

Sermon – Mark 1:4-11

Both readings today look at baptism. Baptism by water and baptism by the Holy Spirit.

Two things to note about the book of Mark.

In some versions of the bible, it is the only book that announces itself as a “gospel”
Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

There is no word in the gospel of Mark about the birth or youth of Jesus.

He starts right in with the “good news” of Jesus’ baptism as the beginning of his ministry.

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,^[a] the Son of God,^[b] ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way”^[c]—
³ “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”^[d]

John’s baptism of Jesus was with water, but “Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”
(Mark 1:8).

Mark 1 v 4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

It tells that John’s baptism had two components — repentance and forgiveness (Mark 1:4).
As John explains what took place with Jesus, he adds that the baptism is not only with water, but with the Holy Spirit.

Those elements are still true of baptism today.

The baptismal liturgy marks the end of the old life (Parents and Godparents are asked “Do you renounce the devil, evil and sin ...”) and the beginning of a life lived in God’s grace and forgiveness.

Then John adds a new component with the gift of the Holy Spirit, also part of our baptism service.

Part of the prayer over the water says this:-

We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism.

In it we are buried with Christ in his death.

By it we share in his resurrection.

Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus finished his life on this earth and his followers became the early Christian church, they developed what baptism means for us.

The process starts immediately at Pentecost, when God gives the disciples the gift of the Spirit to carry on this new life in Christ. This is recorded in our second reading:

²He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' ³Then he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They answered, 'Into John's baptism.' ⁴Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.' ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them

After his sermon on Pentecost, the listeners ask the apostle Peter how they should respond, he answers with these same three components of baptism: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"

As we continue in the New Testament, our understanding of what baptism means continues to unfold. It always follows faith — the faith of the person being baptized, or the faith of the parents

Following what Jesus said In baptism we die, as Jesus did, but we are also raised to new life, as Jesus was Romans 6: ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

When I was baptised by immersion at the age of 14 my pastor wrote on my baptismal certificate the verse from Galatians 2 v 20

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Baptism is a very symbolic occasion. It signifies dying with Christ, burial and resurrection.

The baptistry in my church had steps down into the water and the candidates for baptism, and there were 8 of us all from the youth fellowship, stood on one side of the pool to give our testimony. This signified our present life. Then we were led down into the water one at a time, which signified dying with Christ as we were plunged beneath the water and totally immersed that signified burial with Christ, as we came out of the water, we stood on the other side of the pool which signified rising with Christ.

As someone who was bought up in the Baptist tradition, I struggled with infant baptism, but now having worshipped in Harwell for nearly 40 years and bought my own children to be baptised, who then went on to be confirmed taking the baptismal promises made by my husband and I and their God parents, for themselves. Over the years I have had the joy of watching many people of faith bring their children for baptism and go on to bring those children up in the faith that the parents and God parents promised on behalf of the child on the occasion of the baptism.

The issue of infant baptism versus believer's baptism is the fundamental division among churches of the Protestant Reformation. However, both sides agree that baptism is always done in faith — whether the faith of the person being baptized or the faith of those who bring somebody to be baptized.

The meaning of Jesus' baptism for us is that we are baptized *into* something. A fundamental change takes place in baptism, at whatever age. An adult who is baptized after coming to faith is changed, and an infant baptized into a family of faith will be brought up in that faith.

In baptism we become part of Christ's body. Paul writes that "for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13) and that "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

In the letter to the Colossians, we read "you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead (Colossians 2:11,12).

In his last conversation with his disciples, Jesus spoke again about baptism. Matthew 28:19-20 records: -

Jesus told them, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you"