

Epiphany #2 – The Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3 v 1 – 17

Context:

The season of Epiphany is all about God revealing to us the true identity of Jesus – who he is and what he came to do. Last week we saw the Magi travelling hundreds of miles to pay homage to the child Jesus because they somehow recognised that he had been born King of the Jews in fulfilment of God's ancient promises. Today we fast forward around 30 years to the beginning of the preparatory and prophetic ministry of Jesus' cousin, John, and we witness a very surprising encounter between these two great men. Let's join the expectant and curious crowds by the Jordan River.

Observation:

1. Where was John and what was he doing in v 1?
2. What was the gist of his sermons according to v 2?
3. Where in the Old Testament does Matthew see John's ministry being prophesied according to v 3 and what did that prophecy say about him?
4. How is John described in v 4?
5. How popular was John's ministry and what happened to those who came to him (v 5-6)?
6. Who did John address in particular in v 7a?
7. What did he call them and what was his question in the second half of v 7?
8. What challenge did he give them in v 8 and what warning did he lay down in v 9?
9. What solemn words did he utter in v 10?
10. How did John contrast himself and Jesus in v 11?
11. What did he say Jesus would do in v 12?
12. Who then came to John in v 13 and why?
13. What was John's initial reaction according to v 14?
14. What was Jesus' response in v 15?
15. What do we see and what do we hear in v 16-17?

Meaning:

1. What do you think John meant by '*the kingdom of heaven has come near*' (v 1) and why did he call people to repentance (v 1), confession of sins and baptism (v 6)?
2. In what sense do you think John was '*preparing the way for the Lord*' in fulfilment of Isaiah's ancient prophecy (v 3) – see also Isaiah 40 v 1-11 for some context.
3. The description of John in v 4 reminds us of Elijah (see 2 Kings 1 v 8) – why do you think Matthew includes this detail in his description of John (see Malachi 3 v 1-4 & 4 v 5-6 for clues)?
4. Why do you think John's preaching was so popular in terms of drawing great crowds (v 5)?
5. Why do you think John was so verbally vicious to the Pharisees and Sadducees (v 7) and what do you think was the '*coming wrath*' he spoke of – (see Malachi 4 v 1)?
6. What do you think it means to produce '*fruit in keeping with repentance*' (v 8)?
7. What do you think is John's point in v 9?

8. Putting together John's words in v 10-12, how might we be both warned and encouraged by his preaching? – (see also the warning and encouragement in Malachi's prophecy about John's ministry in Malachi 4 v 1-2).
9. Why do you think John tried to deter Jesus from being baptised (v 14)?
10. If baptism was for sinners and Jesus was NOT a sinner, why did he insist of being baptised by John (v 15)?
11. What do you think was the significance of the sights and sounds of v 16-17? – (see Isaiah 11 v 1-9 & 61 v 1-3 for clues).

Application:

1. To what extent do you think preaching and evangelism today should include warnings of God's wrath and judgement as well as forgiveness and blessing?
2. What kinds of fruit should we expect to see in our lives if we have repented and put our trust in Jesus? For some examples see Romans 12 v 1-21, 1 Corinthians 13 v 1-7, Galatians 5 v 13-26, Ephesians 4 v 17-32, Colossians 3 v 12-17.

Pray:

- Thank God for the ministry of John.
- Pray that you might produce fruit in keeping with repentance.
- Pray for people you know who don't yet know Jesus.