

Baptism: Drama, Grace and Inaugural Spirituality

A. Religious Ritual in Judaism

1. Dramatic representations of significant events in God's dealings with Israel.
2. Repeated rituals – every generation could 'relive' these saving moments
 - a. circumcision
 - b. Sabbath
 - c. Passover
 - d. Annual Festivals
 - e. Day of Atonement
 - f. Sacrifices, washings and prayers

B. John's Baptism (Matthew 3, 21; Mark 1, 11; Luke 3; John 1, 3)

1. Nature of John's ministry
 - a. calls Israel to repentance
 - b. prepares Israel for God's imminent action
2. John chooses the ritual of Baptism – why?
 - a. purificatory washings in Israel – Old Testament
 - b. Essene practices
 - c. proselyte baptism (unsure when this started)
 - d. *Miqvoth* – public ritual bathing stations in Jerusalem and private homes
 - e. Prophetic anticipations
 - i. Zechariah 13:1
 - ii. Ezekiel 36:25ff.
3. Elements unique to John's Baptism
 - a. no probationary period or prior commitment to ascetic principles
 - b. preparation for God's action, not entrance into a community
 - c. a single, non-repeatable act
 - d. a dramatic representation of a person's repentant response to God's message through John.
4. How was John perceived? (Matthew 3, Luke 3)
 - a. connection between prophetic role and prophetic symbol
 - b. identification with the people of God
 - c. relationship to "forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4)
 - i. forgiveness – anticipatory of the work of Jesus at the cross?
 - d. acknowledgment that current Jewish religious practices were not sufficient to guarantee divine relationship
5. Christian applications from John's Baptism
 - a. the prophetic note – a symbol that dramatically represents God's worldview
 - b. John links ethics and morality to faith actions – does this relate to baptism?
 - c. personal participation in the drama of baptism – a decision required.

C. Jesus, Baptism and Kingdom Formation

1. Jesus embraces John's Baptism – why? (Mark 1:9-12; Matthew 3)
 - a. agreement with John's message and affirmation of his role
 - b. engagement of his personal mission from God. Eschatological shift is occurring
 - c. sign of submission – his mission means suffering, death and resurrection. Precursor of Gethsemane
 - d. he "fulfils all righteousness", i.e. through Jesus God will demonstrate complete faithfulness to his covenant with Israel. Jesus is fully prepared to live it completely

- e. means by which John might identify Jesus as Messiah (John 1:32-34).
- 2. Jesus' baptismal practice (John 3:22-27; 4:1-2)
 - a. Jesus' disciples baptized people
 - b. Jesus does not talk about baptism (at least in the Synoptic Gospels) directly
 - c. Continuation of John's Baptism?
- 3. Jesus' resurrection commission (Matthew 28:19-20)
 - a. Jesus' mission linked with the Trinity (not expressed in Luke's Gospel)
 - b. Mark's longer ending links faith demonstration to baptism
 - c. Acts 2:38 – early preaching requires baptism as a demonstration of faith
 - d. continuing sign of Christian discipleship
- 4. Baptism is linked in these teachings and activities with three strategic issues:
 - a. baptism is a way for the individual to accept and proclaim forgiveness of sins
 - b. baptism is associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; Acts 2:38)
 - c. baptism marks a change in ethical standards and behaviour (Matthew 28:19-20)
 - d. through these means baptism becomes the event that marks a person's transition into the family of God/people of God. It marks a boundary.
- 5. What is the significance of names attached to baptism? (Matthew 28:19-20)
 - a. in Acts consistently baptism is in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). It is related to his position as Lord
 - b. "name" carries associations of authority. To be baptized in the name of Jesus Messiah is to submit to his authority and indicate one's complete approval of what he stands for.
- 6. Contemporary issues:
 - a. how do we use the example of Jesus and his baptism to enhance our understanding of baptism? Can we link our baptism with our calling in Christ?
 - b. does our baptism indicate our willingness to embrace God's will for our lives – whether it be one of suffering?
 - c. what is the eschatological significance of baptism, particularly as a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence?
 - d. in what sense is baptism "a drama of decision"?
 - e. do John or Jesus ever associate baptism with circumcision?
- 7. Questions about the relationship between John's Baptism and Jesus' call to enter the Kingdom.
 - a. did Jesus assume that those who responded to his call to follow had already embraced John's Baptism? What happened after John was executed? Did Jesus expect his followers (prior to the Cross) to be baptized?
 - b. If followers of Jesus were baptized by Jesus' disciples, was baptism also part of the apostles' ministry to Israel (Mark 6, Matthew 10, Luke 9)?
 - c. Does the incarnate presence of Jesus create a unique situation in which a person's willingness to associate with Jesus is a sufficient mark of Kingdom membership?