

**SERMON – 12/1/25**  
**'The Baptism of Jesus'**

Luke 3:15-22

“John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.” (Luke 3:18)

It's the time for new beginnings. 2025 is still in its opening days and we are full of hope and enthusiasm for what lies ahead of us. This past week has seen the start of the new thing which is Kinross-shire Parish Church with our united service last Sunday morning at Fossoway, the Service of Union here on Thursday evening, and the first meeting of the united Kirk Session yesterday morning. Although I wouldn't say no to the opportunity to lie down in a darkened room for a day or two, the potential that is there for the advance of God's Kingdom in our area at this time spurs me on with renewed enthusiasm, and I hope it does you too.

It's the time for new beginnings and it's very fitting that one of the first things we are doing as a church this year is to celebrate the sacrament of baptism, which marks the new beginning that all of us are called to take by putting our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In these opening weeks of the year we are in what is known as the season of Epiphany during which we focus our thoughts on the different ways in which Jesus was revealed to be the Son of God. Last Sunday we were thinking about the star that led the Magi to Bethlehem to find the newborn King. This morning we have read about the preaching of John the Baptist and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at His baptism. And in the weeks to come we will be looking at the time Jesus revealed His glory at a wedding by turning water into wine, His preaching in His home town of Nazareth, His call to the first disciples on the shores of Galilee, Luke's lesser known version of the Sermon on the Mount, sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain, and then the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain top.

In our reading this morning we have met a variety of people – John the Baptist and the crowds who went out to him in the wilderness, King Herod and Jesus Himself and I want to reflect

with you on what is revealed about Jesus to each of us this morning and what He is asking of each of us at this time of new beginnings.

First of all we are told that the people of Israel were 'waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.' It is around 27 or 28 AD and there is a widespread spiritual longing in the nation – a dissatisfaction with organised religion and a yearning for deeper spiritual realities. The context is not so very different from our own where the general population has largely turned its back on the faith of our forefathers and has no time for the institutional church but where increasing numbers of people are looking for meaning in life, especially amongst a younger generation who have not been inoculated against Christianity by a childhood experience of faith that was what the apostle Paul calls 'form of godliness but denying its power'.

Onto this first century stage strides John the Baptist, a latter-day Old Testament prophet, declaring 'Thus says the Lord' and finding an audience who respond to his call to repentance. He preaches an uncompromising message, calling a spade a spade as he declares the judgement of God upon those who will not turn their lives to Him, but offering good news of sweet grace to those who are willing to acknowledge their sin and to turn around in their tracks. He is at pains to point out that he himself is not the one they need but that One will come after him who is more powerful and who will baptise not with water but with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

By contrast with the crowds of ordinary folk, King Herod takes particularly badly to John's preaching, because John is very pointed in telling the King that he needs to repent of marrying his own half-brother's wife. Herod not only refuses to heed John's preaching but later puts John in prison and ultimately has him executed. The same message can be heard very differently by different people and while one person can respond with faith and find life in all its fulness, the same preaching can lead another person to reject the Gospel completely.

Which prompts me to ask the question of all of you gathered here this morning. How do you receive the message that John

preaches here? He's proclaiming that the Messiah is coming – someone whose shoelaces he's not even worthy to untie, someone who will pour out the Holy Spirit with fire in the same way that he is pouring water over the people who come to be baptised by him in the River Jordan. And he's proclaiming that with the Messiah will come both grace and judgement.

In Christ it is also my calling to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, which involves declaring unreservedly that all of us have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God and that all of us are deserving of condemnation, but that if we are willing to acknowledge our shortcomings and repent of our sin, we will find in Jesus the healing and peace of forgiveness and the offer of a new life. That is the Gospel of Christ and I know that many of you will respond warmly to that message, tears welling in your eyes as you recognise your unworthiness but find yourselves ready to humble yourselves and to rejoice as you experience the reality of sins forgiven and the new life of the Spirit. But I also know that others will bristle at my use of such language and will kick against the suggestion that you are anything other than a thoroughly good person or that anything might need to change in your lifestyle. I wouldn't be the first preacher to get a good tongue lashing at the church door or the silent treatment from someone who decides that they are not going to sit under the ministry of the Word any more.

What are you taking from this morning's message? Is it the clanging cymbals of judgement and conviction or is it sweet sound of amazing grace. The words spoken are precisely the same; the difference is the spirit in which they are heard and received. Please God there will be such a move of the Spirit of God in our time that just as when John the Baptist began to preach that the Kingdom of God was at hand and prepared to introduce the Lord Jesus Christ to the world, people would draw near in expectation and wonder and come to know the One to whom all true preaching points.

And it is to Him – to Christ – that we turn as we close, for we also read the two short verses in which Luke describes the baptism of Jesus. As the queues of people waited in the desert heat to reach the river where John was baptising those who responded to his

message an anonymous figure stood among them. The other Gospels suggest that when he saw that it was Jesus who was next in line John was reluctant to baptise Him because he discerned that uniquely in the world this man was without sin and had no need to repent. But in taking on our humanity Jesus wanted to identify with us in every way and to show the way of full submission to God. As Jesus prayed there in the river, the epiphany came – somehow heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove and the Father's voice was heard declaring His love for His Son and the pleasure He took in Him. What an intimate moment in this most public of scenes – Father, Son and Holy Spirit rejoicing in one another.

Which takes me to my second question – what is being revealed to us here today as we gather at this place of baptism? Here we too baptise with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in faith that God the Holy Trinity is at work here just as He was at the Jordan that day nearly 2000 years ago. Here may Adelaide and each one of us know heaven opening and the Holy Spirit descending upon us. Here may Adelaide and each one of us know the love and pleasure of our heavenly Father as we submit ourselves to Him.

As Jesus has identified with you in sinful humanity, will you identify with Him as we celebrate baptism this morning and receive, through trusting in Him and in His death in your place at Calvary, the promised forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the fire of God for life eternal.

It's a time for new beginnings and I pray that today might see a new beginning for you as an individual, a new beginning for us as a congregation, and a new beginning for this Kinross-shire community as the Spirit of God brings revival and gift of faith to young and old alike and a turning to God the like of which we have never seen in our lifetime.

“John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.” And God in Christ did the rest. May it be so for His name's sake.