

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST All Souls' 2026 dtw

Creator God, our soul's delight, your voice thunders over the waters,
liberating the future from the past.
In the Spirit's power and the waters of rebirth,
Jesus was declared your blessed and beloved Son;
May we recall our baptism and be disciples of the Anointed One. Amen

Our Gospel today recounts the Baptism of Jesus at the hands of John the Baptist. This is the Eastern Orthodox Epiphany and that, not only of the Christ, the beloved Son, but of the three-fold divine presence all in one event: a splendid Triune Epiphany. Why shouldn't the Orthodox celebrate with great rejoicing, considering their love of the Trinity? The baptism of Jesus is given some detail in Matthew, told more briefly in Mark, only mentioned in Luke and unrecorded though presumed in John. However, in all four accounts the anointing of Jesus with the Spirit and the declaration of his sonship are directly linked to the baptism. Is it any wonder that the end of Matthew's Gospel the Great Commission includes the Triune Names for Christian Baptism? *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* (Mt 28.19) And as with Jesus, God declares to each one of us: "You are my child, my beloved in whom I delight!"

Why did Jesus need to be baptised? The Christ had to be formally inaugurated into the public discharge of his office. For this purpose, he came to John, who was the representative of the law and the prophets, that by John, he might be publicly recognised as the one of whose coming the prophets had spoken. John hesitated at first to baptise Jesus. Certainly, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, and he felt if anything that the roles should be reversed; he should be baptised by Jesus. But Jesus submits to due process, which is an authentic move as well in affirming his self-emptying humility. His reception of baptism was not necessary on his own account. It was a voluntary act, as was his whole life, ministry and death. And if the work he was engaging was to be completed, then it was important that he took upon himself the likeness of sin, though he knew no sin, that he might fulfill all righteousness. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5.21, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* - and later from jail to the Philippians, 2. 5-8: *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.*

But the fundamental feature of this event is the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the declaration of his sonship which inaugurates his own ministry and effectively concludes John's. The anointing of the Holy Spirit is the initial act of fulfilment. Jesus exclaims in the synagogue of Nazareth, where he had been brought up, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.* (Luke 4.18) This characterises the whole story of Jesus and the subsequent story of the early church. Jesus' 'Pentecost' becomes *our* Pentecost. We receive the Holy Spirit. We are empowered as the Body of Christ to do 'all of the above' and more. Now, there are some pretty authentic New Year's resolutions to be found here!

The Kingdom - R S Thomas

It's a long way off but inside it
there are quite different things going on:
Festivals at which the poor man
is king and the consumptive is
healed, mirrors in which the blind look
at themselves and love looks at them
back; and industry is for mending
the bent bones and the minds fractured
by life. It's a long way off, but to get
there takes no time and admission
is free, if you will purge yourself
of desire, and present yourself with
your need only and the simple offering
of your faith, green as a leaf.