

Matthew's weekly musing 8th January 2021

The Baptism of Christ

When I'm stumped for inspiration I often turn to the suite of pictures I bought near the RC cathedral in Nairobi.



So I looked this one up, and my prayer was answered. "Lord help me. Lord what would you like me to say?"

The answer was something like, "Well why do you think I was baptised?"

So the musing began.

First I realised I had to be careful about what baptism meant then. It was a baptism of repentance: the Greek conveys a sense of *turning*. Turning *towards* God and his expectations and turning *away* from the stuff which has distracted me.

John the Baptist was infamous amongst many in Jerusalem for declaring their need for turning. They were comfortable in the directions they were going in life. They didn't like the idea of changing to a more Godly and God-wards direction for life.

Clearly Jesus didn't need to be baptised for that reason. He was already living God-wards and no amount of fake news was going to cloud this perception.

At first John refused to baptise Jesus. Instead he said Jesus ought to be baptising him. "Between us, I'm the one who needs to be more God-wards." Jesus' reply indicated that there was more going on than John knew, and they must stay within God's plan (see Matthew ch 3).

Then I think there are two reasons for Jesus standing in the Jordan River with water being poured over him.

One reason points to his divinity.

10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

This was the beginning of God's putting into place his new way of interacting with humanity, with you, with me. Because Jesus is God's Son, then God can be known as Father. What a terrific invitation! I can call God 'Father' and discover I can trust Him in new and warming ways. If Jesus is Son and so divine, then I can trust Him in ways I cannot trust any human being. I need someone to trust absolutely, so this is definitely good news. (John's gospel is a long exploration of this insight.)

A second reason points to his humanity.

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

Jesus the human was not going to have an easy time. He was going to experience life in the same way we do, facing many tough and costly choices. The forty days in the wilderness saw Him facing up to greed, complacency and ambition. With his powers he could have exploited those motivations far beyond any other person, then or now.

So what do I take from this?

Well thank heavens Jesus is there for me, and thank heavens Jesus knows what it is like to be me. Human me.

What might you take from this?

Perhaps there is something to do with beginnings? Jesus knew to begin a key phase of his life in the presence of God. He sought the Father's help and the Holy Spirit came in a way he couldn't miss. It is probably a good idea for you (and me) to copy Jesus and bring all our beginnings into the Father's presence.

We're used to the idea of bringing a small child into the Father's presence in baptism, but that is only the first beginning for the child. The son or daughter will need to come into the Father's presence frequently, otherwise the relationship with the Father will fade.

Amen.