

## Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

### Week beginning Sunday 12 January 2020 Look back in wonder

Pray Thank God for the assurance that God gave Jesus at his baptism and for the faithful response which Jesus showed in embarking on his mission of love and reconciliation. Pray that we might be open to God's touch and blessing in our day and age (in whatever form) and be as ready to engage in the work which God has set out for us to do in the power that he provides.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Matthew 3:13- 17

Background Quite a short passage this week – one that summarises the encounter of John and Jesus, cousins and partners in God's work. John had already begun to make a name for himself as something of an influential prophetic figure, gathering crowds to hear him and committed followers including some who were to become Jesus' disciples. He styled himself after some of the Old Testament prophets both in terms of dress (spartan) and message. Repentance was his watchword and he urged people to be baptised for the forgiveness of their sins and to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus comes asking for baptism. Initially John was reluctant but Jesus persisted. And he was baptised and there follows the dramatic sign of the dove (later to be taken as a Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit) and the famous words from heaven "This is my beloved Son".

Possible questions/points to consider

1. John signalled the connection with Old Testament times. He lived, dressed and talked like some of the OT prophets. What do you think that meant to his followers? Why do you think John was able to make the old message real and relevant? What might we learn from this? However, he didn't live in the past – his message had a contemporary ring to it – what did John expect from God? What did he expect from his hearers?
2. Some have described John as the last of the Old Testament prophets, the first New Testament evangelist. Our passage marks a public encounter between the two cousins John and Jesus. We can safely assume that they have met before and that both are aware of the ministry and expectations of the other. Jesus asks John for baptism. Why do you think he was reluctant, at least initially to baptise Jesus? John doesn't seem to have had any problem about seeing Jesus as more important. How might we learn from him in this?
3. Jesus said let it be this way for now – and so John baptises him. It is fair to say though that the purpose is somewhat different as Jesus needed no forgiveness. In the light of what happened why do you think Jesus wanted John to baptise him? How does the special blessing point to Jesus' special status? How does the need for assurance and encouragement point to Jesus' humanity? What is the place for our being honest about our need for encouragement and assurance a) from one another b) from God? How can we rid ourselves of our reluctance to admit that we need help?
4. Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (and probably the beginning of the eclipse of John's. How might it have been a real boost to him? Sometimes we mark important beginnings in life (and in ministry). Can you recall any new beginnings – were they marked in any way? If so how did this help? If not, might they have been helped by something better? How might we encourage one another into new beginnings? (Be as practical as you can). How might we give God a place in these?
5. Jumping off. How might the phrase "looking back in wonder so as to look forward in faith" be of help a) to you and b) the congregation as we go into 2020? We can't live in the past but we can learn from it and we need to make room for God in our future.
6. Do have a think about anything else that might have prompted a thought on Sunday.

Prayer: Lord, thank you that Jesus was baptised and for the assurance you gave him. Help us to look back in wonder at your work in the world and in our lives and use that as a springboard to go into the future in faith. Amen.