



# Sunday Reflection

## Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 9 January 2022

# Baptism of the Lord

*Today we celebrate the Baptism of Christ and the affirmation he receives that he is indeed God's beloved Son. Let us give God the glory and worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.*

## Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

**"When Jesus... had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened." Luke 3:21**

### An Illustration to set the scene

What would have happened in the Garden of Eden if, instead of blaming each other, the serpent and Adam and Eve had been honest and taken responsibility for their own behaviour?

How different things might have been if they'd met God *"walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze"*.

They might have knelt before God in their physical and spiritual nakedness and said,

*"We did a very wrong thing. We gave in to temptation and disobeyed you. We ate the fruit which you forbade us to eat and now we know what's right and what's wrong in your sight. We're so sorry and we wish we hadn't been so weak."*

Perhaps God would have forgiven them, made garments for them and talked with them about how they would live together with God now that they knew about good and evil, right and wrong.

But Adam and Eve didn't own up and say sorry.

They disobeyed God and then lied, fearing God's judgment upon them.

Without repentance they could not receive forgiveness, but instead heard God's judgement and sentence of exile from the garden to which we can never return.

Commenting on today's Gospel reading, one writer, Fred B. Craddock, says that "*when repentance and forgiveness are available, judgement is good news*".

With this in mind, let's think about the story of the baptism of Christ.

## **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us the story of John the Baptist proclaiming baptism for the forgiveness of sins, saying that he would be followed by someone more powerful than him, and God's Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove, with an affirmation that Jesus is God's beloved Son.

In Luke's version, however, there are two important elements not included in Matthew or Mark.

The first is John's proclamation that the "*one who is more powerful*" will bring judgement, will separate the wheat from the chaff, keeping the wheat and burning the chaff.

The people who were speculating about whether John himself might be the messiah are now wondering whether the “*one who is more powerful*” is in fact the chosen one of God, since the longed-for messiah was expected to come as judge as well as saviour.

For these people John’s baptism of repentance is indeed good news in the face of imminent judgement and its consequences.

Luke also wants us to see Jesus as a **man of prayer**.

Elsewhere in his Gospel he writes about Jesus **praying at important moments in his life and ministry**; before calling his twelve disciples, before asking them who they believe he is, before teaching them how to pray, and during his last days in Jerusalem.

In this passage, Luke says that it is **while Jesus is praying** that heaven opens and the Spirit of God descends, bestowing on Jesus the blessing of his heavenly Father and, with that blessing, the Messiah’s right to judge and forgive sins when there is heartfelt repentance.

### **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

At his baptism the Holy Spirit gives Jesus the confirmation of something that has always been true: **he is God’s beloved Son**.

The Spirit also empowers him for his ministry.

We too are given the assurance at our baptism that we are God’s beloved children - daughters and sons.

Sometimes we may not hear that clearly, or perhaps we cannot believe that we are lovable and precious to God.

When we forget this, we can remember that immediately after his baptism Jesus spent a long and testing time in the wilderness when perhaps, as he did on the cross, he felt abandoned by his Father.

**He would have needed to hold on in prayer** to his experience of affirmation and blessing when he was tempted to doubt it.

**When we feel alone and lost in the wilderness we too need to hold on in prayer to the times when we've been affirmed and blessed.**

*And we are called to give assurances of God's love to others who are struggling with their faith.*

We are also called to proclaim the good news to all who judge themselves harshly, so that in Jesus we see love and forgiveness, because we are indeed precious in his sight and he wants to keep us safe, like wheat gathered into the granary.

**"When Jesus... had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened." *Luke 3:21***

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**