

Meditation on Jesus' Baptism

John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin and the son of Elizabeth.

Jesus and John had a special relationship that began when his mother and Mary were both pregnant with them.

John leapt in his mother's womb when Mary, came to visit her.

John preached throughout the river Jordan. He encouraged people to get baptized to cleanse them of their sins and to prepare for the coming of Jesus.

He told the people that the Messiah would come and baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit.

In Luke Chapter 3, we are told that John the Baptist “went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...”

...and “crowds” of people were coming to be baptized by him.

Was John the one whom they had been waiting for?

Was he the Messiah?

Was he God-Made-Flesh?

Would he save them from their sins and bring them new life?

We are told that “the people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.”

But John put a stop to that.

“I’m just a sinner like you.

The Christ you are wondering about is so great that I’m not even worthy to untie his sandals.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

And then we are told that “When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.”

Jesus got in line with all the other folks - with all the sinners who were in desperate need of repentance, forgiveness and salvation...

Does this surprise you?

I think it's safe to say that John the Baptist was surprised!

Imagine you are going to a huge rock concert, packed to the doors with eager and excited fans.

Everyone is excited; they are waiting for the thunderous music to begin.

This will be music for a battle, for a victory, thunder and lightning,
an explosion of joyful noise!

The concert promoter comes on stage and declares that the famous musician has arrived...

Everyone gets on their feet, to welcome the man who is going to fulfil their expectations.

As you stand there eagerly, a small figure comes on the stage.

He doesn't look at all like what you expected.

He is carrying, not an electric guitar, but a small flute.

As you watch, shocked into silence, he plays, gently and softly,
...a tune quite different to what you had imagined.

But as you listen, you start to hear familiar themes played in a new way.

The music is haunting and fragile,
winding its way into your imaginations and hopes and transforming them.

And, as the song comes to its close, as though at a signal,
the drums, bass and guitars respond with a new version of the music you had been expecting all along.

Now listen to John as the concert promoter,
talking you into excitement about the hero who is about to appear:

"He's coming!

He's more powerful than me!

He will give you God's wind and God's fire, not just water!

He'll sort you out.

He'll clear out the mess.

He'll clean up God's farm so that only the good wheat is left!"

We're on our feet, expecting a great leader, perhaps the living God himself, sweeping into the arena with a great explosion, a blaze of light and colour, transforming everything in a single blow!

And instead... - we get Jesus.

The Jesus we have only met so far...as a baby with a price on his head.

A Jesus who comes and stands humbly before John, asking for baptism, along with everyone else

who has been broken by the "wear and tear" of this world.

A Jesus who is identifying himself, not with a God who sweeps everyone before him in judgment, but who is with the people and loves them, forgives them, befriends them...

John, of course, is disturbed!

Why would Jesus be coming to be baptized?

What's happened to the agenda?

What's happened to the wind and fire, to the clearing out of God's barn?

In this story of Jesus' baptism we are offered to follow a Jesus who submits to God's grace and finds identity and affirmation.

May we find that too.

We are offered to follow a Jesus who expresses trust and faith.

May we express these too.

We are offered to follow a Jesus who hears a voice from heaven proclaiming that he is God's beloved son.

May we here this voice too – throughout the weeks and months to come.

In the story of Jesus' baptism we are offered to play the music of our lives to a different tune...

...not the tune of fear and scare but the tune of love and gentleness.

Hear the music of the flute.
Feel the blow of the wind.
Hear the ripple of the water.
Hear the birds in the bushes.
Feel the breeze in your hair.
Feel the sun's warmth on your face.
Smell the earth beneath you.
Smell the scent from the plants.
Look up to the sky.
See the mountains in the distance.
Feel their vastness.
Feel your smallness.
Feel your happiness.
Turn your eyes upon Jesus...
The heavens are opening.
There is a light, like a dove.
It is the Spirit of God coming.
Can you hear that?
There's a voice from heaven:
"You are my beloved Son, you are my beloved daughter, with whom I am well pleased."

Take this loving affirmation into your often so complicated lives and be still.
Amen.