



*Picture 1 – Jesus meets John at the Jordan (from The Chosen)*



*Picture 2 – the annunciation by Sue Hollywell.*

## **Matthew 3:13-17**

### **The Baptism of Jesus**

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

<sup>15</sup> Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

<sup>16</sup> As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

My thoughts for today started with the picture of the annunciation which was a Christmas card from my cousin Paul and his wife Sue, who did the painting.

Bearing in mind that we have no idea what it really looked like, Sue has taken a traditional route. Mary is kneeling and wearing clothes in colours we have seen many times.

The Angel is larger, has wings and fills the space but there are aspects to this that really caught my imagination.

Light streams from the angel, there is something majestic there, the left hand looks like a flame, the wings look awesome, and yet there is a tender stooping to Mary, a hand reaching to her with gentleness, compassion and grace is being extended.

Mary kneels in supplication, head slightly bowed, but although we know everyone encountering an angel is told not to be afraid (therefore they must start off afraid), perhaps she has got past her fear.

Last week Jane spoke about surrender – not surrender as in defeat and weakness, but a voluntary giving of the heart. She said...

“It’s willingly offering our lives back to Jesus in recognition of all He has given us”.

Mary has taken that step of willingly giving herself to God BEFORE the visit of the angel. Mary is someone devoted too and seeking to follow God. She was chosen for this very reason.

Then the angel visits and I think what this illustration shows and the word for us today is ACCEPTANCE.

If surrender is the first step, acceptance is the second.

Her hands are open in acceptance.

The words of a song always come to mind when I see pictures like this “Let it be to me, according to your word.”

The annunciation is usually celebrated on March the 25<sup>th</sup> for obvious reasons...

It was considering the images and the acceptance that led me then to thinking about Jesus’ baptism which is celebrated this Sunday.

What is going on?

John clearly thinks Jesus should be baptising him! John knows and testifies as to who Jesus is, the Lamb of God.

John’s baptism was for repentance and to prepare people for the coming Messiah. We believe Jesus was without sin, what then was the reason for being baptised??

In The Message, Eugene Peterson paraphrases the dialogue in this way

Jesus then appeared, arriving at the Jordan River from Galilee. He wanted John to baptize him. John objected, “I’m the one who needs to be baptized, not you!”

<sup>15</sup> But Jesus insisted. "Do it. God's work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism." So, John did it.

Jesus is deliberately identifying with humanity – with sinful humanity if you will. On the cross he is our representative, one of us, without sin, taking the punishment we deserve.

Here at his baptism Jesus accepts his destiny and identifies with all of us.

I've been thinking about the moment of acceptance.

Early in a wedding a couple are asked if they will take each other to be their spouse and in the modern service we have the answer "I will".

But I don't think that is the moment of acceptance. It's the public celebration of it. It's the legal necessity to say that a marriage has been contracted...but the acceptance was earlier.

It might have been when an engagement was proposed – although I'm aware that couples talk and plan when they are going to get engaged - so they already have an acceptance of the commitment.

I was thinking about becoming the Vicar here. I was collated and installed on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2017. But the acceptance was even before Bishop Andrew phoned me to offer me the post. The acceptance came during the interview day and I knew I would say yes if he asked me to come.

Imagine for a moment that an angel visits you later today and imagine that you can get past being fearful. What might the angel's invitation be to you?

It might be a task.

It might be to give up something you have been responsible for?

It might be that the angel crystalises things you've sort of been aware of but not paying attention to.

It might be about your spiritual journey – not so much the outward practical things but the call to go deeper in faith, confront old issues, take the next step.

Vicars are always happy to have volunteers and PCC members and all of those churchy things so I'm bound to mention it – about our giving, our volunteering, readers, PCC and so on and yes - the angel might speak to you about your part in church life.

Are we willing to listen and as God calls to each of us, accept the next steps on our journey. In faith, you cannot stand still.

Some of us take time to accept a proposal and invitation! Mary was able to respond there and then, but Jesus didn't just dive into his ministry and destiny. His baptism, like all baptisms, is an outward sign of an inner reality. He came for baptism as sign of what he had already accepted.

In that sense, I became the 14<sup>th</sup> Vicar of Holy Trinity on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2017 – it was made public and legal on the 16<sup>th</sup> August.

So. Some of us might need to start listening and be open to angelic visitations (who knows??). Acceptance today is to start listening.

Some might know what is being asked and the question is, will you accept?

Here is a something I think is always being asked of us. Are you willing to become truly yourself, losing what is false, and becoming more Christlike and more you? That is the invitation in the song we are about to sing.

But if it all sounds daunting and uncertain – take a look again at the angel of the Lord. I think Sue has captured here immense strength, tender compassion and infinite love and isn't that what God is like? Whatever challenge is being given and however daunting acceptance might feel... We. Are. Not. Alone.

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?  
Will you quell that fear inside and never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you've found  
To reshape the world around  
Through my sight and touch and sound in you  
And you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name  
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same  
In your company I'll go  
Where your love and footsteps show  
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you  
And you in me