

Prayer

All glory be to You, Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. You are there with us throughout the day as each moment comes and goes, as each event takes place, as each conversation occupies the mind, and as each thought leads to action. We praise You for everything that happens this day, and for the leading of Your Spirit throughout it. Alleluia! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The sick in mind

Pray today for all those who are young, and have not yet developed in their minds as quickly as others; they can find the world in which they live very hard. Pray for their care.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for recent converts to Christ*
- *Pray for the armed forces of your country and the work they do*
- *Pray for those who suffer due to the world economic crisis*

Meditation

Lord God

As light breaks down the darkness at dawn

With ever increasing strength and power,
Take charge of all I am this day.

As the sun moves across the breadth of the sky

Giving meaning to the passage of time,
Direct my path and reveal my way.

As the light of day is constantly tempered

By layers of clouds and the changing weather.
Be with me through all the changes.

As the day give way to the evening shades

And night brings closure to the work of the day,
Grant me, I pray, the rest I need:

For Your light in my darkness gives me peace.

Bible Study - Matthew 3:13-17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have stopped Him. He said 'I need to be baptized by you, and yet you have come to me?'

¹⁵ Jesus answered him, 'Let it go ahead; for it is right for us to do this now, in order to fulfil all righteousness.' Then John agreed. ¹⁶ And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up out of the water, suddenly the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ Then a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, who I love, and I am well pleased with Him.'

Review

Now, at last, the full potential of God's revelation through Jesus Christ is made known; Jesus is baptised and everything is now made ready for the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The story today is this; Jesus went down to the Jordan River to be baptised by John and meet the man God had used to tell the people about His coming. He came in all humility and submitted to John's ministry, accepting John as the one God used to announce his coming. How we love the stories of the birth of Jesus (Matt 1,2), and the mysterious preaching of John the Baptist in the desert (Matt 3:1-12); but all of this is little more than an introduction to this powerful introduction to the ministry of the Messiah, empowered by God. Matthew himself was in awe of these events, probably because of the awe-inspiring voice of God, addressing the whole world and blessing Jesus (3:17). The reason for this can be found in the way in which he records the story. In the previous chapters of his Gospel (1,2), Matthew pointed out all the important features of the story by giving them a scriptural reference to make the meaning of them clear. Now however, in telling us about the baptism of Jesus, he does not give us any references at all. It is as if the voice of God is testimony enough; for what more needed to be said? In fact, there are a number of good Old Testament references which Matthew could have used; In Psalm 2:7, for example, the psalmist says 'this is my son ...' in a famous and well known prophecy of the Messiah. But Matthew does not use this scripture to cross reference the voice of God; he tells us about the mystery of Jesus' baptism without interruption.

It is remarkable that all four Gospels record the baptism of Jesus. In John's Gospel, this is part of John's testimony about the Messiah; and in Mark and Luke the stories have different nuances, but are remarkably similar to this passage in Matthew. The main difference between Matthew and the rest is that Matthew records the discussion between Jesus and John about whether it is right for Jesus to be baptised (3:14,15), and he describes what happened as being in full view before all who were present, i.e. 'all Jerusalem and Judah' (3:5). Matthew presents Jesus' baptism as a public declaration of the beginning of His ministry and unashamedly reports the awesome voice of God which commissions Jesus and gives Him authority as Messiah, and as Israel's king come to reign in fulfilment of the genealogy and all the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.

There has been much debate about the baptism of Jesus. Why did Jesus need to be baptised if he was sinless? What did Jesus mean by saying that the baptism was necessary to 'fulfil all righteousness' in verse 15? What is the meaning of the dove? Lastly, what is the meaning of the 'voice from heaven'? We presume this to be God, but it is an extraordinary way for Him to address His Son! Sceptics have found holes within the story and tried to make it out to be less than important, perhaps just a stepping stone on Jesus' path of public recognition and a means whereby he could gain his own recognition and therefore begin his ministry.

Jesus' baptism was so much more than that. Jesus wanted to be baptised so that He could identify Himself with the people He came to save, and also to receive the power and authority of God for His coming ministry. This is amply described in the coming of the Holy Spirit 'like a dove' (3:16) which is God's way of bringing a heavenly anointing on both Jesus and on people. Once the Holy Spirit had come on Jesus, His ministry could begin, for in just the same way, the Holy Spirit comes on people today to enable them to exercise the ministry which God has given them. In this great event, however, God the Father is present with God the Son and the Holy Spirit in power. The Trinity of God is present in the act of baptism, and it is a powerful and awe-inspiring event; God has exposed Himself both through Jesus but also through the presence of the Holy Spirit in power.

One thing should be very precious to all of us. When we are baptised, we submit to the authority of God just like Jesus submitted to the authority of the Father. When we go

through the waters of baptism, we go where Jesus has gone before. In this we are immeasurably blessed, and made ready for our own life and ministry.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What do you think is meant by the 'sinlessness' of Jesus? Why was Jesus baptised if he did not have to repent of sin?
2. Can you give a list of things that are meant by 'baptism' from this study? Use it to discuss the meaning of your own baptism.
3. Discuss in your group what Jesus' disciples must have made of what happened on this occasion.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The baptism of Jesus is a powerful and important moment in the history of the world, because it is the start of Jesus' work as Messiah. I, for one, feel that my own baptism takes its meaning from Jesus' baptism. I confess my sins through my baptism, but Jesus did not have to, and the Holy Spirit who is given to me is the same Holy Spirit! Alleluia!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Would you say that the Holy Spirit has come to you through baptism? To what extent do you know that God has empowered you for the work you do? Spend time praying and thinking about this.*
- *Write down a brief history of your own life and identify the major events on your Christian pathway. How has God been at work through them? Write down your own 'spiritual history'.*

Final Prayer

You have washed me, Lord Jesus. Washed me for cleanness, and washed me for work; washed me for healing and washed me for service. Help me to fulfil my calling through Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit live out my calling to the end of my life. Thank You Lord Jesus. AMEN