

BAPTISM OF CHRIST (Epiphany 1st Sunday).

Mark 1.4-11

A Sermon by Shilo Varughese (Ordinand in Training)

Today we celebrate the feast of the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ. This feast is always linked with the feast of Epiphany, which we celebrated last week.

The Christmas season begins with a silent night, but the Christmas season ends with God's voice echoing across the sky; saying to the world how the God the father is pleased with his Son.

All four gospels emphasize the Baptism of Christ.

John's baptism was only for repentance and he said, the one who comes after him would baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

Why did Jesus Christ, the Messiah with no sin, who doesn't need any repentance, and who has the authority to baptize people with the Holy Spirit, want to receive baptism from John the Baptizer? What does this baptism signify to us?

Even John was confused and tried to defend this by saying, Jesus, I need to be baptized by you and why do you come to me?

As we see in Matthew's gospel Jesus answered, let it be now... to fulfil all righteousness.

So, firstly the baptism of Christ through John the Baptizer, was a step taken by the Son of man to fulfil all righteousness for humankind.

Heaven was closed as we see in Genesis 3 after the first fall when God sent the man out of the garden of Eden. Garden of Eden is symbolic of heaven itself.

In today's gospel, St Mark tells us at Jesus' baptism, heaven was torn apart before him.

Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 5, portrays Christ as a new Adam. Through Christ, the second Adam, the door of the heaven is opened for humankind, which was closed by the disobedience of the first Adam.

By receiving baptism from John the baptizer, Christ shows His humility and solidarity towards humanity to symbolize the beginning of His mission to restore the lost fellowship in Eden.

As heaven was opened before Christ, at our baptism heaven was open before us too, and we have begun our journey towards that heaven.

On the feast of the baptism of our Lord Jesus, we ask ourselves, have we deviated from that path, have we taken some other path instead?

Will we reach the heaven which was opened before us on the day of our baptism, if we continue the journey the way we are doing now?

So, the first reason for baptism of Christ by John was to fulfil all righteousness.

Now we are going to look into the second reason.

By taking baptism from John, Christ revealed His identity to the world.

This is one of the great Trinitarian passages of the New Testament. Here the Holy Spirit and God the Father both bear witness to the Son.

As in the book of Genesis, God created everything by His word, and here on Jordan's banks, God speaks His word again: You are my Son, the Beloved; with You I am well pleased.

Genesis also says the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Here on Jordan's banks, again the Spirit is brooding over the waters, as John witnessed, while Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

So, it was fitting that, as a very commencement of God's new work of re-creation, there would be the same operation of the whole Godhead.

Through Baptism each one of us is united within the mystical body of Christ. We accept the headship of Christ within our life.

Once we are within this fellowship, within the mystical body, Christ shares his identity with us.

We become a son or daughter of God the Father through Christ.

Once we are within this mystical body through baptism, Christ is also inviting us to take part in the other sacrament, the Holy Eucharist to continue our journey with God by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Our identity in Christ as a baptized community is also a call to build bridges between God and the world to restore fellowship, the same way Christ has shown us a life that looks towards reconciliation, building bridges, repairing shattered relationships.

The season of Epiphany is the time for us to reflect on how we nurture our born-again life in Christ.

John the Baptizer, began his public ministry in the wilderness. That wilderness led him to suffer martyrdom for Christ.

The gospel of Mark chapter 1 verse 12 says, God's Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, after baptism.

We might experience the wilderness in our own life in different ways while we continue our journey towards heaven.

We have all walked through the wilderness since the beginning of last year.

The year we went through sickness; the year we lost our loved ones; the year we lost our sense of security; the year we felt lonely and isolated.

We, the baptized people are not exempt from this wilderness. Christ, who knows the way of this wilderness is saying to us, my children, you are not alone on this journey. My grace is sufficient for you.

May we be inspired by the Holy Spirit to reaffirm our baptismal vows.

May the Holy Spirit invite you to come with us in this fellowship, if anyone is listening who are not yet baptized.

Let our celebration, the feast of the baptism of our Lord, inspire us to remember that heaven is opened for us at our baptism and we are on a journey by the guidance of the Holy Spirit towards that heaven.

Let's prepare ourselves to hear that voice always: You are my son; you are my daughter; you are my beloved; with you I am well pleased.

Amen.