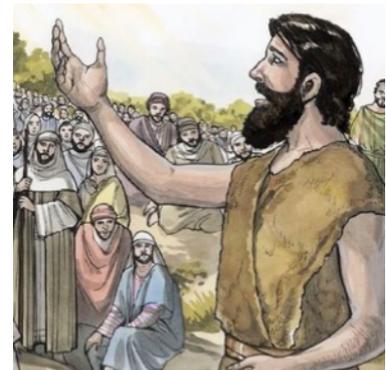


The Baptism of Jesus Begins Our Adoption

Matthew 3: 13-17

John the Baptist is in the wilderness alongside the river Jordan using water to clean God's people. John invited people to repent and be baptised, that is, to turn away from their sinful thoughts, words, and actions. To 'baptise' means to wash or purify something, and John had been appointed to prepare the way of the Son of God, purifying people in a baptism of repentance in order to prepare them for the coming Messiah.



This washing with water continued an old biblical teaching where there were two ways to wash or purify something in order to make it pure for God's holy purposes. The first method of cleansing was passing it through fire. But if it was going to burn and be destroyed in fire, then the alternate was ritual washing with water.

People don't go so well in fire. The way for us to be purified is washing through water. John was following God's instructions to wash the people of their sins with water. It was a spiritual washing using the physical means of water used together with the teachings of the Word of God.

So here's John, urging people to repent of their sins and be baptised so they could be clean and holy. This will prepare them for the coming One who will take away the sins of the whole world — when suddenly the very next person to step forward to be baptised is... the man Jesus!



John and Jesus were related. John knew much about Jesus. When Mary, with Jesus in her womb, visited the pregnant Elizabeth, the baby John leaped inside her. John knew Jesus to be the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, and now Jesus stands in front of John to be baptised. This puzzled John, as it has puzzled many readers of the Bible!

You see, this baptism was for those who have sinned, for those who repent of their sins, and for those who need to be washed of their sin. But Jesus wasn't a sinner. He had nothing to confess. He has no sinful thoughts, words or actions. Although fully human and like us in every way, the significant difference is that was Jesus without the

taint of sin that infects everything we do.

What was John to do? Here stands the only One who truly has nothing to repent of! Jesus is already clean, pure, and holy. He's already been set aside for God's holy purposes. He's already bearing the fruit of righteous obedience to God's will! The reality is that, if anything, John needed to be baptised by Jesus, and he tells him so!

But Jesus replies saying that it's fitting and right that he be baptised 'in order to fulfil all righteousness' — to make everything right and fulfil the will of God. So, there in the Jordan, Jesus

fully identified with us sinners, and in those very waters began his ministry of taking the sin of the world upon himself, so that his sacrificial death on the cross would pay the full penalty of it.

It's here when Jesus was baptised that the great exchange began to take place. In baptism you're washed of your sins, and those sins are taken by Jesus. Sinful people like you and I become pure, clean and holy, while the pure, clean and holy One of God becomes the bearer of our sin.

Your baptism using ordinary tap water, pool or sea water works the same way as the waters of the Jordan. This is because it's not just the water which does this great and mysterious exchange, but it is water used together with the Word of God, and the gift of faith brought about by the Holy Spirit. God's promise and command to bless the nations with the triune name, and our obedience as church in mission commissioned by Jesus with his authority to baptise and make disciples, our obedience as parents presenting our children for baptism, and as individuals celebrating and daily claiming the status, power and grace of our baptism.



Every baptism in obedience to Jesus' command to go and baptise all nations in the Triune name, is now part of this great exchange of sin. Faith trusts what God promises in this action of baptismal washing. Here in baptism, our sins are washed away because Jesus takes on all our sins of thought, word, and deed, and receives the punishment we deserve for them on the cross.

In the river Jordan, sinless Jesus was baptised among sinners, and later he took his place and died between sinners on the cross. God came to make things right and good through the work of Jesus Christ, beginning at his baptism. He came to bear the sins of the whole world, yours and mine.

Even now, God continues this cleansing work among us as we're reminded of our baptism when we speak his holy name at the beginning of worship, when we repent of our sins and hear his gracious and undeserving words of forgiveness, and when he welcomes us at his holy banqueting table as forgiven and holy people of God through faith.

Convicted by faith, we celebrate that God's goodness, love, mercy and righteousness is greater than our capacity to sin! And there's more, because something else happened which changed John's baptism of repentance into something new. We are told the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit came down from the newly-opened heavens to rest on Jesus in the form of a dove.



The Holy Spirit came down and rested on Jesus, reaffirming that he is the loved, chosen, and well-approved Servant and Son of God. He is now the font of the Holy Spirit, which means we come to the incarnate Jesus Christ to receive his Spirit so that we may live a life of righteousness. It is only with the Holy Spirit's help that we're able to do the good, perfect, and salutary will of God.

At the same time, the voice of God the Father (who completes the Holy Trinity miraculously present at this world-changing baptismal event), declared this Jesus to be his priceless Son, with whom he's deeply pleased. Amazingly, much of the same sentiment is conveyed to each of us in our own baptism, as he adopts us as his holy and

dearly loved children, speaking his words of love and pleasure over us as we fulfil his will: his holy will and command that we would be baptised and continually learn from his Words and ways on

In terms of our sin, it is forgiven and gone from God's sight. When he looks at us, he sees not our sin and failures to live worthy of our baptism, but he sees Jesus, the perfect obedient sinless one. This is because, as Paul reminds us, anyone who has been baptised into Christ has put on Christ. We have not only been buried with him in his death, but have been raised up with him from the grave into the presence of the Father.

As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Galatians 3:27

When Jesus was baptised, baptism itself was changed. It's no longer a simple washing, but it's a means of the Holy Spirit which brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the Word and promises of God declare. Jesus' baptism at the start of his ministry, was the beginning of our adoption as beloved children of God with whom he is well pleased. We are now in Christ, and with Christ, and he dwells in and among us. As his holy gathered people, we are carriers of the font of the Holy Spirit for the world, declaring Christ is in our midst, working in us his will for the sake of all righteousness. Amen.