

The Baptism of Jesus 8 January 2017

[Isaiah 42: 1-9; Psalm 9; Acts 10: 34-43; Matthew 3:13-17](#) from Vanderbilt

[Baptism of Jesus 8 January 2017](#) Textweek

Peter is at his daughter Gabby's wedding in Sydney and we start by sending our best wishes and prayers to them.

This is a wonderful time, just past the twelve days of Christmas, getting into the New Year and in the season of Epiphany. We are or have been enjoying our summer holiday time. Today we celebrate the feast of Jesus' baptism and the wedding at Cana is close.

The baptism of Jesus is seen as the start of his mission and ministry in his early thirties and the Gospels tell us nothing about his about his life after his venture when twelve years old to the temple until his baptism.

The baptistry, so appropriately at the entry to our our church building, tells the story about Jesus' baptism by John in its stained glass windows. We should pause there today as we leave the church building and reflect on the people who have been baptised here in the last hundred years and more. Some of us are among that throng.

Let us think about Jesus at the time of his baptism. He certainly knew his family, including his cousin John. And he had friends. Some of them became his disciples. They include two of John's followers.

Jesus and family would have shared meals on days of celebration and also on those days when we share food after a hard days work. Mary and Joseph would have said to him: "You need a break. Here is some water or wine". And I can imagine them saying, "Have you heard that John is baptising lots of people in the Jordan?".

John was a popular prophet known as a holy man. People called him the baptiser, He was well enough known to be written about by the Roman historian Josephus. And he was popular enough to be feared by King Herod who eventually had him imprisoned and killed.

Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism follows a passage in his gospel about John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea and proclaiming "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near".

Matthew describes John as wearing clothing of camel's hair and a leather belt, eating locusts and wild honey, and baptising people in the river Jordan.

According to Matthew John said: "I baptise you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire".

I am pleased that an internet preacher, Susanne Butterworth., notes that John did not invent baptism". Ritual washing or cleansing was common in Jewish communities.

Special pools were built for the purpose, We know them well in modern excavations.

Sects, such as Pharisees and Sadducees and religious groups such as the Essenes all had elaborate baptism rituals.

John and Jesus influenced each other in many ways. Cousins after all.

We should imagine the family mealtime conversations.

Mary could well have said : “Jesus, I hear that John is baptising near the Jordan”.

Joseph might have added a comment about the muddy water there. And so on.

We need to remember that Jesus, Mary, Joseph and their family were real human people.

And there is good evidence that Jesus had brothers to deal with.

I think there is good evidence that John and Jesus influenced each other in many ways.

Cousins after all.

We know from John's Gospel 2:35-42 that Jesus first two disciples were followers of John the baptist and in John 3: 22 to 30 we find Jesus and John baptising in the same region, almost together.

Our first reading today, Isaiah 42:1-9, contains the quotation made after Jesus' baptism by the voice from heaven, God, “This is my beloved in whom I am well pleased”.

This passage is the first of four poems which are known as Servant Songs. Their author is called “Deutero Isaiah” – the second Isaiah, a prophet, a later disciple of Isaiah. He lived in Babylon and his message is about the restoration of Israel and the end of exile.

It is a message of hope.

The four servant songs are in chapters 42, 49, 50 and 52. We ask who is the servant?

Deutero Isaiah uses the word about Israel or about a pious remnant group, a people. He also uses it about great individuals like Moses or Job.

Christians have typically applied it to Jesus.

We should apply it to us. As a group and as individuals we are the suffering servant described in today's reading. We are to bring forth justice, to not break bruised reeds and so on. We try to do this in our own parish in our various good works here and in Nepal and elsewhere

I close with a note about our reading from Acts 10:34-43.

I starts: Then Peter began to speak.

I have commented here before about the genius of Luke with Greek language with his use of refined educated style and commonplace everyday usage. But here his greek is quite rough and unpolished. It has a semitic style. Either he is quoting Peter's poor greek or copying from a document in Peter's own language.

The point is that Peter shows how Christian openness to Gentiles is accelerating and the way for a mission to the Gentiles is more likely.

Gerry Costigan