

Sermon 11 January 2026 Baptism of Jesus

1 John 3:16-20 Matthew 3:13-17

Today we look at the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. Interestingly, this is the first appearance we read of Jesus as an adult. John has been predicting for some time that a person would make an appearance, this person who is far, far greater than him and that he would be baptising with the Holy Spirit. I'll come back that in a minute.

So sure enough, one day Jesus walks up to John and asks him to baptise him. As he does so, a dove, which is a sign of the Holy Spirit, settles on his shoulder and God's voice is heard: *'After his baptism, as Jesus came out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."*' Matthew 3: 16-17.

The fact that God calls him his Son is important. It affirms Jesus as the Messiah. Several Biblical passages refer to the Messiah as God's Son. Psalm 2:7: *'The Lord said to me, "You are my Son. Today I have become your Father."*' Martha says to Jesus, *'Yes, Lord, I have always believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God.'* John 11:27.

The baptism of Jesus takes place shortly before he began his ministry. Immediately after his baptism, Jesus went into the desert for forty days where he experienced significant temptation and then his ministry got under way. So in a sense, his baptism is rather like a commissioning. Jesus receives God's approval (*'This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.'*), and he also receives God's power, as in the Holy Spirit, to equip him for his ministry.

The point I want to make this morning is that in baptism we are all commissioned to do God's work. What does that mean for us? What are the implications? It means that we are all disciples of Jesus. It means that we are challenged to spread God's love wherever we can. It means to give something of ourselves. It doesn't mean we have to make massive sacrifices in our lives. It doesn't mean we have to devote our lives to the service of others. As I have said before, it is often a case of attitude. If we have a caring, loving attitude, we will make a difference.

There is the story of Li-Li, a girl who lived in China. Li-Li got married and went to live with her husband and her mother-in-law. In a very short time, Li-Li found that she couldn't get on with her mother-in-law at all. Their personalities were very different, and Li-Li was angered by many of her mother-in-law's habits, and as well, she found her to be critical of Li-Li.

Li-Li and her mother-in-law never stopped arguing and fighting. But what made the situation even worse was that, according to Chinese tradition, Li-Li had to bow to her mother-in-law and obey her every wish. All the anger and unhappiness in the house was causing her husband great distress.

Finally, Li-Li could stand it no longer and she decided to do something about it. Unfortunately, her proposed remedy was quite drastic. She went to see her father's good friend, Mr Huang, who sold herbs. She told him the situation and asked if he would give her something to poison her so that she could solve the situation once and for all. Mr Huang thought about it for a while and finally said, *'Li-Li, I will help you solve your problem, but you must listen to me and do exactly what I tell you.'*

Li-Li agreed. Mr Huang went into the back room and came back with a package of herbs. He told Li-Li, *'You can't use quick-acting poison because that would cause people to become suspicious. Therefore, I have given you a number of herbs that will slowly build up poison in her body. Every other day prepare some delicious meal and put a little of these herbs in her serving. Now, in order to make sure nobody suspects you when she dies, you must be very careful to act friendly towards her. Don't argue with her, obey her every wish and treat her like a queen.'*

Li-Li was so happy. She thanked Mr Huang and hurried home to start her plot of killing her mother-in-law. Weeks went by, months went by, and every other day Li-Li served the specially treated food to her mother-in-law. She was especially nice to her and treated her like her own mother.

After six months had passed, the whole household had changed. Li-Li had practised controlling her temper so well that she found that she almost never got angry or upset. She hadn't had an argument for months with her mother-in-law, who now seemed much kinder and easier to get along with.

The mother-in-law's attitude to Li-Li changed and she began to treat her like her own daughter. She kept telling her friends that Li-Li was the best daughter-in-law one could ever hope to have. And of course, Li-Li's husband was very happy to see the change in the relationship.

One day, Li-Li went to see Mr Huang. 'Mr Huang, please help me to stop the poison from killing my mother-in-law. She has changed into such a nice woman and I love her like my own mother. I do not want her to die.'

My Huang smiled. 'Li-Li, there's nothing to worry about. I never gave you poison. The herbs I gave you were vitamins to improve her health. The only poison was in your mind and in your attitude towards her, but that has all been washed away by the love you have been giving her.'

I feel it is appropriate that we are encountering the story of the baptism of Jesus at the beginning of a new year. This is a time when we often make resolutions for the year ahead, when we resolve to make changes or do things better. So what could be better than to resolve to serve Christ with all our might, and the good news is that we can do that simply through our attitude. We can make a difference through our attitude. Every single one of us has the ability to make a difference in the life of someone else.

I remind you of the story of the wise man who was once asked, 'What is the meaning of life?' He took out of his hip pocket a very small round mirror. He said, As a small child I found this and I began to play with this as a toy, and became fascinated with the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine, in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to give light into the most inaccessible places I could find. As I became a man, I grew to understand that with what I have and who I am I can reflect light into the dark places of this world – into the black places in the hearts and minds of men and women, and change some things in some people, bring warmth where there is cold, comfort where there is sorrow, serenity where there is unease. This is the meaning of life.

It doesn't matter what gifts or talents we might or might not have, every one of us has the ability to be kind, to be generous, to give something of ourselves in order to be of some benefit to others. We can bring about change in some people by bringing a little light into their lives with a little kindness and love. Just as Jesus was commissioned by God at his baptism, so that should be our commission as we set out on another year.

I finish with those wonderful words from John in our first reading: '*Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.*' 1 John 3:18.