

Mark 1:4-11 The Baptism of Jesus

Today the Church remembers the baptism of Jesus. The fact that he was baptised at all has always caused something of a problem. John the Baptist called on people to be baptised for the remission of their sins, but Jesus was not a sinner, so why was he baptised? The reason which is most frequently put forward is that he wished to be identified fully with the human race. Personally, I do not agree with that; he was *already* identified with us. In fact, I believe that it was because he was so completely identified with us that he *needed* to be baptised – not because he was a sinner but for a different reason, which I will share with you. But first let me say this. My interpretation is personal to me, although others hold it also, and I have not seen it set down in the terms which I will explain. And so you need to know that not every believer will agree with me. However, it is not heretical and it is based totally on Scripture. So I suggest you listen to what I say and then weigh up the evidence and see whether you agree or not. If you don't agree, that is fine provided you reason out *why* you don't; because then you will have learned something and will be more certain of what you *do* believe. So let's explore.

The gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was not conceived in the normal way but by the Holy Spirit coming upon his Mother Mary. He was conceived or born of the Holy Spirit. Now we were not and we, unlike Jesus, inherit a tendency or a bias to sin. Following the fall of Adam, every human being is born with this bias. Technically it is known as the doctrine of original sin; yes I know that some of us are more original in our sinning than others, but the doctrine doesn't mean that. It refers to the common state of humankind that we are all sinners; it is part of our nature. Apart, that is, from Jesus who, having been conceived or born of the Holy Spirit, was born in that state of innocence which was Adam's before he disobeyed God.

Because we are all sinners, we have lost that close communion with God which Adam had originally; and that part of us, our spirit, which is the channel through which God contacts us and we contact him, fell into disuse. We still have it, but it is inoperative. You understand why, don't you? The prophet Habakkuk says of God:

Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing. [Hab. 1:13]

Because of our sin God cannot draw near to us in close communion; in his presence human beings would be like wax before a fire. Our spirit, therefore, is out of commission. This is what Jesus was trying to explain to Nicodemus when he said:

"Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. [John 3:5/6]

What he means is that when we are born naturally our body and our soul, that is our flesh, are functioning but our spirit is latent. Flesh can only give birth to flesh. Our spirit can only be brought alive by the Holy Spirit. But for the Holy Spirit to come near to us, we have to be cleansed from our sins and so we need to repent and, as it were, be born again – not physically, because we already have our body and soul functioning (we don't have to re-enter our mother's womb, which is what Nicodemus thought Jesus was suggesting) – but *spiritually*, so that our spirit will begin to function.

So let me recap on where we are so far. All human beings, because of sin, are born as flesh, body and soul, but our spirit is not functioning; it has to be brought alive by the operation of the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus was conceived or born of the Holy Spirit in the first place, so he did not need to be born again. His spirit was functioning from the time he was born. He had close communion with his Father from the outset. However, although

he had *communion* with his Father, he was still fully a human being and he did not have any supernatural power for his work of ministry. It is important that you hear that, so let me repeat it; Jesus was fully a human being and he did not have any supernatural power for his work of ministry. The supernatural powers of being God were something he gave up when, as the Letter to the Philippians tells us,

He emptied himself, made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. [Philp. 2:7]

I will give you the proof later, that Jesus did not have power in himself for his work of ministry, but first I want to develop the truth of the full humanity of Jesus.

Let me just stress the fact that when Jesus became a human being, he did not cease to be God; he couldn't because that is who he is in his essential being; but, in his incarnation, that which was and is always God, had only a human body and a human brain, like us.

As Jesus was growing up and because of his close communion with God, he would only gradually come to understand that apparently other people didn't seem to have this same close communion and were not as keen as he to do God's will. We see something of that in the incident when he was 12 and got left behind in Jerusalem; when his parents searched and eventually found him in the Temple

His mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" [Luke 2:48-49]

Do you get the flavour of that? Here is the child Jesus being nonplussed – "Well where did you think I would be? I was

seeking to learn more about my heavenly Father – isn't that what everyone is about?"

As a Jew, Jesus would learn of the expected Messiah, someone who would be anointed by God to deliver his people. At some stage it would have crossed his mind that perhaps *he* was to be the Messiah. Maybe, at first, he would have rejected that idea, feeling that it was presumptuous of him to imagine that. But the idea would persist and I can imagine the conflict between his humility and the pressure of the Spirit upon him. In the end he comes forward to be baptised by John, not in order to repent of his sin, for he had none, but as a form of anointing. As he comes up out of the water the Holy Spirit comes upon him in the form of a dove and accompanied by a voice. Mark and Luke record he words as,

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."
[Mk.1:11]

That is to say, "You haven't made a mistake, you are not getting above yourself; you *are* my Son and what you are doing delights me." These words give Jesus the assurance he needs that he *is* to be the Messiah. However, Matthew records the words as:

"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."
[Matt.3: 17]

Is there a discrepancy here? I do not believe so. The Holy Spirit does not *translate* the expression of God, He *interprets* it. The Father expressed the thought "My Son who delights me." The crowd (and probably John the Baptist himself) needed to have the witness, "This is my Son"; Jesus needed the personal assurance "You *are* my Son." How wonderful God is; through the Holy Spirit he meets the need of each of us individually.

But now let me remind you of John's account of the Baptism:

I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' [John 1:32/3]

Notice the words, “The Holy Spirit descended *and remained* on Jesus.” Why stress twice the fact that the Holy Spirit not only came upon Jesus, but *remained* on him? Does that not imply that previously the Spirit had not remained on him? What is the significance of that?

Well, do you remember what Jesus said to the disciples just before he ascended to Heaven to return to his Father? He told them to remain in Jerusalem until they had been baptised with the Holy Spirit and then he added:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. [Acts 1:8]

They would receive power for their ministry when they were baptised in the Holy Spirit. I suggest that that is exactly what happened when Jesus was baptised with the Holy Spirit – he received power for his ministry. Right at the start of this sermon I said that I did not believe Jesus was baptised in order to identify with us human beings, but because he was already fully identified with us. In himself, during his earthly ministry, Jesus had no power to work the works of God any more than we have power in *ourselves* to work them. That power was given when he was baptised with the Holy Spirit. Think! there is no record of Jesus working any miracle as a child, a teenager or in his twenties. The first miracle Jesus worked, St. John tells us, was when he turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana, and that was after he had been baptised; that is, after he had received power.

Now, I promised I would give you the proof that Jesus did not have power in himself. I say that on the authority, not of any learned scholar, but on the words of Jesus himself. Listen:

Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. [John 5:19]

"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. [John 5:30]

So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me.

For I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. [John 12:49]

Finally, and the clearest statement of all:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. [John 14:10]

The disciples thought that Jesus was doing his mighty works because he was God. It is true that he was and is God because, as I have already stated, that is who he is in his essential being, but that is not how he was able to work his miracles – he left that power behind when he became man. He explained that he was simply a perfect vessel for the Father to work his work through him. The power was the power of the Holy Spirit who came upon him and remained with him at his baptism.

What is more he promised that the disciples would receive the same power, listen:

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. [John 14:12]

Can that really be true, that everyone who believes in Jesus will be able to do the same mighty works that Jesus did? Yes, because it was not Jesus who was doing them, it was his Father through the Holy Spirit; and as it is the same Holy Spirit who dwelt in Jesus who comes to dwell in believers, it isn't surprising that we are to do the same works. What is more, the early Christians believed it and saw it happen under their ministry. Peter and John healed the cripple at the Beautiful Gate. Paul raised the dead on at least two occasions. Perhaps we don't believe it any more.

Well, there you are, I said I would tell you what I believe the baptism of Jesus was all about and why he needed to be baptised. I have, I believe, backed up every claim I have made with the words of Scripture. You must now make up your own mind whether you agree with me or not. But let me close with this.

Jesus promised that he would ask the Father to send the same Holy Spirit who dwelt in him upon and into every believer. Unlike the early disciples you do not have to wait for this to happen, but you do need to be filled with the Spirit if you are to have power to work the works of God. If you have made Jesus your Lord and Saviour, you have already been born again of the Spirit, just as Jesus was born of or conceived by the Holy Spirit. But he needed to be *filled* with the Spirit for his ministry, and so do you. How do you go about being filled with the Spirit? You ask God, said Jesus. Listen:

Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly

Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" [Luke 11:11/3]

Have you asked the Father to fill you with his Holy Spirit?

If not, why?