

Sermon

17 April 2016

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Text: Luke 3:21-23 & 38

Baptism (Polbeth Harwood)

On Thursday Queen Elizabeth celebrates her 90th birthday. Because of this she has been in the news a lot lately, and every now and again a photo of her coronation in 1953 pops up somewhere. There were 8000 guests present at her coronation, and millions of other people tried to get a glimpse of her from the streets, listened to the proceedings on the radio and even saw it broadcast on the very first tellies. All over the world people participated in this spectacular event. The broadcast was translated into 44 different languages!

During this special ceremony, the Queen had to make promises in front of all these people, in order for her to become the Queen of the United Kingdom. It was the start of a brand new chapter in her life. She is now the longest reigning monarch in British history.

And you know, I can't help but wonder – that day, when that crown was placed on her head, did she have any idea how her life was going to turn out? She has now just about lived for 90 years!! She's been on the throne for 64 of them. All the things she must have seen and experienced...

Our Scripture reading today was about Jesus' baptism. That was his "coronation", so to speak, the start of his public ministry, a new chapter in his life. This also happened while a huge crowd of people was watching, and I think that they got more than they bargained for, because as Jesus was being baptised, the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove, and a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

How spectacular it must have been to see and hear *that!*

Today, watching something like the Queen's coronation or birthday celebrations has lots of entertainment value for us, but in the 1st century, what happened at Jesus' baptism was much much more than just entertainment.

Who you were, determined the authority you had in society.

There is some similarity in this today as well: If the Queen announces that she is going to make a public statement – all the news teams storm to the Palace with their cameras and notebooks. If *I* said that I am going to make an important public announcement, a few of my friends might come to listen, but there won't even be a single camera recording my words to broadcast it to the world. Why would that be? Because the Queen is someone very important, and if she speaks, the world listens.

What is recorded in Luke 3, happened, so that when Jesus spoke, people would listen to him. Publicly, in front of a huge crowd of people, God himself declared Jesus as his son.

Then, straight away, we read that at 30 years of age, Jesus began his ministry. And then this statement is followed by Jesus' genealogy.

In Biblical times your genealogy was more than a list of the names of your ancestors. It was more like your CV. It didn't only say who you were and where you came from, but also who you could be.

So for Luke it was really important to emphasise that Jesus was really the Son of God. That's why he starts by saying that Jesus was the son, "or so it was thought" of Joseph; because in actual fact – although Joseph acted as Jesus' father on earth, through this genealogy Luke was now going to prove that actually God was the Father of Jesus. In those days people were expected to act in accordance with their birth status, which means that little would have been expected of Jesus as the son of Joseph, the carpenter. Nor would he have had the legitimacy and authority to speak and act in public.

But to have the status of "Son of God", on the other hand, was an honour declaration of the highest kind. Who could *not* listen to the Son of God?

If you compare this genealogy with the one in Matthew, you will see a few interesting differences, and that's because Matthew and Luke had different audiences and different things that they wanted to bring across to their readers.

Matthew wrote to Jews, so he starts his genealogy with Abram, the father of the Jewish nation. Luke wrote to Gentiles, and that's why it was so important for him to trace Jesus' roots all the way back to God himself, so that it would be clear to everybody that God's love is universal, it goes far enough to include every single person who believes

in Him – whether this person was a member of the original people of God or not.

I wonder if that day, at Jesus' baptism, he had any idea what lied ahead of him? In his *short* life he saw and did more than we can probably imagine...

Not unlike the Queen's coronation or Jesus' baptism, I think that our own baptisms also indicate the start of a new chapter in our lives.

It is the public confirmation of our journey through life with God by our side. It's like getting a passport.

Today, without a passport, we can't travel the world. A passport is a document which states who you are, where you belong and where you are allowed to go – something else that is very similar to a first century genealogy...

Having the right paperwork is something my family and I have first-hand experience of. You can't just pack your bags and move country – you need visas and a passport. But with the right paperwork in place, the *world* is your playground!

Baptism gives us the right to enter a spiritual world without any boundaries – we can go anywhere and do anything, nothing can restrict us. Why? Because our baptism reminds us that we are not alone in our journey through life. Ever. God is with us every step of the way.

The Queen lived through the 2nd World War. Which must have been really hard, but she came through it. Jesus fought, and won, the battle

against sin; which must have been so much harder, but he never gave up, because he did it for us. And this means that we can walk through life with reasonable ease.

If we encounter difficulties along the way, at least we know that we don't have to ever face it alone; through his Spirit God is with us every step of the way.

In the eyes of the world we might be just ordinary people, but actually, because of what God did for us in Jesus, we all are very very special. Every single day of our lives we get to wear the crown of God's love, and we have the paperwork to proof that we belong to him.

The Queen might not have had an idea of what lay ahead of her; Jesus might not have known exactly what he was going to do for us; and to be truthful, none of us knows what lies ahead of us – how many years we are going to be on this earth and what is going to happen with and around us during this time.

But one thing we can know for sure, without a shadow of a doubt, whatever lies ahead of us, we'll be able to face it; we'll be able to excel at it, because God is with us.

What more can anyone ask for?!

....., remind of the gift he has been given today – a crown that might be invisible to the world, but a crown that cannot be removed from his head by anything. And do that by wearing your own crowns with

pride, because then will automatically do exactly the same. May
God bless you as a family.

Amen