

The Baptism of Our Lord 2021

Today Epiphany continues with the Baptism of Jesus. Let's take it all in...

Why does Jesus get baptized if He is without sin, being God Himself?

What difference does our own baptism really make?

And, with Genesis still on our minds from today's first reading, what's it all got to do with Original Sin, Adam, Eve and the apple?

Why does Jesus get baptized? By being baptized, He makes Baptism a thing. Baptism was already a ritual washing, but Jesus *hallows* the waters of Baptism. He takes a *sign* and makes it a *real symbol*, a ritual reality of a heavenly truth.

He will do the same with the Passover. Like Baptism, He doesn't dismiss the Passover, He completes it – offering His *own* flesh and blood on the cross as the Lamb of God and giving us a ritual reality of it in the Eucharist via the Last Supper, so we can be there too.

So in the light of Christ's Baptism and the Paschal Mystery **what difference does our own baptism make?**

In baptism, as we go under the water (a dunk or a trickle) we ritually die and are buried (the water like soil). Then as the water falls away from our faces we rise to share in the Resurrection life. At your baptism you were made part of Jesus's life – you have already died, beaten death and risen to eternal life. So when you face death again, that story has already been told.

This ritual, as with all *true* ritual, makes real what it shows. We are changed.

So what about our third question, original sin? Bishop Rowan Williams says that original sin is simply the realisation that we human beings can't do this on our own. Deep within us, part of our nature, is the impulse to be our own little gods. To do it alone, autonomous and independent. This is what got Adam and Eve into such trouble with fruit and veg, and fundamentally lies at the heart of every disaster to befall men and women ever since.

It's in me and you, and it's nonsense. Thanks to baptism I know that ultimately that instinct to 'go it alone' deep within me no longer defines me. I am a child of God, at home in His everlasting arms, a part of Christ's Body.

Because of Baptism, that is now who we *really* are.

It's so good to hear those words of Genesis again and remember that creation is *good*, made for good, and by God's goodness (not any of our scheming) destined for good.

And that's where today's three questions come together. What does Jesus's and our baptisms mean? And the real point about original sin. They all meet in the person of Jesus: what He has done, what He continues to do through the Holy Spirit through the Church, and *who we are* in Him.

He is the ground of our being – behind, beside and before us.

A retired priest friend once spoke of an even older priest who was the grumpiest most misanthropic old so-and-so. He was dying (much to the quiet relief of the clergy team of the parish). My friend went to visit him and found him totally unlike himself...sat up in his hospital bed – still dying, clearly – but eyes bright and he just smiled and said 'I'm going to meet the Master. I'm going to meet the

Master'. That says it all – who we *are*, where we've come from and where we're going, thanks to our baptism.

He didn't die, the old priest. He recovered and went back to being a complete pain for a few more years, but that's not the point.

Jesus. In all these different ways, it is the person of Christ and our personal relationship with Him that matters. Not infantilised or domesticated or weird. Just Him and us, and nothing – wherever we are, not even lockdown – can get in the way of that.

This relationship, begun in baptism, can only be undertaken by those who are genuine. It requires time, given to simply being with God in prayer, reading Christ's words in the Gospels, opening our hearts to the enormity of *who* we receive in Holy Communion, and to committing to living out our baptismal promises – look them up at home in a Prayer Book or online.

And if you're wondering about Baptism for you or for another, or Confirmation this year, or reaffirming vows made long ago please contact one of the clergy and we can do it together this Spring.

In the Baptism of Jesus, God speaks to every single one of us: 'you are my child, whom I love, in you I am well pleased'. What response will we make?