

SERMON

Mark 1:4-11

Jesus Baptises us with the Holy Spirit

Nunawading and Waverley, 10-1-21

Dear friends in Christ

John the Baptist, **dressed in camel hair and eating locusts and wild honey** would never appear on the cover page of Vogue. Actually, as wild as it sounds, John was wearing the prophet's uniform as Elijah did. Like Old Testament prophets, John called people to turn their backs on their wickedness and seek God's forgiveness. He was administering **a baptism of repentance** but the people had to abide by the law and any infractions would condemn them before God.

The trouble was, people remained the same. Don't we see this around us today? We hope 2021 will be an improvement of the previous year but there will still be conflict, political turmoil, lies, greed and unbelief. John understood this and therefore looked forward to the one who would **baptise us by the Holy Spirit**.

Jesus came to the Jordan and was baptised, not because he had sinned and needed to repent but to change John's baptism and make it the sacrament of baptism we have today. We see this so clearly in the description of that wonderful day by the river. The Father spoke and declared Jesus to be **his precious Son whom he greatly loved** and perfect in every way so that **he was pleased with him**. Jesus, our Saviour and Lord was there, obviously and so was the Holy Spirit, who came down on Jesus, **like a dove**. These three persons of the Holy Trinity act today in baptism and are active in our lives. The baptism of the Holy Spirit means that the Holy Spirit is joining us to the Father and the Son so that we belong in a union, sharing in our lives together.

Jesus said that he saw **the heavens being torn apart**. The next time that expression was used was when our Lord died on the cross: **the curtain in the temple tore apart**. The curtain was not simply opened in Holy of Holies only to be closed again but torn apart from top to bottom. The way to the Father now remains open in Christ. In baptism, the Holy Spirit leads us to that opening, where the curtain lies shattered on the ground and we enter the most holy place of God to be presented to him. Isaiah longed for this: **Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down**, he said. And isn't that what our Lord did? The

Saviour came from heaven as a baby to show us that his kingdom is open and everything that belongs there is given to us in baptism.

Baptism asks us the simplest of questions: what do you want to be as a person? Do you want to be close to God? Would you like to be a person of prayer? Could you do with some courage so that you could take a risk in giving and serving the Lord rather than playing it safe? Would you appreciate being free of the desire to blame and be ready to forgive? What about the end of worry and growing in trust of the Lord? Would you like to become a confident witness to the Lord rather than feeling inadequate?

John's baptism could not bring about these things. Six hundred years before John, Jeremiah looked forward to an inner change, of God's word being on our hearts. Joel did, too, and prophesied that the Holy Spirit would enter the young and the old and they would dream dreams and prophesy. They spoke of God's Spirit coming on believers so that a new type of human being would emerge. To be baptised by the Holy Spirit is to be plunged into the Spirit, to rise up from the water, **a new creation**. As Paul said, **the old passes away and a new person comes forward**.

Luther reminds us to keep returning to our baptisms on a daily basis, dying to the old and rising up to live in the power of the Spirit in a totally new way. I think we have a habit of losing sight of this. Each morning we feel the same as we did the previous day. We need to look at the baptised person near us and think, "I see a person alive in the Spirit. That is why you stand at the door of the church as a steward or act like a servant and wash dishes. That is why you teach the children to know the Lord or pray for the sick. These things are a testimony to the Holy Spirit in you. When you love or you speak of Christ to others or support mission work or help our neighbours speak conversational English or you welcome the new comer, you are showing off your baptism. Do you read the Bible and meditate on the word or have Christian conversations? We need to recognise this as the Holy Spirit bubbling away underneath in that watery old baptism.

If we not baptised by the Holy Spirit, would we be doing these things? It is because we are baptised that the Holy Spirit is doing these things in us. Let us, then, rejoice in what he has done to us.