me.

But then through the tragic death of my brother who was killed due to a drug and drink related accident, I cried out to God for answers to the problems of death, suffering, addictions and sadness. God heard my prayers and the Holy Spirit began to draw near. As the holy spirit did this, I felt deeply convicted of my sin and rebellion. A friend's mother introduced me to the Gospels. I read about Jesus for the first time in my adult life. In the Gospel accounts I discovered how Jesus loved and forgave people like me, how he defeated death and how he could heal the sick and set prisoners free. I found all this so attractive I attended a communion service in a church. As I took the bread and looked into the cup of wine, Jesus opened my eyes to see that he suffered and died for me personally. He showed me how he took the punishment I deserved for all my wrongdoing. He showed me just how much he loved me as I thought about his death on the cross.

I accepted an invitation to have full immersion Baptism. When I was drying off in a back room of the church, I experienced the Holy Spirit in a powerful way. The Holy Spirit filled my life with his presence. I felt clean, new and full of joy. I knew that Jesus had set me free and had broken the chains of 14 years of addictions. I had an overwhelming desire to love, worship and follow Jesus. I thank God for my baptism. Today the church celebrates the Baptism of Jesus and therefore it is a good day to think about our own baptisms and what baptism means. If you love, follow and obey Jesus, Mark 1 v 4 – 11 lays down 4 truths that are yours through your baptism in Christ.

**1. Be Filled with Peace** Verse 10: 'Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.'

When Jesus was baptised something special happened. The holy spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. The dove is a symbol of peace, which the Holy Spirit brings into your life. Paul writes in Galatians 5 verse 22: The 'fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace'.

And listen to what Jesus said in John chapter 20: "Peace be with you. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Are you anxious? Stressed about something? Longing for peace? Health? A difficult family situation? Someone you worry about? Added to this, we live in a war-torn world. It is so easy to lose our peace. When we're facing challenges we tend to focus on the difficulties. They can overwhelm us and we lose our peace, God can feel distant. Christian writer Max Lucardo has some good advice: "Meditate less on the mess and more on the Master. Less on the problems and more on his power." Take time each day to meditate and focus on Jesus and ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you Peace. First thing – Be filled with peace.

**2. Through your baptism, be assured of your adoption.** Verse 11: "You are my son."

Jesus is **the** Son of God in a unique and special way. This was underlined at his own baptism when a voice was heard affirming Jesus as **the** Son of God. However, when the Holy Spirit is in our hearts, he assures **all of us** that through what Jesus has done on the cross, we too are made God's sons and daughters. As you put your trust in Jesus, you receive the spirit of adoption into the family of God. The Holy Spirit himself then testifies with your spirit that *you* are a child of God. Not long after my Baptism in London, I met a very wealthy Christian family. The family kindly offered me a home and work – I was sleeping on someone's couch and had just lost my job. I ended up living with my adopted family for 7 years in their spacious home in Surrey. The family helped me grow in Christ and to develop my gifts and talents. They nurtured, loved and taught me about following Jesus. I was like an adopted son in the family and enjoyed all the benefits of belonging to the family: family meals and celebrations, financial support, unconditional love, gifts, beautiful home, swimming pool, a trip to Kenya, use of cars. I was part of the family. I was dearly loved.

Through your baptism, you are also a dearly loved adopted child into the family of God. And because you are an adopted child, you too can enjoy all the benefits that belonging to God's family brings. And the benefits are far **better than what** the world has to offer. The benefits of belonging to God's family are:

God's unconditional love,  
the Fruit of the Holy Spirit, Forgiveness,  
Guidance,  
Strength,  
Help,  
Billions of brothers and sisters,  
A Home in heaven!

**3. Know that you are loved by God** Verse 11: "You are my son.....**whom I love.**"

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5 v 5: 'And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.' In baptism God's love is poured into your heart by the Holy Spirit and God's perfect love drives out fear. When fear rises up in our hearts, and it does, we need to seek the assurance of our adoption as God's children. We need to remember that we are loved, dear children of our heavenly Father.

Romans 8 verses 15 + 16: 'The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba, Father.*" Abba = Dada....this speaks of intimacy and love. Are you fearful about something? What the future holds? Unsure how you're going to cope with a situation? Well listen to the final verse of the hymn 'In Christ Alone':

No guilt in life, no fear in death	This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath	Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man	Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home	Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

**4. Feel God's pleasure:** Verse 11: "with you I am **well pleased**

This is of course supremely true of Jesus, because **he is the** perfect Son of God, sinless and perfect in every way. We are not perfect and sinless. But as you walk in step with the Holy Spirit, you are filled with God's peace and presence, you too can experience this sense of God's delight and pleasure. We can know that God is pleased with us as well. A good film is *Chariots of Fire*. The film is about the Scottish Olympic runner Eric Liddell. Liddell was a committed Christian and then a missionary in China. When Liddell ran his races an unusual thing happened. There was always a moment, when he would be in full flight, that he would put his head back and just run with his arms flying around. After one of his races he spoke about this to another athlete who questioned him about his unusual running style. Liddell simply said, 'When I run I *feel God's pleasure.*' We may not run fast or win Olympic medals but through the Holy Spirit we too can experience God's pleasure, especially as we love, follow and obey Jesus in our lives. We can feel his pleasure as we serve others, give our time and money, pray and intercede for others, use our gifts and