**The Baptism of Jesus & Prophecy Isa.42:1-9 Acts 10:34-43 Matt.3:13-end**

**Given by Rosemary Sumner at All Saints’ Church. 8th January 2023**

If you were writing a biography of someone, what do you think you might start with? The person’s early years? Their parentage? Whatever it was that made them special or famous?

In the gospels or life of Jesus, Matthew opens with a long genealogy; Mark begins with John the Baptist as the forerunner; John launches into profound Theology and Luke has the conception and birth narratives about John the forerunner and Jesus as the expected one. Only Luke retells one story from the childhood of Jesus – the episode when the 12 year old went to Jerusalem after his Bar mitzvah, the moment when a boy takes on the responsibilities of an adult Jew. Eventually, the 30 year old Jesus appears at the Jordan for baptism by John, and it is this experience which is the starting point of his ministry.

This Baptism is a significant point for all the 4 gospel writers and one of the few episodes which all 4 report in similar details. Today, we usually think of it as the moment when Jesus becomes aware of his commission and the unique role which he is to undertake. The following temptations are then a time when he can work out what sort of Messiah God wishes him to be. Another way to view it is as an anointing by the Holy Spirit, an idea we shall return to shortly.

3 years later, the apostles also had a problem to work out – how to pass on the details of Jesus’s life and death and resurrection to other people.

Luke, in Acts, gives us a flavour of the types of approaches made by the apostles as they took the story of Jesus to those who had never met him. The speeches of Peter and Paul are excellent examples of how the approach changed according to the time and place and type of audience. In the early days in Jerusalem, the emphasis was on the death and resurrection of Jesus and an effort was made to show how these events fulfilled prophecies or promises recorded in Scripture, but how would they start when they were speaking to Gentiles?

We find the answer to that in Acts 10 in the speech which Peter made before the family of Cornelius the Roman centurion. He starts by putting the family at their ease, declaring that the God of the Jews has no favourites, but shows impartiality in his dealings with people. Everyone who acknowledges this God and behaves well to his fellow human beings is acceptable to him.

Only after he has made his audience feel comfortable does he declare that Jesus offers peace with God. Then he talks about the ministry of Jesus, beginning with his baptism which was the moment of his anointing by God.

Consequently, all his teaching and healing were done by the power of God’s Spirit working through him. He then turns to the death and resurrection appearances which he and others witnessed and which included sharing food together (thus indicating that Jesus was not a ghost). Then he turns to a concept well known in the Roman world – the Day of Judgement. This Jesus has been chosen by God to be a Judge over all people, alive and dead. He concludes with the conviction that Jesus was the one to whom the prophets pointed.

Some of these passages were from Isaiah, especially the Servant Songs of which we have just heard the first one from Isa. 42. A key word which links Isa. 42 with Acts 10 is the phrase that Servant and Jesus were both anointed echrisen by the Holy Spirit. This idea of anointing a person to begin special work for God is interesting. It is still used in the present day when the King or Queen is anointed with oil during the coronation ceremony. This custom is based on the Anointing of David the shepherd boy to be a future king over Israel. Later, in English history, this practice led to the belief in the divine right of anointed kings. In Isa. 42:1, the Servant is the Eklektos, the chosen one and God has put his Spirit upon him. This Servant will bring judgement krisin to the nations and this word is repeated 3 times. In Acts 10, he is to be a judge kritas to the nations. It is the same root word in the Greek and we need to remember that the early church used the Greek Septuagint version of the OT. So it is easy to see how the early Christians would see this connection. Other points from Isa. 42 are worth mentioning. The Servant is given as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations. He will give sight to the blind and release those who sit in the darkness in prison. When Jesus spoke in the Synagogue in Nazareth, he read similar words from Isa. 61 and claimed to fulfil them because he has been anointed echrisen to do so. When John the Baptist was worrying that he might have pointed to the wrong man, Jesus performed various miracles which fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecies and indicated that all was well.

Thus we can see clearly how the early church looked back to the earlier Scriptures and saw how they had been fulfilled in the life of Jesus. In Luke 24, it was Jesus himself who pointed them to the prophecies about himself while he walked on the road to Emmaus. If only Luke had listed those prophecies for us, rather than leaving us guessing!

This pattern of prophecy and fulfilment was very dear to all the gospel and letter writers and links with the words in Isa.55:11 where God says, “ So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”. It shows a God who is faithful and keeps his promises, even if we have to wait hundreds of years to see this happen.

We face a very uncertain new year. News of wars and rumours of wars are with us constantly. Natural disasters occur often with little warning. The threat of Covid and other viruses hang over our everyday affairs. Our money does not seem to stretch as far as it used to. But each new year has always presented us with problems to be faced and we, as God’s people, know that we do not face them alone. God knows each one of us intimately, our hopes and our fears, and he loves and cares for us. This is a faithful God who loves and cares for all that he has brought into life. He is the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23, who provides good things for us and leads us safely through the darkest path. Every time I go home in the car, I sing the chorus to the modern hymn version of Psa. 23: “I will trust in you alone. Your mercies ever follow me, your goodness will lead me home.” May that be true for all of us. Amen.