**Matthew 3:13-17**

**Jesus’ baptism – and ours**

I wonder how many tens of thousands of people have been baptized in this church?

 This church was founded in 1190AD and since then, it has been at the heart of Enfield, leading people into a relationship with God and formalizing that through the sacrament of baptism.

 And baptism is such an important rite of passage for us as Christians: in fact, the living out of our faith is hallmarked by the two sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion.

 And so it is important to celebrate our baptisms today and to recognize that our own baptisms are located back into the baptism of Jesus Christ himself in the River Jordan, which is what we heard about in our Gospel reading just now.

 Now, baptism means different things to different people: for some, it is just a traditional thing to do, for others, it is about becoming a part of the family of God, for others, it is about identifying with a particular church family, for others, it is about feeling washed free of sin and having a new start in life. All of these are valid reasons for baptism. But I want us to think this morning about what Jesus’ baptism told us about him and how that relates to each one of us and what that tells us about who we are. And there’s three things in particular to focus on:

 The first is that Jesus’ baptism revealed him as the Son of God.

 In verse 17, we read that after Jesus came up out of the water, “a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’”

 Jesus is the Son of God.

 There have been many other great people in history: inspired leaders, wise gurus, deeply spiritual human beings with the ability to draw people closer to God. But all of them are human beings; the disciples, the prophets, the Buddha, Guru Nanak, Mohommed, Confucius - all incredible people with deep insights. But none of them able to lay claim to the title ‘the Son of God’.

 This is a unique claim that only Jesus Christ can make – to be *the* Son of God: the one and only, the first born of God, as the Creeds say, “begotten, not made”. And no-one else can claim that for themselves.

 And yet, there is something for us to relate to in this aspect of Jesus’ baptism. Because whilst we may not be able to claim the title ‘the Son of God’, it is certainly true that, by baptism, we become adopted children of God.

 Our relationship with God is transformed through baptism: we are no longer just creatures, created by God. We become his adopted children and there is an intimacy available to us with God that is not mirrored in any other part of his created world.

 Through baptism, we become part of God’s family: brothers and sisters together under the parenthood of the Lord God almighty. Just like at the baptism of Jesus, God looks at you and he says, “This is my son, (or daughter), my Beloved with whom I am well pleased”.

 And when we truly grasp that this is how God sees us – beautiful and beloved - then that knowledge and experience can truly transform our world for the better.

 So, first, we are children of God through baptism.

 Second, Jesus’ baptism brought down the Spirit of God, verse 16: “The Spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted on Jesus”.

 The Spirit of God is the presence of God in creation; the same Spirit who was hovering above the waters in the creation story in Genesis, the same Spirit who spoke through the Old Testament prophets, the same Spirit who came upon King David.

 And now this Spirit of God, this Holy Spirit, alights on Jesus in his baptism as the assurance of God’s presence with him, empowering him for the ministry that lies ahead.

 It was this Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus to heal the sick and calm the storms and turn water into wine, and raise the dead, and multiply loaves and fishes.

 And the amazing thing is that through our baptism, the Holy Spirit alights on us and empowers each one of us to live for God too. We are empowered by God to meet the challenges we face in life. We are empowered by God to forgive others, to love others, to be reconciled. We are empowered by God to live out our destinies and become the people that he longs for us to be.

 So like Jesus in his baptism, through ours we become sons and daughters of the living God. We receive the power of the Holy Spirit to live for God.

 And third and finally, like Jesus, we receive the mandate to serve others through our baptism.

 When Jesus was baptized, God spoke and said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased”. And this is a quotation from the Old Testament, from Isaiah 42, in which the suffering Servant is being described; the suffering Servant who carries the sins of the world.

 And Jesus, of course, was that suffering Servant who carried the weight of our pains and sins and wrongdoings so that we could be put right with God.

 Of course, Jesus has done that – once for all – and we cannot be servants of the world in that way. But each one of us, through our baptism, is called into a life of service: we are brought into the Body of Christ, the church, through our baptism, and the church is a servant community. We are to serve those around us – friends, family, other members of the local community and do what we can to meet their needs in good times and in bad.

So Jesus’ baptism was a stand-alone event in one sense because he was absolutely unique as the Son of God, absolutely unique in how he was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and absolutely unique in how he served the world by dying for our sins. But his baptism does act as a kind of metaphor, or role-modelling, for our own:

 We too are adopted as God’s children through baptism.

 We too are empowered by the Holy Spirit through baptism.

 We too are called into a life of service through baptism.

 And so, on this Sunday when we remember the baptism of Christ, we give thanks to God for our own baptisms and we recommit ourselves to living out those baptismal vows; to live faithfully as God’s children, in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the service of those in our community and the wider world.