

I'll begin by asking 'how many of you have been baptised'?

And how many remember the date of their baptism without looking it up?

I wonder in the list of significant life events or things of importance, where does baptism sit for everyone?

I know, for my husband nothing beats West Bromwich Albion winning promotion to the premier league.

How much does our baptism mean to us?

All four of the Gospels wrote about Jesus' baptism, and in the early Church Jesus' baptism held more importance than his birthday.

Nowadays, it's the opposite way round.

Christians today celebrate Christmas as an amazingly special day every year with lots of attached festivities.

And year after year, most of us enjoy celebrating our own birthdays.

But very few people celebrate their baptism.

Our baptism quickly becomes an event of the past; photos of which we have in some album, or computer drive somewhere.

It soon becomes just a distant memory.

The first Sunday after Epiphany is the day when Christians around the world celebrate Jesus' baptism, a day when we're encouraged to reflect on and consider our own baptism.

But do we?

This morning, I will share with you my reflections on why it's so important to remember and celebrate our baptism

1. It Defines our "Real" ID

When Jesus rose from the River Jordan, the Heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and God the Father spoke over Him. The Holy three, all present in one place.

And God says "this is my beloved, in whom I am well pleased". God 'spills the beans' and Jesus' unique divine identity as His Son is revealed.

Jesus' true identity is no longer a secret

The Spirit descending on Jesus signals the new creation that can be found through him and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist offered a baptism of repentance, in preparation for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah, who would baptise with spirit and fire.

It symbolised the washing away of the old, leaving a new creation in us.

In modern life, people's identity often depends on social media likes, career achievements, appearance, or relationship status, all of which are temporary. It can feel like we must earn our worth or "fix" ourselves to be acceptable

Baptism reminds us that the words spoken over Jesus by his Father, are words for us too. It reminds us that our worth should be rooted in God's unchanging nature and unfailing love and not the things of this world.

We are all chosen and dearly loved by God and when we choose to follow Christ, we receive a new identity, a "new passport" as a citizen of God's kingdom. A new identity rooted in & through Christ.

God sees the new person we are in Christ, and our past no longer defines us.

2. It's our "In-Case-of-Emergency" Anchor

Martin Luther famously wrote "I have been baptized" on his table when he felt overwhelmed by doubt or depression. Not only does baptism help us define our true identity but it's also a reminder that we're never on our own.

Imagine John's face! "You're the Messiah, I should be baptised by you!"

But it was the right thing to do.

The Jordan River was, and still is commonly known as 'the muddy river'.

Jesus' baptism was an act of radical solidarity. Jesus starts as he means to go on. In this moment and throughout his future ministry Jesus doesn't stand above the crowd; he stands amongst them. Immersing himself in the messiness, the struggles, and the hopes of everyone in the river. In that moment Jesus demonstrated his solidarity with us; demonstrated his willingness to get down and dirty, to walk alongside us in our journey of life and faith.

Life changes, the ups and downs of life happen, but our "baptismal status" is unwavering. The grace of baptism remains a standing invitation to return to God's family whatever our situation.

3. It's our Spiritual "Birthday" Party

Why not celebrate our "baptismal anniversary" just like a birthday. It's the date we are officially welcomed into the "Body of Christ". The wonderful community of believers across the world - a family that transcends time and geography. Through our baptism we become members of a global army of light.

Baptism reminds us that the invitation and welcome God offers, isn't a private one just for the few, but a public promise for the many. What a wonderful party to be a part of.

And as part of the body of Christ, we join in God's mission. Just as Jesus' baptism launched his public ministry, our baptism is when our own public ministry begins. Baptism reminds us we have a purpose: to live as a light and a servant in our community.

Later in his ministry, Jesus commissions his followers to 'baptise all the nations. Remembering our baptism recommissions us for the work God has planned for us in the year ahead.

Let's not allow our baptism to be a dusty memory in a photo album.

The birth of our spiritual life is worth celebrating

We shouldn't just **have** a baptism. Its important we **live** our baptism every day!

I leave you with the words of the Pastoral Introduction from the Baptism Service Liturgy.

Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which continues for the rest of our lives, the first step in response to God's love. For all involved, particularly the candidates but also parents, godparents and sponsors, it is a joyful moment when we rejoice in what God has done for us in Christ, making serious promises and declaring the faith. The wider community of the local church and friends welcome the new Christian, promising support and prayer for the future. Hearing and doing these things provides an opportunity to remember our own baptism and reflect on the progress made on that journey, which is now to be shared with this new member of the Church.

The service paints many vivid pictures of what happens on the Christian way. There is the sign of the cross, the badge of faith in the Christian journey, which reminds us of Christ's death for us. Our 'drowning' in the water of baptism, where we believe we die to sin and are raised to new life, unites us to Christ's dying and rising, a picture that can be brought home vividly by the way the baptism is administered. Water is also a sign of new life, as we are born again by water and the Spirit. This reminds us of Jesus' baptism. And as a sign of that new life, there may be a lighted candle, a picture of the light of Christ conquering the darkness of evil. Everyone who is baptized walks in that light for the rest of their lives.

As you pray for the candidates, picture them with yourself and the whole Church throughout the ages, journeying into the fullness of God's love.

Jesus said, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' *John 10.10*

Amen

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