

St James' Church, Weybridge

The Baptism of Christ – Yr A 2026

Today's Readings

First Reading Acts 10:34-43

Peter speaks to the people, telling them about Jesus whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit, bringing him power to do good, heal the oppressed and forgive the sins of all who believe in him.

Gospel Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus is baptised in the river Jordan by John and receives the Holy Spirit and is declared to be 'my Son, the beloved'.

HOMILY *"Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness."* (Matthew 3:15)

John the Baptist is a fascinating and charismatic preacher and in Matthew's Gospel, we find more about him and his prophetic message, calling people to repent and return to God's ways. His proclamation is damning and judgement is imminent, as he baptises those who come to him in the river Jordan. He made quite an impact!

Imagine someone appearing on the banks of the River Wey, with such a dramatic message, calling us to repent! Would we flock to hear them? Back then people came from all over Judea and the surrounding country to hear his message. The crowd is only the start, for there is someone else on their way, much greater than he, who will baptise them with the Holy Spirit – and fire!

Fire is an important image in scripture, often suggesting God's very presence. You may recall the burning bush that was not physically consumed, and yet contained the very presence of God, the ground holy! When the Israelites fled Egypt by night, the scriptures describe a pillar of fire to light the way – God leading them from slavery to freedom.

With John the Baptist, the last of the prophets and a link between the old covenant and the new relationship brought about by Jesus, we find a transition. As always, Matthew's Gospel, steeped in Hebrew mystery, places John as the introduction to Jesus and his ministry that follows. So, the first recorded act of Jesus' adult life is baptism, by John in the river Jordan, and John recognizes this very special individual. And even more than that we find something not found in the other synoptic Gospel accounts, which is John's apparent reluctance to do it.

"John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented." (Matthew 3:14, 15)

John feels he needs the permission of Jesus to baptize him – and in recording this, Matthew the Evangelist is showing the superiority and authority of Jesus, but none the less, consent is important – John and Jesus must agree. Perhaps Matthew chooses to emphasize this because he wants to build a narrative of servant-kingship. It seems to me that Jesus' baptism displays his humility; submitting to baptism a foreshadowing of his role as the servant-king. A later example being our Lord's washing of his disciples' feet on the first Maundy Thursday, although that is found in John's Gospel, another moment

of symbolic washing. And the water and blood that poured from Jesus' side when he was hanging, dead upon the cross.

As Jesus emerged from the water after his baptism, all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) with one voice declare the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove from heaven, and a voice is heard from proclaiming, *"This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:17) In Matthew's Gospel everyone sees a dove and hears God's voice. The starting gun has been set-off and Christ is proclaimed – this is a defining moment, marking the start of our Lord's ministry. He is the Servant King who saves.

In baptism, we too emerge from the water as beloved children of God, refreshed, renewed and washed clean, ready for a new life following Jesus' example of servant ministry. We too are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, strengthened, renewed as we learn to submit to God in obedience. That is why in the liturgy we promise to 'submit to Christ as Lord.'

I was baptised on Easter Day in 1976 – a baby, and like many of us I can't remember my baptism, as in our tradition we are often baptised as infants. The Church of England offers the rite of confirmation in which we affirm for ourselves the vows made for us at our baptism, as we pray for the outpouring of the Spirit, to rest upon us and to transform us and our lives. Even after we have been confirmed, sometimes many years later as older adults we can re-affirm that commitment should we wish. But to do this we too have questions to answer. Our Faith Confirmed programme is just such an opportunity, to re-affirm our commitment to the servant king who is our example of holy living and humility.

In today's Gospel we catch a glimpse of the servant ministry of Christ to be revealed across this year in Matthew's Gospel; which is love in action! The challenge for all who are baptised and all those who have experienced a spiritual moment at any time must be to reflect upon the life and ministry of Jesus, his priorities, his humility and allow God's very presence to transform ourselves, that we too may mirror the values of Christ our Lord in word and action. Amen.

Father Damian Harrison-Miles, January 2026.