



Sermon: Baptism of Christ.

9th January 2005

A couple of weeks ago we celebrated Christmas. Our Lord being born as a human baby. On Thursday we celebrated Epiphany, the visit of the wise men with their rather strange gifts. And now today, Jesus, a grown man, is at the River Jordan. Of course, a lot happened in between. The flight into Egypt by Joseph and Mary with the baby Jesus to escape Herod's murderous rage, the return to Nazareth where Jesus grew up. The visit to the temple when he was twelve. And now he is an adult.

John, like one of the Old Testament prophets, had a vision of the need for all Israel to repent of sin and start again, renewed and in a right relationship with God. He proclaimed the need for repentance so that the Messiah would come, the Messiah, whom God would send to fix the mess people had made of their lives and the life of Israel. He baptised in the waters of the River Jordan to demonstrate forgiveness and a new life. And now Jesus has come to be baptised. WHY? Surely the Son of God is not in need of any forgiveness. So why has he come?

Perhaps this little story helps answer the question.

John the Baptist is baptising in the River Jordan and huge crowds are coming to him and it is all rather disorganised. So some business men in the crowd decide to sort things out and tidy things up. They set up tables and get people into queues and as each person reaches the front of the queue they are asked for their name, which is written on a sticky label. Then the person behind the desk asks what their main sin is, what it is they want to be forgiven for.

So Bob walks up to the table. 'What's your name?' 'Bob'
'What's your most awful sin, Bob?'
'I stole some money from my boss.' So the person at the table writes in big letters BOB - EMBEZZLER on the label and sticks it on Bob's chest.
The next person comes forward. 'What's your name?' 'Mary.'
'Mary, what's your worst sin?'
'I gossiped about some people. It wasn't so bad, what I said, but I know I shouldn't have done it.'
So they write down MARY - GOSSIP and stick it on her.
Another man walks up to the table.
'Name?' 'George'
'What's your sin, George?'
'I've often thought about how much I'd like to have my neighbour's car'
So they write down GEORGE - COVETER and slap the label on his chest.
Another man comes up. 'What's your name?' 'Harry.'
'What have you done, Harry?'
'Well, I don't know how to say this. I had an affair.'
So they write down HARRY - ADULTERER and stick his label on him.
Then Jesus comes to be baptised. He hasn't got a label on his chest. He walks down the line of people waiting to be baptised and one by one, he peels the labels off their chests and sticks them on himself. Then he goes to John and as he steps down into water, the river washes away the writing from every single one of those labels.

Jesus, the Son of God does not need the baptism of repentance, forgiveness and renewal but we do. But born as a human baby and growing as an ordinary man Jesus identifies with us in baptism. He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove to alight on him. The same Spirit that we