

The Baptism of Jesus Christ

Sunday, 11th January 2026

By the Reverend Ruth Li

This Sunday is Epiphany Sunday. It reminds me of the Study Tour to the Holy Land from 15th to 27th June 2022. It was the first travel group from Australia to the Holy Land since COVID-19 restrictions were lifted and borders reopened. One of the remarkable places we visited was the Jordan River. The travel guide told us that the Jordan River area we visited was the site of Jesus' baptism, as scholars had identified it as the original place. During the COVID-19 lockdown, the Israeli government sent specialists to clear mines in that area and built the area to be suitable for travellers. The desert surrounding that area is as described in the Bible. After Jesus' baptism, the Spirit led Him into the desert for forty days of temptation. There was a wonderful time of celebration at the Jordan River when a young, handsome, tall gentleman in our group, a member of the staff at Trinity College, was baptised in the river. After his baptism, we all celebrated and entered the Jordan River to wash ourselves, thereby experiencing the Lord Jesus' baptism, as recounted in today's Gospel.

In today's gospel, John the Baptist goes beyond Judea and Jerusalem, and people come to confess their sins and be baptised in the Jordan River by him. *"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptised by him."* (Matt 3:13)

The story of Jesus' baptism is recorded in the four Gospels: Matt 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:29-34. The Synoptic Gospels record the same words after Jesus' baptism. *"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."* (Matt 3:17, Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22). The Gospel of John provides more details about Jesus' baptism as the Lamb of God, who takes the sins of the world, the Saviour of the world, the Son of God, and the Beloved (John 1:29-34). Here is what John 1:29-34 says:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but I came baptising with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One."

In the Bible, baptism (βάπτισμα) is a symbolic ritual that signifies a person's public identification with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, and their own death to sin and new life in Christ Jesus. It often involves immersion in water after repentance and faith. It's an act of obedience, a sign of cleansing, and admission into the Christian community. It represents a spiritual rebirth and union with Christ's body, the Church, by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is sinless. The Baptist John knows that Jesus is the Son of God, the Holy One. He knows he needs to be baptised by Jesus. But Jesus shocks John when He asks John to baptise Him. This does not make sense to John to consider baptising the Holy One who has come.

Therefore, John said, *“I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?”* (Matt 3:13). For John, this implies that Jesus needs to repent of His sin, and that Jesus is seeking a new life through John, even though John reckoned that Jesus *“is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29).

In John 1:29, using the singular "sin" (ἁμαρτία) emphasises Jesus as the Lamb of God taking away the root cause of humanity's sinful condition (the world's rebellion against God), rather than individual acts (plural "sins"). It highlights a comprehensive removal of sin's power and barrier, in contrast to the repeated animal sacrifices for specific sins in the Old Testament. This singular act of the divine Lamb provides atonement for the entire world. Its benefits are received by all believers.

Therefore, Jesus insistently responds to John, *“Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.”* (Matt 3:15). And John obeyed even though he did not understand it. And the heavens opened with a clear voice: *“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”*

As the servant of the Lord and the Lamb of God, Jesus will take away the sin of the world. Jesus will face rejection, hatred, betrayal, and eventual crucifixion, but His salvation will prevail over all the earth for whom put their trust in Him through baptism.

The Church is built up through the baptism of each individual member as Jesus, the Holy One of Israel, the sinless Lamb of God, and the Son of God did. As we reflect on the Lord's baptism this morning, we are reminded that the Lord Jesus comes to us through our own baptism.

Our baptism is a baptism into Christ. It is our spiritual rebirth and union with Christ Jesus' body, the Church, by the Holy Spirit. As baptised people, we were immersed in the water; our older lives died in the water. We rose up from the water in the new creation life in Christ Jesus. This baptised new creation life bears many good fruits, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23), blessings, harmony, humbleness, and obedience. We are witnesses of Jesus Christ's new creation life in us, living as each has received gifts and talents from God. We are many, but in one Body; we all share in One Bread and drink the same Cup. We came from the same baptism, the same Holy Spirit works among us, and we are united in one body-the Church. These were because the baptism in Jesus Christ made us in this way.

If you haven't been baptised, I suggest you please find time to talk to Fr. Robert. He would be pleased to help you.

I encourage each of us to take the Pew Sheet home, read the message from Fr. Robert on the second page, and pray to the Lord for understanding of baptism and for visions.

I say to our faithful baptised people, let us be united with Jesus Christ, as His humbleness and gentle kindness bear many good fruits, use our gifts, talents, and devotion to build up the Church, support the parish ministry, and glorify our living and resurrection Lord Jesus Christ through our daily parish lives.