

## The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

### Mark 1:1 -20

The Gospel of Mark appears to be on speed dial. What he writes in sixteen short chapters, Matthew takes 28 chapters and Luke takes 24. In the first twenty verses of the first chapter: John is introduced; Jesus is baptized; he is tempted in the wilderness; he calls his first disciples. Mark's way of telling the story of Jesus' Baptism is thoroughly apocalyptic in nature; no genealogies, no birth narratives. Mark launches right into Jesus' adult life.

A sense of urgency pervades these opening episodes in Mark. The critical time has arrived; God's reign is breaking in, and there is no time to dawdle. This announcement of God's in-breaking reign may come as threatening news. It is much more comfortable to think of God safely beyond the heavens, benignly looking down on us. If God is "on the loose" in Jesus, alive and active in our world, then we are not in control. There is no telling what God might do, or what God might ask of us. Might we too, be called to drop everything and follow Jesus on a risky mission?

Often, experiences can change the direction of our lives. These experiences are so casual, they can be frightening. And they are critical experiences because they **are** life-changing. Albert Schweitzer casually walked into a library and sat down at a table to study. He picked up a magazine that someone hadn't returned to the rack, a publication of the London Missionary Society. As he thumbed through it, an article about African missions caught his eye.

That article changed the direction of his life. He could have been a great organist, performing in the world's most renowned concert halls, or a

medical doctor, working in the great research centres of the world. Instead, he would spend the rest of his life in Lambarene, Africa, as a Christian missionary, all because of a casual visit to a library. Some of the most-important decisions of our lives can turn on the tiniest of hinges. It's not the splashy or the loud events, but those that are quite ordinary. God is on the loose, but God works in the shadows, under the radar.

At the time such experiences are happening, you don't give them a second thought. Yet, those are the very events that bring the most profound changes. Suddenly, things seem to converge and you meet new people, or get a new idea, or acquire a different way of looking at things. The results are life-changing.

This is what happened to Jesus at the time of his baptism. John the Baptizer declared, *"I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* For Jesus, John's coming was a sign, a turning point, a moment of decision.

This incident in the life of Jesus made sense to the early Christians because it expressed so fully an essential element in their own personal experience of God. This story features the voice of the Father, the presence of the Son and the prompting of a gentle dove-like Spirit. This was their own experience of God. This is why this story made so much sense to them. These same things are true for us and our experience of God.

Several things in Jesus' baptism are analogous to our lives. One thing that stands out is the delay. Jesus had been waiting for thirty years for this to take place. For thirty years he had waited for John to come preaching and baptizing. It must have seemed that this time would never

come, that his public ministry would never happen. According to Luke's gospel, Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work. Since life expectancy in the first century was barely forty, this was late in coming.

Delays are challenging for most of us. We interpret God's delays as God's denials. There are times when we feel that life has passed us by. So, what did this baptism mean to Jesus? What does it imply for us who are committed to him?

Why was Jesus baptized? This moment was a turning point in his life. It ended his life in Nazareth forever. He was to begin his public ministry. We know very little about his early years. There is evidence that Joseph died when Jesus was a young man. As the eldest son, Jesus cared for the family and probably took over the family business and ran the carpenter shop in Nazareth.

John came preaching a baptism of repentance. His message declared that God's judgment was imminent. The only way people could escape it was to confess their sins and in a deliberate act of repentance turn from their wrongdoing. But surely Jesus had no need to be baptized under those conditions.

Why then was Jesus baptized by John? There seems to be only one answer. These were the people that Jesus came to save. The only way to save them and reveal his love for them was to get alongside of them. Jesus felt the need to identify with them. He got down in the water alongside these men and women and identified with their need.

Jesus also wanted to identify with John both in his message and in his preaching. These seem to be the logical reasons for Jesus' baptism by

John in the Jordan. The historian Josephus describes John's baptism of Jesus as a purification ritual for the body, instead of for forgiveness of sins, as Jesus was the one without sin. Purification rituals were common at the time and were part of the preparation of proselytes.

So, during the Christmas season, we have been celebrating God becoming flesh and experiencing life exactly as we know it. The whole of Jesus' ministry after the baptism and his identification with us is consistent with the incarnation. Jesus did not stand aloof from human involvement. This was God on the loose.

God entered into all areas of life, accepting the hospitality of those whom the religious leaders regarded as contaminated and unfit. He was accused of being the friend of the publicans and sinners. He did this in defiance of the Jewish law which said that good men kept their hands clean and avoided notorious sinners like the plague. Not Jesus. He deliberately went to them and offered God's forgiveness and chance for a new life. This complete identification with sinners begins at Jesus' baptism and continues all the way to the cross.

Following his baptism, Jesus heard the words, "*This is my beloved Son.*" These words are actually taken from a psalm used at the coronation of a king. As the king was crowned and oil poured on his head, the words were said, "*You are my son, today I have begotten you.*" The king became the messiah. So at this moment, Jesus is assured by God that he **is** the Messiah. This was his coronation. Beyond any shadow of doubt, his relationship to God his father is now confirmed with the words, "This is my beloved Son."

The Spirit is the coming sign of the new age, an eschatological harbinger, and will be the driving force behind the Messiah's reign-of-

God ministry. The promised Spirit is for prying open an otherwise closed present. So when the Messiah comes, his baptism will not be about preparation, but empowerment for ministry, for setting the disciples on the way.

There may be moments when Jesus would wonder about what is transpiring in his life. But he could look back upon this moment and draw upon its reality and strength. Although he may have had doubts, he would never doubt his call.

The words that followed, “with whom I am well pleased,” must have had a tremendous effect on him. The words came from a passage from Isaiah, in which Isaiah describes the character and mission of God’s messiah. According to Isaiah, he would be a servant, but more than that, he would be a suffering servant, taking upon himself the consequences and the punishment of the sins of others. This baptism experience gave meaning and direction to Jesus’ public ministry which was about to begin.

At his baptism by John in the river Jordan, the decisive moment, the meaning of Jesus’ life, finally arrived. He left his hometown, his family, and friends, and launched out on that mission for which his whole life was directed. This was his *kairos*, his time. In the original Greek, *kairos*, means a point in time. Jesus’ baptism was his *kairos*, a critical moment, a decisive moment. He is no longer the waiting messiah or the eldest son caring for the family business. In the words of John, he is *“the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”*

What does that baptism of Jesus mean for us today? One thing that stands out is that after a long delay, Jesus’ public ministry finally began. Waiting and patience are never easy. We are used to having things done

immediately. We live in a world of the instant – no delays or waiting. But God is in no hurry. We live and work in the framework of time, and God’s framework is eternity. But, we do not handle delays or waiting very well. Patience is not one of our virtues. Howard Thurmond, author, theologian, philosopher, wrote:

*Always I have an underlying anxiety about things. Sometimes I am in a hurry to achieve my ends and am completely without patience. It is hard for me to realize that some growth is slow, that all processes are not swift. I cannot always discriminate between what takes time to develop and what can be rushed. Because my sense of time is dulled, I measure things in terms of happenings. O, to understand the meaning of perspective that I may do all things with a profound sense of leisure.*

For several years now, mature men and women, already established in a career are entering our seminaries, our national bishop can be included in this group. She was a placement student at our congregation in Kitchener. These mature seminarians, have become tired of climbing that corporate ladder of success and are convinced that there is more to life. At this later period in their lives, they have heard the call to ordained ministry as pastors or deacons or counsellors, as they discover an all-consuming purpose for their lives and express amazement that it took so long for them to discover such a deep sense of fulfilment for their lives. This should remind us all to keep praying and to be patient. God never gives up on us.

Jesus’ baptism, for us today simply put, means that the way we live in the world and the kind of service that we do is the same for us as it was for Jesus. We have been baptized in Christ and into his ministry. The pattern of our life must be one of involvement in the world and identification with people in need. We cannot escape the hard fact that

this will be a costly experience that could lead to suffering. Paul reminds us, “in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

To be baptized into this ministry of Jesus means involvement on our part. It is at this point we can become afflicted with paralysis. We talk a good thing rather than doing a good thing. When discussing his success in sports, Deion Sanders, the flamboyant athlete who played both professional football and baseball said, “*you can’t just talk the talk; you gotta walk the walk.*” Success is more than mere words. We Christians often get caught up by the delusion of glowing words and statements. Many feel that if they have talked about something or approved a definitive report on the problem, then they have done their job.

In our churches we have our endless synods, forums, conferences, and seminars which, on so many occasions, are unrelated to the real world around us. If mere words and meetings would solve the world’s problems, then the church could have accomplished this a long time ago.

We need to do more than “talk the talk.” We’ve got to “walk the walk.” This is the one thing that really impressed me when I was in Tanzania: all the young people, the young volunteers, who weren’t talking church, but were being church;— weren’t talking about their faith, but were living their faith. I met a number of Peace Corps volunteers and many young people from a variety of countries, doing amazing work there in teaching and nursing, medical consulting, and agricultural training. I had the privilege of teaching some of the Home Based Care workers pastoral care, with a translator, of course.

In Petrograd, Russia, in 1916, the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church were involved in a heated discussion regarding liturgy and

vestments while the country was in crisis. At the same time, **in the same building**, the Bolsheviks were planning a revolution. The church leaders were so out of touch that the revolution swept away the Czar and his family, along with the church.

The church is not a place for refuge, to get away from the cares and burdens of modern life. Our baptism calls us to the ministry of involvement as it did Jesus. Through our baptism we are called to bring the might and the power of the Gospel to bear on every aspect of human life. We cannot do that if we stand aloof, unrelated to the world. Jesus challenges us to respond to his call, to join him in his servant work.

In our baptism, we identify with others as Christ has identified with us. We willingly become the hands of Christ to do the work of love and reconciliation. There is no escaping the call of a God who is on the loose in our world. Yet this is good news. Through Jesus, God is on a mission to reclaim the world as God's own, beginning with each of us. Through our baptism into Christ, we, too, are declared God's beloved children, "possessed" by the Holy Spirit, and enlisted for God's mission. God's gracious claim on our lives defines us and gives us purpose.

**Amen.**



## **Prayers of the People**

### **Baptism of our Lord Sunday January 7, 2024**

In the waters of baptism, we were made God's beloved children and have been called to serve one another as we have been served by Christ. Therefore, let us pray for one another and for all people who will not, or cannot, pray for themselves.

Dear heavenly Father, we give you thanks and praise that, in your mercy, you brought us to baptism, and there gave us Jesus' holiness in exchange for our sin and impurity. Thank you for our parents who brought us up in the faith and to baptism. Thank you for those other people whom you used to bring us the gospel, and, thank you for our pastors and teachers in the faith.

We pray for the baptised people of God, that we may cling to your eternal promises in true faith, especially when we experience the trials, temptations, and tribulations of daily living; in times in the wilderness when we experience feeling distanced from you, when our human brokenness and willfulness raise sin and evil within. Strengthen us with your Holy Spirit so that Jesus' victory may be our victory.

We pray for all people, that the good news of Christ will be proclaimed and heard by all people, and that many may come to believe and be baptised. To this end, strengthen, encourage, and support our bishops Susan and Kathy, Anglican Primate Linda Nicolls, all pastors, priests, deacons, church councils, musicians, missionaries, teachers and lay leaders, that they give truthful and loving witness to Christ. Today we uplift Christ Lutheran in Kelowna and Pastor Barbara Groote, and the Shared Mission in the BC Synod.

Have mercy on those in need, those who are struggling because of domestic violence and family breakups, those who are suffering from harmful behaviour and hurtful relationships. Heal, restore, and renew them, loving God.

We pray for the sick, those who are disabled, those in hospital, those undergoing medical treatment, and those facing death. Welcome with your divine pleasure all who have died, that they may have a place in your eternal kingdom. Show all in need the light of the gospel. Provide helpers and care givers and medical resources where needed to heal both body and soul. Be with those among us who are sick or recovering from surgery, including those whom we name in our hearts.

May your heavens open and your Spirit descend upon all for whom we pray, especially the peoples in Israel and Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, and all nations in conflict or at war. We pray for those who are fleeing their homes. Grant them a safe passage. Comfort those who have lost loved ones. Give freedom to those who are still being held hostage. Bring lasting peace to your world.

We pray for all who are facing the devastations of nature: the earthquake in Japan; the potential volcanic eruption in Iceland; the threat of eruption of Mt. St. Helen in Oregon; those facing floods and imminent wintry weather on the eastern coast of Canada and the United States; the continuing drought in parts of western Canada; and countries experiencing severe drought in Africa.

We pray for the young adults from 48 countries who recently attended the 46th European Taizé Youth Meeting in Ljubljana, Slovenia. May the inspired youth carry your light onward and outward.

We are grateful for Efrat Meyer, who is a Jewish Israeli, who is the principal, and Engi Wattad, who is the Palestinian vice principal, of “Hand in Hand”. Hand in Hand is a network of schools with branches in several Israeli cities that enrolls Israeli and Palestinian children to grow in understanding and respect for all. Guide their reconciling work that younger generations may value fostering a greater mutual respect and acceptance for the diversity of all peoples.

We rejoice as newly installed solar panels in a clinic in Mawtawar, India, are saving lives by providing electricity for equipment to support infirm patients in a fossil fuel starved region. We give thanks for the solar technicians who are bringing the light of life, literally and figuratively to people living in this region.

Hear our grateful thanks and praise for your manifestation of presence and grace in our lives and in the lives of others. We give thanks for the gifts and blessings in the lives of those celebrating another birthday, anniversary, and the birth of new life as this New Year begins.

Heavenly Father, you have shown us your love and salvation in the baptism of your Son, and through the gift of baptism in our lives. Send us out into the world to be your loving hands and feet in all the ways you would have us serve. Accept these prayers of your children in the name of Jesus the Christ, who first taught us to pray ...

**Our Father ...**