

# ***Water And Fire***

**Matthew 3:1-12**

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In those days John came.... preaching.

*"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*

He was preparing the people for the arrival of the Messiah, the envoy of God for whom all Creation longed, the one who would restore the broken bonds and relationships between heaven and earth.

For people to prepare themselves for that there needed to be a change in their lives -  
Lives that were all over the map,  
self-centred lives with all kinds of stains and impurities;  
lives that needed to be washed clean and restored.

These lives needed to become lives submitted fully to the authority and rule of their Creator.

He needed to receive their first love;  
their best attention;  
their full obedience.

That obedience and attention and love would have to show itself through changed action and words and thoughts.

Repent!

John preached.

And along with the preaching he used a symbol to help drive the point home in peoples' lives.

"You really want things to be different? You really want your life to be fully submitted to God? You really want everything to be coloured by this commitment to faithfulness?"

Yes?

Then here's a symbol to remind you of that commitment and step you've taken."

The symbol he chose had its roots in the textile industry. Cotton and flax fibres were spun and woven into fabric, which would then be cut into curtains, bedcoverings, and clothing of different sorts. But the natural fibres were of varying hues and shades. There were blemishes and stains, perhaps dirt marks that simply couldn't be removed by washing. So the fabric was dipped into a vat of dye and coloured - every thread the same.

That process of dipping the fabric into the dye vat was called **baptizo**.

In English we have from it the word **baptize**.

John would preach. The people would come in response.

And they would go down into the river

to be covered by water,

dipped in,

- baptized,

a symbol of their desire to be **covered** by God's authority and power,

their desire to be **coloured fully** as servants of His.

More than just being cleaned up a bit, or having a few dirt spots washed out, baptism was a symbol of change - deep, through and through change, like the through and through change that happens to fabric in the dye vat.

Baptism - a symbol that faith will colour everything in the life of the believer: How he thinks.

How he speaks, works, plays.

Which is the point that John was trying to drive through the hard heads of the Pharisees and Sadducees who stood in the crowd.

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance!"

What John also made very clear was that this act of being dipped and coloured, dyed as it were, for the Lord, was not something that stopped with his ministry. It was pointing ahead to the one in whom would be fulfillment, the one who came after him - Jesus Christ.

Now the water of baptism comes to represent blood - the blood of Christ that was sacrificed for us; - the blood that ran down the cross, dripping onto and colouring the ground where Jesus, the Son of God hung in suffering humiliation, carrying the guilt, the shame, the burden for the sins, stains, smudges and evil blotches on our lives.

By the shedding of His blood, we are set free from the curse and domination of evil and sin and eternal death.

We are changed.

Baptism - being recoloured, dyed, spiritually.

It is a symbol, a sacred action - sacrament - that Jesus commanded be continued. Which it has, for 2000 years.

Baptism - the symbol applied to all who enter the community of faith in Jesus Christ; all whose lives are coloured by Him.

With John the sacred act - the sacrament - was a symbol of the desire of the individual who came forward.

With Jesus it becomes more than the symbol of a desire. It represents the washing, cleansing, dying, recolouring work that actually goes on in the life of the believer through the Holy Spirit of Jesus.

The divine, spiritual God power of the Holy Spirit works right into the warp and woof, right into the very weave of the fabric of our lives.

We are changed:

- Our attitudes
- thinking process
- language
- the way we treat other people
- our stewardship of creation.

We begin to reflect the will of the Lord in all these areas.

It becomes a part of who we are.

That is a process, a life-long process.

It is a life-colouring process that happens in community.

It begins when we enter the community of Jesus and doesn't end until He calls us out of this life into eternity.

Baptized - with water and the Spirit

Dyed in the colour of God.

Sad thing about this all -

sad thing is that **sometimes** those who have been baptized with water, who have tasted of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, begin to try and resist the influence of Jesus in their lives. They are, shall we say, tie-dyed Christians.

Remember the process of tie-dying?

A product of the 60's. Someone suggested to me that it might be making a comeback. Could that be true? You know - where a shirt is taken and tied in knots, or has elastics tied around it in certain places.

It gets dipped in the dye vat and pulled out with all these - what was the word back then? -- all these **groovy** patterns on it.

There were places where the dye simply couldn't penetrate, and other places where only a little got in.

Sometimes we behave like tie-died Christians.  
We get baptized. We bring our children for baptism.

We acknowledge belief in Jesus as Saviour. We sing songs on Sunday about Him being sovereign Lord. But then on Monday - well.....

Perhaps we don't want to seem overly fanatical, too out of place in the office and so the language we use tends to become a little off-colour, and the jokes we tell somewhat shady.

Sunday we read the bible passage that talks about thinking about whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent and praiseworthy (Phil 4.8).

And Monday we get home from school, kick off our shoes and flick on the tube to go into a semi-hypnotic state while our brain sucks in trash from less than worthwhile sit-coms.

Sunday we commit to being fully devoted to Jesus.

But Monday we have our eyes on a boy or girl that we'd love to get to know better, and we conveniently overlook the fact that they have no background or interest in serving Jesus.

Sunday we nod our heads in agreement with the reading of the 10 commandments. But Monday we have coffee with some friends and the gossip begins - perhaps not intentionally, but it begins. And before we know it we're exchanging negative, derogatory remarks, hurtful and unhelpful statements -- the sort of thing that Jesus called murder.

And should someone point these things out, we perhaps resent it.  
Or we shrug it off saying, "What do you expect, anyway? Perfection?"

See?? We twist part of ourselves into a tight knot and intentionally or not, consciously or quietly end up with the attitude - "Baptizing, colouring Spirit of Jesus, you're welcome in this house of mine..... as long as you don't get too carried away splashing around that holy dye of yours too much. "

Tie-dyed.

We're all that way to some degree.

And God is at work undoing those knots, removing the elastics from those corners of our lives so that we would - in everything - reflect the colours of our Saviour. That's renewing work. Renewal.

Sanctification is the old church word for that process.  
Sanctification - that our lives would reflect in concrete reality what the sacrament of baptism represents -- the sacredness of God shining through me.

Tonight we're going back to remember our baptism.

And it's the chance to ask,

"Dear Jesus, could there be parts of me that remain in knots, that I've held back from you?"

Tonight is a moment to recommit ourselves to the ongoing baptizing work of the Spirit;  
to pray for his purifying fire to flow through us and cleanse us.

For each of us there will be special areas that God will bring to mind.

Areas that need to be unknotted.

As we proceed with the liturgy of remembrance,

and as we have some quiet prayer time where you'll be able to come forward and remember  
with the touch of water,

listen to what the Holy Spirit may be saying.

Acknowledge the problem areas.

Allow this to be a truly open time between you and your Saviour.

And invite Him to begin the process of change, of recolouring even those habits and thoughts and attitudes you wonder if you could ever live without, but know that He isn't fully pleased with.