

Sermon: Baptism in the Holy Spirit - Mark 1: 4-11; Acts 2.36-42

Dear Father, we thank you for the gracious gift of baptism. May we never forget the preciousness of having been marked as Christ's own forever and may we always strive to honour your call to:

Live as a disciple of Christ: fight the good fight,
finish the race, keep the faith. Amen

The Fruits of Baptism

Today we joyfully celebrate the baptism of Lenny Eisenhower. Clearly from Jesus' own baptism and those of many other adults referred to in the bible it is essential to baptize new adult believers. However, for centuries many Christian denominations have also conducted infant baptism.

The Anglican Book of Common Prayer provides for both types of baptism. It does so on the basis of the long-standing tradition inherited from the early Church and enshrined formally in our church in 1562.

Many churches, including ours, also believe that it is valid that sponsors of an infant renounce sin and profess faith on their behalf. This is done on the critical understanding that the child will be supported by their family and the Church community to grow to a personal commitment to Christ. In this way the person will be able to make an informed decision at the time of their confirmation.

This, I suggest, is a true honouring of what is known as the Great Commission in the gospel of Matthew. In Chapter 28 Jesus calls on us not to just go forward and baptize disciples in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit but to **also teach them** to obey everything He commanded.

And it is this point which is vital to both infant and adult baptisms. When we are first received into the family of Jesus through baptism, whether we are a babe in arms or a 40-year-old adult, we are all spiritual infants.

Once baptised we are called upon to grow in our faith throughout our life. It is the power and grace of the Holy Spirit and the nurturing fellowship within the Church, which supports us to do that.

Think back to whenever it was that you were baptized. How did you grow in your faith? You could probably name at least one, possibly many, brothers and sisters in Christ, who nurtured your spiritual growth; who cared and loved you from a baby disciple to a mature follower of Christ. Praise God for such people. Without them it is difficult to grow in our faith and commit to the body of

Christ. Without them it is so much harder to realise the full fruits of the gift of baptism.

This shared journey of growth gives us some insight into how that fruit is expressed in our life. I'm going to turn now to our New Testament readings to see what else we may learn about this fruit.

Acts 2. 36-42

In Acts 2 verse 36 Peter declares with certainty that God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah. The Jews hearing this were cut to the heart and asked "What should we do?" In verses 38 and 39 Peter's response was to turn back to God, which is what repent means; turn back to God and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the Holy Spirit. The promise of a deep relationship with Jesus "*is for you, for your children and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him*".

Over three thousand people were converted and baptised that day. For all of them it was a very real experience – it was personal, it was empowering. The amazing biblical truth is that ever since that momentous day, these deeply personal, empowering experiences have continued to be available to every believer of Jesus. At their baptism all people receive this promise. The outward sign is through the baptism by water, but it is the ongoing inward transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit that bears the most fruit. As an essential part of our one God; the Holy Spirit performs many tasks. He comforts us in time of need, prays for us, gives us spiritual gifts such as pastoring, faith and teaching to help grow the church and, as portrayed in Acts 2, He enables all his disciples, both then and now, to witness bravely and lovingly to others the truth of Jesus Christ.

And one of the most significant of all the Spirit's actions, is that He transforms us. In following our call to live as disciples of Christ, as we grow in our faith, we can bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. In his letter to the early church in the city of Galatia Apostle Paul describes this fruit beautifully. It is the: *the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*" (Gal 5:22):

And in another letter to the early church in the city of Colossae, Paul tells the new disciples: *'We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.'* (Col 1:9-10 NIV)

The fruits that we bear in our lives are the evidence, the truth, the reality of the Spirit living in us. We are not of course perfect and God knows we don't always

exhibit the love and joy and peace we're meant too! But through the wonderful power of baptism, we can choose to allow the harvest to grow within us, bursting with fruits of all sorts. And those fruits are a tangible sign of God's love and His kingdom breaking into our world every day.

The Importance of the Baptism of Jesus: Mark 1.1-11

Now, nothing that I have just shared about the fruits of baptism through the power of the Holy Spirit makes any sense without first understanding and accepting the declaration of Peter in Acts 2.36 that Jesus is indeed our Lord and Messiah. The concluding verses of today's Gospel reading lead us to this amazing truth. It is particularly revealed through the impact of the three miracles that occurred that day and have reverberated across every generation since.

“And 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.”

What a beautiful and dramatic image! Picture yourself on the banks of the River Jordan watching this miraculous event take place. How would you feel watching the heavens being torn apart, a dove like Spirit suddenly appearing and God speaking to you!

This is the revelation that we celebrate every-time we baptise a new disciple into Christ. None of the gifts freely given to us through the sacrament of baptism could be given were it not for the fact that Jesus is indeed God's beloved Son. Hallelujah! God has graciously revealed to the world the identity of Jesus.

With that knowledge the rest of the baptismal gifts makes sense, don't they? Who else but our divine Lord could give us a new God centred life? Who else could wash away our sins through the water and the Holy Spirit? Who else could transform us through the power of his Holy Spirit? Who else could give us entry to God's kingdom?

No-one else could, only the Son of God. This is the good news we embrace when we are baptized, this is the revelation we grow into as we support one another to deepen our faith and to grow in expressing the fruits of the Holy Spirit. May our Lord continue to guide and bless Lenny and all of us, as we continue with him on our baptismal journey together. Amen