

Baptism of Our Lord

Father John Beiers

Baptism of Our Lord – Isa 43:1-7, Lk 3:15-22, Acts 8:14-17

Lk 3:15. John's baptism symbolised the washing away of sins, when people were repentant, and showed it, by a desire to reform their lives. Baptism into the Church was when one personally accepted Jesus, and received the Holy Spirit when God's blessing came upon him or her. In the early church evidence of this was often speaking in tongues, or a sudden increase of love for God and fellowmen. In fact, some years back when the Pentecostalists flourished, they claimed that speaking in tongues was the only evidence of the Holy Spirit entering a person.

This was doctrine of that church, and totally unknown to the other traditional churches. This doctrine caused great distress for many a lifelong and devoted Christian who had never spoken in tongues at all. I was impelled to study this new so-called truth early in my ministry. If it were true, then most of us were lacking an essential part of being a Christian.

I scoured the New Testament and every reputable scholar I could find, but there was very little information on this subject, except that the Spirit was a comforter, a mentor, and would bring to our remembrance what Jesus had taught. However, I found that the assertion that speaking in tongues was the only evidence of the presence of the Spirit to be untrue, for these following reasons.

When we are baptised, we receive that Holy Spirit from God, but because we are generally baptised as babies, there is no visible response. Later when we confirm, or take on the baptismal promises ourselves at Confirmation, and mean every word of it, then the dormant Holy Spirit begins to act in

response to our invitation.

As we ask to be God's children, something usually happens, even though we may not expect or recognise it. If a child or adult is taught to expect a sign from God, it usually happens. I discovered that there were other signs of the reception of the Spirit which some writers recorded. So I began to teach candidates that it could be anything that could happen to them, and not to be afraid. It could be pins and needles, something like electricity going through their body, a sudden flooding of their body with a love for God, a sudden tenderness for other people, a flood of compassion, or even speaking in tongues.

Checking after the bishop had laid hands on them, I found that many of these things had happened, and thrilled the candidates, some of whom had not actually believed me. I can understand how the Pentecostalists made up their doctrine, because speaking in tongues was spectacular. But they overlooked the fact that God works as He will, and will not be constrained, as I was to find out.

Later, at Port Adelaide Church, a tall and imposing young man walked into the church office, and said, "I want to hear about this Jesus. I have tried everything to make my life meaningful, drugs, alcohol, sex, and nothing makes sense. If this Jesus does not make sense, I am going to kill myself."

I could tell that he meant it. So I gathered all the men then in the office and said, "Can we pray for you, and rest our hands on you?" He replied, "Well, I don't like other men touching me, but if it is absolutely necessary...then, OK."

So we laid hands on his head and shoulders, and in the middle of prayer, he leapt up, our hands going everywhere, and said "It's beautiful, it's bloody beautiful," and proceeded to bearhug us all, individually. He then wanted to know what he had to give up' since he wanted to be a real Christian. I told him that he had to start reading the New Testament, to find

out what Jesus was like, to pray, and be like Him.

In prayer, Jesus would tell him what, if anything, he should give up. Well, first it was alcohol, then drugs, then swearing, then random sex. What else, but the Holy Spirit could cause such a change?

Since that time, the Anglican Church has developed a more detailed and informed theology of the Holy Spirit, thanks mostly to American Charismatics, who pioneered it for the traditional churches.

I'll leave you to think about it. Amen