

Genesis 1:1-8; Mark 1:4-11

Parting waters ; The Baptism of Jesus;

God parts waters ... and he does so at the most *key* moments in Biblical history. Our reading from Genesis this morning, about the Creation, is just the first in a series, of waters being parted by God. In the Bible, water is the symbol of the Holy Spirit: God in action. Water is powerful: offering the possibility of redemption; to cleanse, to wash away all sin and guilt, opening the way to a new state and fresh possibilities.

It's noticeable that each time God has parted waters, he has also called his people into something new; something better; a new beginning.

Think of the time God parted the waters was when he brought his people out of slavery and bondage in Egypt, bringing them freedom and security.

Or the time he parted the waters, for **the Hebrews to cross into the Promised Land;** a land where **they would begin a whole new chapter in their story,** a chapter that would be filled with goodness, abundance, and peace.

He parted the waters for Elijah and Elisha. When Elijah knew that his time to meet God had come, and he and Elisha crossed over the Jordan on dry land, God parted the waters 'to one side and to the other' (2 Kings 2:8). Elijah went on to ride into heaven in a flaming chariot.

But the first time **God separated the waters was at the beginning** of Creation. We heard this in our reading this morning from Genesis, ... God's wind came and swept over face of the waters, the waters of chaos, and He called into being light. God went on to create earth, trees and animals, and lastly human beings. This was the beginning of *our story* as children of God.

Moving on from the beginning of time, right forward to the Baptism of Jesus by John, as described dramatically by Mark in our Gospel reading:

‘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. And a voice came from heaven “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased”’

Here, the water brings the gift of the Holy Spirit

Think what this moment might have meant to Jesus.

Was it the forgiveness of sin? But was he not free from sin? (although we know He had human qualities – he experienced pain, hunger, compassion, despair .. it is hard to imagine Jesus as sinful) Surely the babe whose birth we have so recently celebrated, was not that of a ‘normal’ child, but the Son of God, *free from sin*.

For Jesus, was it the assurance of God’s words “You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased”? Was it the gift of the Holy Spirit that gave Him the strength and power to set forth on His ministry? ... to teach, to carry out works of healing and eventually to bear the weight of the cross?

Jesus’ ministry was to be *challenging*, but when things didn’t go His way, he wouldn’t be alone. He would not be *protected* from trouble, but he *would* have God’s blessing and the gift of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus’ ministry and accomplishments as portrayed in the Gospels continue to be an inspiration to us over two thousand years later.

As we think about the Baptism of Jesus, and the story that followed, we may be drawn to think about **our own baptism**, and the impact it may have on us.

Whether we have been baptized as infants or later in life or perhaps it is something some are still considering, where does baptism take us? Physically it’s only a small splash of water, but it does mark a whole new beginning -- of forgiveness, of the presence of God’s Spirit, of our union with Jesus, and our becoming part of the world-wide Christian church.

Does Jesus’ baptism by John, **call and inspire us to follow His lead?**

It makes me wonder as we live out our lives, as Christians, where *our own* baptisms have taken us so far and where they will lead us in future.

What will our story be, as baptized Christians? When we are gone, what will we have accomplished as Christians? Will *we* have been an inspiration to others, a model to follow? Will people be moved, or perhaps their lives transformed by what we have done?

I am not talking about changing the world, but living out our lives as Christian disciples.

Have we used our God-given gifts wisely?

Have we lived out our lives with love, compassion; put others before ourselves, consoled the broken hearted? Transformed the lives of others, even through small acts? Brought wholeness in body, mind or spirit, through prayer?

Of course, baptism is more than an individual act. In baptism, we are baptized 'into one body'. ... the body of Christ working as a people, responding to God's call *together* and bringing Christ to the community in which we live ... whether we are called to contribute to the food bank, help run the night shelter, work on a pastoral team visiting the house bound or simply holding out our hands to people in need .

As we celebrate Christ's baptism today, and recall Jesus as he sets forth in ministry, may we be stirred to live out God's calling through our baptism as individuals and the body of Christ?

Amen