

Sermon by Rev W Huizinga On Matthew 3:1-17

LITURGY

Votum and Salutation

Psalm 71:1,8

The Ten Words of the Covenant

Psalm 71:9,10

Prayer for the Opening of God's Word

Thankoffering

Psalm 69:1,5,6

Read - John 1:19-34

Text - Matthew 3:13-17

Sermon

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS BY JOHN

We will see that this baptism was:

- 1. The focal point of John's ministry.***
- 2. The fulfillment of all righteousness.***

Hymn 11:1,2

Pastoral Prayer

Hymn 11:3

Benediction

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At Christmas we preached to you about the mystery of Christmas. It lies in the Person who became a man. The Word became flesh. The Word who was alongside of God, and who was God, became flesh. The Word, yes, the Creator, came to his own 'cosmos'. The divine Word became flesh, like us in all respects except He had no sin.

John the Baptist testified to Him, writes John the apostle. John was not the One who was to come, but only testified to Him.

Once more we submit ourselves to the Word of God as brought by John the Baptist. This time we coordinate it with the message this afternoon about how we are justified before God by grace, without any merit of our own.

I preach to you the Word of God under this THEME:

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS BY JOHN

We will see that this baptism was:

- 1. The focal point of John's ministry***
- 2. The fulfillment of all righteousness.***

1. The focal point of John's ministry

Isaiah calls John the Baptist the voice crying in the wilderness - "prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." Not only would the LORD lead Judah back along a highway to their land of Canaan, but the LORD would do more. The LORD Himself would come to his people - "behold your God!" For such a royal visit the people needed to prepare, to be ready. After all, when a dignitary such as Queen Elizabeth II herself visits Australia, many preparations go into effect, even months and months ahead of time. Well, John the Baptist was the head of the committee for such preparations. As the unyielding prophet, in the style of Elijah the prophet, he turned the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Reformation came to Judah - they returned to the law and to the prophets. Children who had wandered from the faith of their fathers returned. What joy entered those homes! How parents rejoiced at the return of their children. Parents started to instruct their children in the good ways God gave them through Moses. Yes, this reformation brought parents and children back together. We need that today as well. How many parents have not left the faith? How many children have not turned their backs on the Lord? Reformation is needed.

Otherwise they have no future, no dawn.

As a result, many went out to John, confessing their sins. John the Baptist baptised them in the Jordan River. Their baptism confirmed the forgiveness of their sins.

Others came to hear, but they did not repent, but hardened themselves in false religiosity. Still, multitudes came out to hear, to repent and to receive baptism.

Yet this was not yet the climax. John knew that. There was a coming One. John had spoken of Him as the One who was to come, as the Judge who had the winnowing fork in his hand, who wielded an axe which was aimed at the

root of the tree. Thus this strict Judge and Executor, who was still to come, was one to be feared.

As their promised Messiah God had anointed him to rule and to judge his people.

Who was this coming One? Did John not know Him? You and I might think that John, related to Jesus through his mother, obviously knew Him.

Maybe you think that everyone knew all the facts about Jesus. Maybe you think that everyone knew about the miraculous conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. Maybe you suppose that they knew about his birth, about the name given to Him by Mary and Joseph. Yes, maybe you guess all knew about the extraordinary events surrounding his coming in the flesh. Had the unborn babe, John, not leaped in the womb of Elizabeth when the mother of the Lord greeted Elisabeth? Would Elizabeth not relate to her son John about the extraordinary events surrounding his birth and that of Jesus? Maybe!

Yet did Mary put two and two together, adding up to the conclusion that her son Jesus must be the Messiah? No! Why would you then expect others to come to that conclusion?

Mary and Elisabeth were cousins. That means John and Jesus were second cousins. Maybe they met during some family occasions – a wedding or a funeral. But it did not mean that John concluded Jesus is the Messiah. Two times emphatically states, *I did not know Him* – (John 1:31,33).

Now if a second cousin, who probably heard of the wonderful happenings of Jesus' birth, did not know Jesus, then we cannot expect other Jews to know. No wonder then that God sent John the Baptist out to baptise, so that he might announce the Messiah to the Jews. For this stood out as the focus of John the Baptist's ministry.

I did not know him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptising with water (Jn 1:31).

John did announce Jesus as the coming One. *Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*, John announced. The Spirit of God remained on Jesus. Thus John knew that Jesus is the promised One.

What really surprises us is not that John and others could not identify Jesus as the Messiah. That was understandable. However, once announced as the Messiah, how come Israel did not remember, did not know who He was? Why did they not gather round to honour and to coronate Him as God's promised One? For later on at the feast of tents Jesus preached to them. It left them guessing as to Jesus' identity.

Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, Truly this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ! But some said, Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was? (John 7:40-42)

It seems the crowds forgot the past. They had short term memories. How else could they collectively forget his birth in Bethlehem, the shepherds' tidings, the visit of the wise men, the slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem, and the prophecies of Anna and Simeon at the temple?

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, study your Scriptures so that you never make such mistakes.

For later on again the crowds agreed *while John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this person (Jesus) was true* (John 10:41). They thus should have known.

Today Jesus announces his good news to the world. Now is the time to hear and to heed. When He comes in glory, then the time is gone. It is too late. Today is the hour for us.

Yet John enjoyed the honour of introducing the Lamb of God to the world, first to the Jews but later on also to the gentiles. *Here He is; the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.* John testified that *Jesus is the Son of God* (John 1:34). This formed the **focal point** of his ministry. What excitement! He has come!

In a sense the church today has a task to broadcast the message about Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed One. For you believers are his anointed ones. You too are prophets who proclaim his name.

What is a crowning ceremony for you as prophets? To announce to this world that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Saviour and the King. For you to be able to announce that Jesus came into this world as God's promised One to die for our sins – this is tops for us prophets.

However, we cannot repeat what John the Baptist did. John announced Jesus to the Jews. John waited till the Holy Spirit rested on that one special Person whom he baptised. Then John could announce, *here He is!*

You and I may not do the same. If the church today proclaims to this world, *here He is*, or, *there He is*, then the church proclaims false prophecy.

For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (Mt 24:27).

We cannot predict when Jesus comes in glory. Oh yes, we must proclaim to our world that Jesus has come in the world, as our Saviour. Also, Jesus comes as the King of glory to judge the living and the dead. But when? We know neither the day nor the hour.

You see, you may use the witness of John about Jesus for others. Please do! For Jesus wants your neighbours to glorify the Father in the day of visitation. So use the witness of Jesus to confirm that Jesus indeed is the special Person, the one God promised ages ago. He indeed is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

But remember to tell them as well that Jesus at present sits as King at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Jesus as a man is not here on earth. He indeed comes. When? Like a thief in the night! We must be ready at all times. For this is the really big, royal visit! Trumpets will sound. The archangel will sound the summons to the living and to the dead.

Let the hearts of the fathers then be turned and converted in faith so that they raise their children in the knowledge and love of God. Let the hearts of the children return to the faith of their fathers. Let all of us be ready for that great and glorious Day of our Lord. Let us promote mission work so that other nations too stand ready for that day. Let us redeem the time at home as well so that reformation may make our own Australian nation ready for that coming Day.

Jesus comes!

2. The fulfilment of all righteousness.

Jesus approaches the place where John preaches and baptises.

At first John hesitates to baptise Jesus. This puzzles us. For John did not yet see the sign which God mentioned. The Holy Spirit did not yet descend on Jesus to stay on Him. That sign would tell John who the Messiah was.

Yet John seems to know enough about Jesus to resist his request to be baptised. Surely this does not mean John considered Jesus an unrepentant sinner. For John required them to heed the ultimatum, *repent for the kingdom of God is at hand*. No, John did not consider Jesus a gross sinner. Not at all! On the contrary, John tries to prevent Jesus' baptism. He says that Jesus should baptise him, John, and not the other way around.

God, the covenant Lord, demanded that Israel keep his commandments, his covenant, as we heard it this morning. God sent prophet after prophet to bring Israel back to obedience. These messengers demanded fruit, the fruit of obedience. Instead, the people scoffed at these messengers, maltreated them and stoned the prophets. Arrogantly, they killed these pesky prophets. So God's patience ran out. Now He sends the Forerunner, John the Baptist. People had to confess their sins, be baptised and so cleansed, before the coming of the Judge.

But instead of entering the murky waters of the Jordan to be cleansed of something worse than leprosy, they remained up to their necks in the waters of judgment. They can quote Psalm 69:

Save me O God!

The waters rise up and leap,

Up to my neck the roaring floods surround me.

God was willing to rescue them from these waters of his judgment. Baptism would sign and seal it.

And yet, you know as well as I do that all those baptised would still break the commandments of God. They would never obey the covenant as they pledged.

Do you parents perfectly keep your oaths of baptism for your children? Each of us must admit that we make many mistakes, have much negligence as well as many weaknesses.

So who can guarantee that we will keep the covenant? Who will guarantee that they will take the punishment our covenant-breaking deserves? Who is the perfect covenant-partner who can guarantee that God's covenant with us will not boomerang into a curse?

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, the answer to that question is in our text. Jesus guarantees the covenant.

On the eighth day after his birth Mary and Joseph had Jesus circumcised. So the covenant of God was in his flesh. God signed and sealed all his promises to Jesus. But Jesus was also under oath to keep that covenant. For in every covenant there are two parties – God and man. God makes his oath, but so does man. Your baptism means you are under oath to live and to act as a child of God. Did you know that?

If we do not, then the curses of the covenant come into effect. Baptism is not a harmless, innocent ritual. A little sprinkling of lukewarm water!? Not at all! It signifies God's covenant. In that covenant we have God's blessings for obedience, but curses for disobedience.

How can we be sure that our covenant with God will bless us. Who guarantees our obedience, our holiness and dedication?

This is where the baptism of Jesus comes in. Jesus will do this.

Yet John has objections. In fact the Greek text indicates that John kept up his opposition to Jesus' request for John to baptise Him.

John, as we can read in the gospel, is humble as well as brave. John acknowledged Jesus as the One who ranks ahead of him, because Jesus was before Him. Yes, John was older, by at least six months. Yet Jesus ranks ahead of John. John saw Jesus as the Son of God!

John was the servant. In fact John ranked so low that as a servant he is not worthy to untie Jesus' sandals. That is the lowly task of a servant. Yet even that low task was too much for John. Notice the respect John has for Jesus. It amazes us.

When did John learn all this about Jesus? Did He learn it from his mother Elizabeth? Did God inform him? We do not know. We are not told. But John knew. John knew Jesus was holy. Jesus did not need baptism. John came to bear witness of Him.

Though John kept up his opposition, Jesus prevailed. Jesus did not deny John's point that really Jesus should baptise John. Yet it had to be this way. God wanted to fulfil all righteousness in this way.

This righteousness refers to the performance of the covenant teachings and commandments. He who walks with God is righteous. *Thus it is fitting to fulfil all righteousness.*

For by baptism Jesus is placed under oath to keep the whole covenant. He is born under the law, under oath to keep all what God has commanded his people. If not, the curses of the law descend on Him.

In this way Jesus guarantees the covenant which God makes with his people, including us.

As a result, it was Jesus' bread and butter to keep God's commands, all out of love. Jesus dedicated himself to be God's servant and covenant partner. With zeal and devotion!

And this was not just a matter of a sign, a symbol. Jesus did not just undergo the ritual. No, **Jesus underwent the reality** for which it stood.

Recall how Jesus at a certain point in his ministry says,

But I have a baptism to baptised with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished (Luke 12:50)!

Or again, He tells his disciples who seek the first and best position,

You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with (Mk 10:38)?

Jesus here speaks of his death on the cursed cross as a baptism. He was all in knots until it was finished. That is the reality. To fulfil all righteousness Jesus will need to accept the sentence of God, that we sinners deserve to die. You see, water cleanses, but water can also drown. Jesus receives the blessings of God, but He undergoes the judgments as well.

The covenant of God pledges blessings, but can also bring judgments.

Jesus willingly served as the Surety of the new covenant. Jesus said to God, I will keep your covenant perfectly. I will serve you with love and zeal according to all your ordinances. Jesus pledged that He would undergo the judgments and curses that God's people deserve.

In this way Jesus guarantees the covenant. He fulfils all righteousness for us. Now you understand why Jesus speaks about his death as a baptism. Jesus must fulfil all righteousness.

God in heaven sees all this. It hurts the Father to see Jesus undergoing baptism. Jesus is God's own Son! God in heaven knows what that baptism points ahead to! Yet the Father smiles at the obedience of his Son.

Then an amazing scene unfolds.

God Himself makes the announcement from heaven. God opens the heavens. To us the heavens seem so far away, way above the clouds, and up into the endless space.

Here God opens the heavens. The curtain is drawn back. God speaks. Not a prophet like John the Baptist. No, God Himself speaks from an open heaven.

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Already here Jesus exhibits the characteristics of obedience which pleases God so much. Jesus wants to fulfil all righteousness. Here finally is a covenant partner who knowingly and willingly keeps to God's will, no matter how difficult the path becomes for Him. Here is a partner who reflects God the Father. It is his own Son! The beloved Son! In Hebrew, the Beloved is Jedidiah, which was the name given to Solomon.

God anoints his beloved Son, *Jedidiah*, with the Holy Spirit. Even as the Spirit came down on David when Samuel anointed him to be king, God likewise anoints Jesus with the Spirit. His baptism is his anointing.

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, you remember what anointing with the Spirit means? It means you are called and equipped for an office. Jesus was called and equipped for the threefold office of prophet, priest and king. Immediately after this the Spirit drives Him into the wilderness to begin his task, to confront the ancient Enemy, the Deceiver. Jesus must undo what our first parents did in the garden of Eden.

The Holy Spirit descended in the form or shape of a dove. Long ago Noah sent out a dove to ascertain whether the waters of God's judgment had left. The dove symbolised all was ready, God was at peace. Here too the dove stood for God's peace and favour. That would come through Jesus who would fulfil all righteousness.

This baptism speaks to you, beloved brothers and sisters, boys and girls.

Now you know for sure that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. He is the Light of the world to whom John testified.

This speaks to you because you too are beloved by God. All because of Jesus! In Jesus you too receive the anointing with the Spirit to be prophets, priests and kings. What a tremendous privilege! What a tremendous responsibility! But the Triune God gives you tremendous comfort. Jesus guarantees the covenant for you. Therefore you are baptised into the name, the one name, of the

Father who spoke from an open heaven,

The Son who voluntarily fulfils all righteousness for us,

And the Holy Spirit who descends as a dove on Jesus.

And please note that the Spirit **stays** on Jesus. Jesus will complete his task, right to the very end. He is not like Saul who reneges. The Spirit left Saul. What misery followed! Jesus accomplishes all righteousness, right to the bitter end. Jesus brings the blessings of God. One day He will bring the full reward.

Are you ready? Amen.