

For Baptism of our Lord, 2021, 10 January 2021

Genesis 1:1-5; Romans 6:1-11; Mark 1:4-11

Why was Jesus baptized? All these people came to John. They knew he was a great prophet. They saw him as a great man of God. They believed that he was doing what God commanded him, and that he was speaking for God.

They came. It was the right thing to do, because they knew that John was great in God's eyes. So they went to the great one. You want to be baptized by someone who is greater than you – someone who is holier.

But Jesus was greater than John. So why was he baptized by John?

All of these other people were coming to John, confessing their sins. They wanted to be cleansed of their sin – washed with God's cleansing water – so that their lives could be clean. Then God would not look upon their sins.

But Jesus had no sins to confess. So why was Jesus baptized? And why did he get baptized by John?

The baptism was to open

Open himself to God

Open his ministry

Open himself to us

And open the kingdom for us.

I am giving you a way to remember these reasons for Jesus' baptism with the four letters O-P-E-N.

O – Obedience

P – Public

E – Equate

N – New

Open – the reason for Jesus being baptized by John.

Jesus said that he had to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness, to follow laws. That is, he was obedient. While baptism is not in the Old Testament, it was commanded for John to baptize. Baptism is not just something that is done out of some sort of human law. Baptism is not meant to be done "just as a thing to do".

But rather, God commanded John to baptize. He was to baptize to symbolize cleansing and show that people's lives were changed. And Jesus had to be anointed.

Kings have to be anointed. That is the law. It is commanded that kings are anointed by prophets. His baptism was meant to be a parallel to the anointing of kings.

We call him Messiah. That word is also translated into Greek as Christ. These words simply mean one who is anointed. One anointed as the king – the descendant of David who is meant to rule.

A king submitted himself to be anointed every year. There is a Psalm that was used every year as the high priest re-anointed the king. The king then renewed his vows – to God and the people.

The Second Psalm is the liturgy that was used. Picture what went on. The king and the high priest stood in front of the gathered crowd. The king knelt before the priest. The priest poured oil on the king's head. Then the king faced the people and said, "God said to me, "You

are my son, today I have become your father.” Then the king was considered again to be an obedient Son of God.

Here though, in John’s baptism – the claim – the truth is that Jesus is acknowledged as being obedient and God’s son his whole life. The voice came from heaven, and not from the mouth of the king. God called Jesus His son.

This obedience means that he was now being anointed by one who was lesser than him, because that is what God said to do. But obedience led him to being publicly called Son of God.

Obedience is also one of the reasons that we baptize. Baptism is not a mere human action. It is something God commands of us: to make disciples of all people by baptizing and teaching. It is that way that God has said that He adopts us, and calls us His children. It is His means of grace. Through it, He has anointed you as His child as well.

Obedience.

Now: Public.

That is the way that Jesus began his ministry. To speak of the beginning of his public ministry, you have to remember how important John was. John had many followers.

Just before this took place even some of the Pharisees and Sadducees had come to see John. Some think that they wanted to follow John, but not change their other allegiances. All sorts of folks followed John.

But the one that people eventually should follow was Jesus. The purpose of John was to prepare the way for Jesus. So people would have to have a change of loyalties.

Why would they change their loyalties?

Yes, it was God that they were following. But the voice that they listened to was John’s. We do not change those loyalties very easily. Once we are comfortable with one leader

One Pastor

One Boss

One political party

We don’t change easily, no matter who the leader is we follow. We stick to the familiar leader. That of course is one of the challenges for our congregation in this time...we are in transition, and looking for a new pastor. And that is the struggle we are seeing in our country as well.

So it was true for the hand-off from John. In a very public way, in a way that everyone would see, John needed to hand over the mantle to Jesus.

Though here John acknowledges and tells people to follow Jesus, we know that some still continued to follow John. Even with this public exchange of authority. There are – even today – about 60,000 people loyal to John the Baptizer.

Something else is happening here to. Something that John did not expect. John had one idea of the messiah, and that is as a conquering king. But the voice from the Father changed that, even if it was not understood.

Throughout the book of Isaiah, there are four Songs that we call Servant Songs. They describe – 700 years before Jesus – a servant of God who suffers for the sake of all people. This servant, while Isaiah doesn’t call him this, was commonly called “the beloved of God”.

The beginning of the public ministry of Jesus – to our knowledge – is the first time that these two are put together. The suffering servant – and the messiah. That is what the public ministry of Jesus was. And so PUBLIC is a key word. This is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Often I have been asked about Jesus' life before his public ministry. The fact is we know very little about that. This may be why there are some people who try to "fill in the blanks." This is the beginning of Jesus' being in the public eye. Here is where he stops being a private person, and is sent to his public life.

Now the word: EQUATE.

Jesus was baptized because he equated himself to Israel – and to all the people.

Equate – first to the nation of Israel. In the Old Testament, some of the prophets confessed the sins of the people. They asked God for forgiveness. Even though they themselves were not guilty of the sins they confessed. They stood in the place of the people. They equated themselves to the people as a whole.

That is what Jesus is doing here. He is standing in the place of sinful people – though he himself was sinless. He equated himself with us – standing in the place of God's people and being baptized for their sin.

There is another way that he equated himself with Israel. Jesus relives the life of Israel. Without sinning.

He stood as Israel – when he went to the desert for 40 days – as Israel had been in the desert for 40 years.

He becomes equated with Israel, and relives the nation's temptations.

Finally Jesus is equated with individuals in his baptism. The people who came to John to be baptized. The people who confessed their sins. The people who were being forgiven. These are the people Jesus equates himself to.

Those born sinful and unclean, and in need of forgiveness. And so, even though he didn't need baptism for the forgiveness of sins, to measure up to righteousness, he equated himself to our needs. He was baptized.

NEW.

This is the last word. NEW.

Because John's baptism is not the baptism Jesus gives us. John's baptism was for forgiveness, and Jesus had no need of forgiveness.

"Into whose baptism were you baptized," some people were asked in the book of Acts (Acts 19:3). They answered that they were baptized by John. Not into Jesus' baptism, but John's.

So, in order to be baptized with the Holy Spirit...in order to be baptized into the adoption by God the Father that is given by Christ...in order to be joined to the Beloved – the servant Messiah of God...they were baptized in Jesus' name.

There is a difference between the two. One is meant only for those confessing their sins. The other is being joined to Christ. By being baptized by John, the contrast between the two is brought out.

The NEW baptism that is now yours is not John's. It isn't by a confession of sins. It is NEW, by God's action only. NEW – joined – immersed into Jesus that you may rise with him.

Jesus baptism was his being OPEN:

To God

To his ministry

To us

And for our entry into the kingdom.

He was baptized out of OBEDIANCE, to begin his PUBLIC ministry, to EQUATE himself to us, and to start the NEW.

OPEN – that you too might now be open to God's leading. Amen.