

Surprise! Surprise!

- Do you prefer surprise presents or ones you know what is coming?
 - sometimes, as it comes towards Christmas, relatives or friends will phone... "is there anything you'd like?"
- I'm not sure which I prefer!
 - sometimes I like to be asked, like to get something I am actually wanting;
 - at other times I like to be surprised - helps keep giving presents away from being a mere "shopping list" experience!
- God seems to like surprises - **not so much for himself, but for us!**
- This story of John the Baptist and how he baptised Jesus in the Jordan is one of those quite surprising incidents you come across in Scripture from time to time.
 - **peculiar characters** (John - camel hair coat and all! Jesus);
 - **acting in a peculiar manner** (haranguing; baptising; Jesus being baptised).
- And in it all God is slowly unwrapping before us his biggest surprise of all!
 - **Himself come to earth in human form, in his son Jesus!**
- Lets explore three extraordinary, surprising things about God that he reveals of himself through this incident on the banks of the Jordan river:

God has taken human flesh

- John's baptism was a symbol for washing clean.
 - (image: water splash)
- He was asking people to repent - turn from the dirt of sin to God.
- So why should Jesus, the only without sin, the only one already clean, be baptised?
- Because:
 - (1) he wanted to obey God, and
 - (2) show us he was fully human
 - (image: baby/manger)
- In Jesus God had become one of us - sharing every aspect of our experience - so that we might share the the freedom and eternity that is his.

A fishy tale!

- (image: fish tank)
- The story is told of someone who realised they had become a God! Fortunately this involved neither blasphemy, nor megalomania, nor mental breakdown. It simply involved buying a tank of tropical fish!
- It was only after he had lavished attention on them for a week or so that the man began to think about how the fish viewed him. Whether they realised it or not, those fish were entirely dependent on him for their survival. He fed them, or he didn't. He cleaned the tank, or they suffer discomfort. He keeps the water neither too hot nor too cold, or they die. He pumps air through the tank, but at a whim he could switch it off.
- A number of months later the man decided to change the fish's tank for a larger one. He knew it would give them a better quality of life - but he also knew not matter how he tried to minimise their distress, the actual process of moving from one tank to another would be unpleasant for them. There was nothing he could do to explain that what was happening was for their own good - humans are not able to communicate with fish in that way. If he had wanted to let them know ho he planned to give them a new life, the only way would be to leave humanity behind and go down into the waters and become a fish...
- First surprising thing we learn:
 - **God took flesh - stunningly, extraordinarily - that we might gain new life!**

There is nothing to which God will not stoop

- Second thing we learn is that in taking flesh, to help us in our helplessness, there is nothing to which God will not stoop.
 - *(image: man mopping floor)*
- Humans have fallen so far from God we not only don't know how to be good, we can't even properly repent of our sin!
- Not only did Jesus come and live for us...
 - ...not only did he come and die for us...
 - ...he even stooped so low as to repent for us!
- He makes his way to the very heart of our desperate, damaged, sinful situation.
- That is why he is such an incomparable help to us - and example to us.

Microwave story:

- *image microwave oven*
- An American pastor gave his parents a microwave one Christmas. They were excited that they, too, would now be part of the instant generation. When his dad unpacked the microwave and plugged it in, literally within seconds the microwave transformed two smiles into two frowns! Even after reading the instructions they could not make it work. Two days later his mum was talking with a friend and confessed her inability to get the microwave even to heat some water. The friend offered to lend her a better book of instructions.
- *image: mother/son*
- "I really don't need better instructions to get the wretched thing to work," she exclaimed. "What I really need is my son to come along with the gift!"
- Jesus came with the gift of life into our sin-sick world:
 - he didn't just present it to us, dump it on this world's doorstep;
 - rather **he showed us the way of humble repentance that is the doorway to receiving that life!**
- What a surprise, what an astounding realisation for John (who knew something of who Jesus was, Messiah, righteous one):
 - God was taking human sin on himself - there is nothing he won't stoop to in order to help us!

God waits for an invitation

- The third and final surprise that God reveals here is that he always waits for an invitation before acting in our lives:
 - *(image: invitation)*
 - he won't force his way into human affairs, but respects that freedom that he created us to enjoy.
- Jesus, the one who alone can give the true baptism, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, comes not as a baptiser, but to be baptised!
- John the Baptist: "There's something funny going on here....!"
- John at first refuses to baptise him, recognising his purity - "you don't need this baptism!"
- And here's the surprise:
 - Jesus issues no orders!
 - rather, he makes a **request** (v.15; **But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so for now. For in this way we shall do all that God requires."**)
- Jesus hasn't changed. He still acts in the same, surprising fashion today.
- **Jesus asks, patiently and lovingly to be immersed in our lives...**
 - just as all those years ago he presented himself at the shores of Jordan, waiting to see what John would do.

Conclusion

- What an extraordinary incident!
- What an extraordinary God!
- And so we are left with the challenge:
 - *(image: half-open door)*
 - how will we respond to Jesus as he stands at the door of our lives, waiting for an invitation to come in?
 - how will we immerse him in our lives, bringing every nook and cranny, every selfish and private part to him?
 - *how will we do that in the year that lies ahead...?*

Prayer:

- When you left your home and your kingly crown, baptised as a man for me, with the lowliest birth and no home on earth, you were full of humility.
- O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee.