

Sermon 10 January 2016 'Named and Claimed'  
Isaiah 43:1-7 Luke 3:15-17; 21-22

Prayer: Speak our names again this day, O God, to remind us that you have been calling us for a very long time. Speak our names again this day, O Lord, to remind us that you have been claiming us for a very long time. Speak our names this day, O Spirit, to remind us we are not alone, or powerless, and loved beyond all measure. Amen.

**Today** we are being asked to reflect on Jesus baptism, as his time / his moment of being named and claimed by his heavenly father. But before we dive into all that there are two significant 'other' matters of background setting that might shed more light on Luke's story of Jesus baptism.

I have always loved pictures like this one -> and always think of them as 'Old Testament' pictures. Simply because they belong to my earliest memories of Bible stories as a child and the great OT figures like Elijah or Moses etc would have stirring sun-breaking through pictures like this as background!! I am using the picture today to highlight how God's truth – which is always present – but sometimes hidden from us breaks through. Today's reflections have some 'break-through's' of God's truth highlighting passages and words of scripture for us.

The first significant 'other' for today is the Isaiah passage.<sup>1\*</sup> The passage today begins and ends with the affirmation that YHYW-God created Israel and it repeats the words 'created', 'formed', and 'named' (vv. 1a and 7). These 2 verses form what is called an *inclusio* in the passage, i.e. a set of 'bookends' holding the passage together. In this the appearance of a key word from Gen 1:1 (Hebrew *bara*, 'to create') is to remind us about the great deeds of YHWH-God of old and of the power and authority of the creator God.

Today this stands as **witness** for us of the **truth of God's love** for Israel and God's determination to be in their lives. **As inheritors** of this truthful revelation of God's nature, we claim this relationship also. So what Isaiah tells us God wants / says about Israel, is true for us too. As they faced difficult times with the despair and devastation of living in exile, into them God poured this hope, this vision. In effect saying: "You are mine and I will bring you home"

The good-news in it is that even as we are reminded of deeds long ago, there is something new involved here too, for Yahweh-God now creates not a world but **a people for himself**. YHWH-God names and claims a people – even 'us' for God's own-self. In one of those 'sun-beams of light' Jesus being named and claimed is a special sub-set of all people being named and claimed by YHWH-God!

The second significant 'other' piece of background for us today is about John the 'Baptist'. **Before** the actual scriptures for us today, there is recorded the 'conversation' between the crowds and John.<sup>2\*</sup> (3:7-14) During which John had told them that their ancestry would do them no good, if they were counting on quoting it at judgement day. *So you're a child of Abraham. Big deal! God can take a handful of rocks and make those* (3:8). Instead of relying on their genetics and their past, what they **needed to do** was **change** their lives and move in a different direction – **from now on**.

"What, then, are we to do?" the crowd asks. John tells them they must share, and mentions two specific forms of sharing, tunics and meat. Tunics were made by women, meat provided by men. John's instructions encompass the actions of both genders. Tax collectors and soldiers ask for more specific instructions. Both are told to be honest in their dealings with the poor.

John's responses seem to have impressed the people, and it is then no surprise, that all of them wonder aloud if John might be the Messiah-- "...all were wondering in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah," which is where we start today.

John<sup>2\*</sup> makes it as clear as he can that he is NOT the Messiah. 1. The Messiah is stronger than him! Stronger in what ways we might well wonder – but John defines it a little by saying it is not physical strength – but a spiritual / character attribute. He, John is not worthy to even be the Messiah's slave.

Secondly, John says that he baptizes with water, and sharply contrasts that with what "the one stronger" will do, which will be baptism in "a holy spirit and fire." From before Jesus began his ministry, the early church understood a crucial and distinguishing feature of Him as the Messiah was the presence of God as Holy Spirit. Secondly they understood that *whatever else was happening* at Jesus baptism; *whatever* church politics or textual tensions we might have – **all 4 Gospels** bear witness that the descent of the Spirit on Jesus confirmed his role, his ministry – his life's work.

So even with something as central to understanding what God was doing in Jesus with the Holy Spirit there are two other 'sunbeams of light I want to uncover today. 1. Church politics. And closely tied to it is 2. Is text-tension. We know John the Baptist had disciples. We know there is still a church and there are still disciples of John actively following his teachings. To have Jesus being baptised by John would imply Jesus was sub-ordinate to John. And the early church would have none of this, church-politics!

Mark, who wrote first, is joined by Matthew to say John the Baptist baptised Jesus. Luke, doesn't say 'who', and if we had read all chapter 3, not skipping out verses 18-20 we would have to wonder in a logical sequence of the text<sup>2\*</sup> because Luke has John the Baptist in prison 'while' Jesus is being baptised. John's Gospel (this is not the same person as John the Baptist!) ignores Jesus baptism altogether!

So if you want the bible stories to match, *you are going* to be disappointed and have to deal with the tension this creates for you. You see, faced with 3 gospels to 1, I vote that Jesus was indeed baptised – but that with 4 from 4 gospels testifying to the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus, I don't believe we have a choice! They all knew that the descent of the Holy Spirit was what activated, powered, and propelled Jesus into his work – **from this point forward**.

Luke writes of three phases to this 'Father-Son' moment in Jesus's life. <sup>2\*</sup>1. "the heaven was opened." This is understood as meaning the space between heaven and earth was dissolved, disappeared, opened! In a rare act of God, heaven communicates directly with earth. This would happen again in Jesus life!

2. "the Holy Spirit descended." The Holy Spirit is a source of power and dynamism in Luke, for <sup>2\*</sup>Luke **more** than any other Gospel emphasises the role of the Holy Spirit. So, even though the Spirit has been involved with the Jesus story all along (1:35), the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus ignites his mission. In Luke, Jesus speaks for the first time only after he has been said to be "full of the Holy Spirit" (4:1). To underline the point even further, Jesus' first public statement of his mission begins: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (4:18).

3. "a voice happened." <sup>2\*</sup>"We have been told before by Luke, of Jesus' special status (1:32-35, 2:11, 2:27-32). Previously, however, this special status had been communicated by angels (or Elizabeth). **Here**, it is affirmed by God himself. We might even argue that the first three chapters of Luke are focused on this one moment; i.e. when God affirms Jesus saying: "**You are my son, the beloved. In you, I am well-pleased.**" cV

*Last week* we reflected on the time when Jesus was 12 years old he and his family went on their regular Passover trip to Jerusalem. **This visit** however, Jesus got 'caught' up in His Father's ?\_\_\_\_\_ about His Father's ?\_\_\_\_\_... **Jesus claimed** his Heavenly Father.

Today we have his Heavenly Father's claiming of Him. Jesus **is now** about his father's business, interests, house-hold... He has been claimed, named and propelled out. And a sunbeam of light that shines strongly for us, is the truth that because he was and did – we are and can do! **All because of his baptism, we too are claimed and named: "beloved" of God.** Amen