

Hello everyone

I was baptised on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1959 in a church of Scotland church along with my older brother. Even though it is over 60 years ago and I don't remember anything of it, yet it remains an important day to me. That was the day that I was given the treasure of being baptised into Jesus Christ, of being made part of his church if you like.

Maybe it seems strange to you that I was baptised in a Scottish church yet I grew up in Gravesend in the South East of England. The answer is simple. My parents grew up in Scotland but they lived in Ghana up until I was six, when we moved to England. So, my brother and I were baptised while my parents were on furlough back in UK. Back when the word furlough really meant holiday. We saw our grandparents. We stayed in a variety of rented houses, we got very cold and on one visit we were baptised.

What I didn't realise was just how significant that action of my parents in arranging my baptism would be. Nowadays we say to parents at baptisms unfold the treasure that your child has been given today as he or she grows. Well I have to say that to put it delicately

my parents were not great at unfolding that treasure and yet despite that it turns out that God doesn't need much help really. Here I am an ordained minister in the church of Scotland who often finds himself musing on my path to ordination that God mapped out for me.

Mark starts his gospel like this. The beginning of the good news of Jesus the Son of God.

Then Mark moves on to describing the entrance of John the Baptist and how he links the story back to a variety of Old Testament prophets, not just Isaiah. All the gospel writer's emphasise repeatedly through their accounts of Jesus life that this story is a continuation of life with God as much as it is a specifically Christian new start with God.

Mark like Matthew, Luke and John all use the story of John the Baptist to prepare us for the entry of Jesus, the Son of God into the story of how we experience God.

The good news comes with Jesus, Son of God. Eugene Peterson calls it The message. We are so used to the idea of a message as a written or spoken comment passed from person to person that it's easy to forget that the message, the good news from God isn't in

written form at all. The message from God is Jesus Christ himself. Jesus is the message, the good news, sent from God.

God has sent his son. Now that is some message isn't it?

Such Good news that it prompted his first followers to record their experiences of God through Jesus in what we call the New Testament of the Bible.

Confession time for me now. I paid little attention to that opening line of Mark's gospel until I was well through my twenties. There were so many other exciting stories to wonder scientifically about. While I didn't ponder on it much, it was there at the back of my mind.

Why?

Well the answer is bound up with the next part of Mark's story. Mark like all the gospel writers tells us that Jesus is baptised. The son of God is baptised like we were. Although there are differences. At Jesus Baptism, God and the holy spirit turn up as they do at ours. But for Jesus, the image of the dove is visible and we hear God telling us how pleased he is with his son.

The baptism of Jesus brings alive the message God is giving us.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. This message links back through the Old Testament to creation, but hints at the future through the appearance of the Holy spirit which will be so important to the church.

This is a treasure to be unfolded indeed. Yet growing up, for me, it played little part in my life, but I never forgot I was baptised and more than that that I was baptised into Jesus through the holy Spirit and the church of Scotland.

Remember I grew up in the 1960's and 70's In England. I remember vividly back then how each year, your form master would check with the class the details in his register. Everyone was asked to check their name and tell the master what we liked to be called.

Remember this was the early seventies and it was always a time for humour as people had to admit to their full names in public and watch as nicknames were born. Everyone was asked not just what faith they were and the Gravesend of the 1970's was very multi faith environment, but Christians were asked what

denomination you were. As progressed around the class C of E, church of England ,after C of E was shouted out and with every shout I was reminded of my baptism. Church of Scotland I answered.

The teacher also checked your school house. It was always a bit of fun. Mine was Downs. In fact, the whole class was Downs house. That's how it worked, but we all hoped each term that some poor member of cliff, town or hill house would realise their mistake and rush from the room as we laughed. But it never happened.

Over the years being part of the Church of Scotland became very important to me even though there was no church of Scotland around us. So, when Norma and I moved to Scotland it really felt like coming home until one well meaning passer by in Girvan said. You'll want the English church. It's down there. Now we actually wanted the church of Scotland church and became members of Girvan North.

My Baptism was and is still important to me and baptism is very important within the church of Scotland. It is the point at which God sees us as part of his church whatever age we are. Jesus was baptised. We are baptised into the good news and that is not a

book or a social movement, it is Jesus, God's son. The church gathered with the head, the son of God experiencing god in our lives in a whole variety of ways. God wants us to live like Jesus -helping out those in need.

After his baptism, Jesus is sent by the holy Spirit into the wilderness where he is tempted and served by angels. Jesus, God's son is a person too. Just as we are. Then he preaches a message about the way God wants the world to work. In his arrival that has started. It's not finished but it is started. This kingdom of god is about experiencing God through Jesus and spending time in reflection and thought as we work out how that fits into today's world.

And Jesus is this message. Watch how he does things and change your life is what God is saying.

As you read through Mark's gospel it is like getting involved in a work book, rather than a rule book or instruction manual, of how god want us to live. We are shown a group of people struggling each day to work it all out. But Marks gives us the key to it all right at the start of his gospel. Jesus Christ is the son of God and he

himself is the message to us of how things should work.

The disciples struggle to understand and we continue to grapple as his followers today. We work and live in a different time and with different issues. Yet we have to work it all out too- time and time again.

As we do we know that we are drawn into the church through our baptism wherever we are and we are part of the church headed by Jesus, God's message to us

Through our baptism we can see we are part of the whole Bible story from creation to the appearance of the new kingdom

And we all have difficult times to face, but we can know that God is with us through Jesus in all of them.

So rest in the risen lord who baptised you and who still invites you to walk with him every day.

Peace be with you.

Amen