

We are now into the second week of 2016 and we look forward to this year with all its joys and challenges. We meditate on the theme, 'At his Baptism Jesus is revealed as the Son of God.' How does the Baptism of Jesus and his revelation as the Son of God affect us in our day to day lives? Human beings with their own capacities cannot know God and therefore God had to reveal himself. God in his infinite mercy has chosen to reveal himself in and through his Son Jesus. When we see Jesus we understand who God is.

Matthew, Mark and Luke record for us that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John is the one who prepares the way for Jesus to come. But how does he do it? He comes as a prophet who foretells that the one who is coming after him was indeed far superior to him and though John baptizes people with water Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. John also sees himself as the messenger who was sent before Jesus to give the good news about the coming of Jesus and to prepare the people for that coming. His message was one in which he called people to repent of their sins because the kingdom of God was at hand. John was in many ways a forerunner of the Messiah and that is why he said, 'After me will come one who is more powerful than me. I baptize with water but he will baptize with the Holy Spirit'.

Jesus then comes to be baptized by John in the Jordan river. John tries to dissuade Jesus from being baptized by him. However, Jesus insists that John should baptize him. As Jesus was baptized the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

The baptism of Jesus was a public proclamation of what he had come to do – to fulfill the plan and purpose of God. It was the beginning of his public ministry and Jesus was probably about 30 years old, when he began his ministry (Luke 3:23). Adult baptism or Confirmation is a public proclamation in the midst of the congregation. Likewise we see Jesus publicly proclaiming his divine purpose. His baptism was also an identification with sinners. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling with us (John 1:14). Though he was without sin he identified with sinful human beings (2 Cor. 5:21). God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. The coming of Christ was primarily to take away our sins and to cover us with his righteousness.

The baptism of Christ revealed that he was indeed the Son of God. Different opinions existed about Jesus. Some said he was a prophet, some that he was Elijah, others that he was a good man and still others who considered him a rabble rouser. But God's revelation was, 'this is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased.' Our opinion of Christ will make a difference to our lives. If we truly believe that he is indeed the Son of God in our hearts and proclaim with our tongues that he is 'Lord' then we can be sure of our eternal destinies. If we think that he was just a good man or a prophet at best then we are to be pitied.

The Holy Spirit also descended on him in bodily form like a dove confirming that this is indeed God's Son and by his word 'with him I am well pleased'. We see the three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit operative in the baptism of Christ. It was an act of reassurance and confirmation for Christ in the human form as well as evidence for John and all the others that Jesus was God in human flesh.

The baptism of Jesus also shows us that all God's righteous requirements for the Messiah were fully met in Christ. Jesus fulfilled the role of the suffering servant which has been portrayed in the book of Isaiah. May we thank God for his revelation of himself through Christ and for identifying with us sinners though he was without sin. May we also respond in faith to the revelation that God has given us in and through Christ.