

## ***“Beloved Child”***

When he penned his Story of Jesus in 85 CE,  
one of Matthew’s sources was Mark’s Gospel,  
where he found his account of Jesus’ baptism.

I don’t think Mark intended for his readers  
to see this story as one of “literal” history;  
But... whatever Matthew thought of Mark,  
he makes significant changes in his version.

1<sup>st</sup> he dramatizes the encounter between Jesus & John:  
Mark says simply, *“Jesus came & was baptized by John,”*  
while Matthew has, *“Jesus came to be baptized by John.”*

And Matthew has John protesting mightily:

*“Me... baptizing you, a sinless person?  
It is I who needs to be baptized by you!”*

Here we discover Matthew’s agenda:  
a need to rationalize Jesus’ Baptism;  
we will have another look at that later.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> difference is in how the heavens opened.

*“Just as,”* Mark’s Jesus *“was coming up out  
of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart,”*  
while in Matthew’s version, *“Just as he came  
up from the water the heavens were opened.”*

In Mark Jesus is the only one to see it, while,  
in Matthew, everybody else gets to see it too;  
not only do they see it, but they hear it as well.

There’s the 3<sup>rd</sup> difference: In Mark, the voice speaks to Jesus,

*“You are my son etc.,”* but Matthew has, *“This is my son.”*

Page 2

So for Matthew, the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit  
at his baptism is a public event, witnessed by all present.

Matthew’s need to rationalize Jesus baptism,  
who by then was seen as the perfect human,  
is tied into the public nature of his anointing.

Matthew has John agree to baptize Jesus,  
rationalizing that it is the right thing to do.

*“Make it so now; for it is proper for us  
in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”*

Somehow Jesus’ being baptized  
made baptism right forevermore,  
Yes! forevermore & for everyone.

PAUSE

The little group of doctors and interns burst out laughing  
at their own joke... slapping each other on the shoulders  
in good natured camaraderie as they go for coffee break.

The nurse finished tucking in the last sleepy infant  
and left the nursery to return to the central station.

*“At last! Alone!”* I breathed. *“Alone!  
With you! Weren’t they a noisy lot?”*

In the stillness, the rhythmic pushing  
of my rocking chair slowed somewhat.  
But my gaze, never even for a second,  
left the swaddled ‘bundle’ in my arms.

*“At last! Alone with you! How can this be? How can you be?  
And me holding you? I know the biology, but this is bigger.”*

**Page 3**

*“Oh, I remember the day I met your mother.  
pensively watching the room full of people,  
dancing, chatting, laughing - just as it was  
here in this nursery but a few minutes ago.”*

*“Only it wasn’t a nursery... it was a Hall,  
the site of her sister’s Wedding reception.  
The maid of honour in a dusty rose gown,  
one dance... and I just had to know more.”*

*“We talked ‘til all hours and we started dating,  
four months later we were engaged to marry,  
and four months after that was our wedding.”*

*“And then - before long - you were on the way.  
On my thirtieth birthday your mother told me.  
I couldn’t believe it. What a birthday present.  
I watched her tummy grow bigger and bigger.”*

*“One day, she took my hand in hers, kissed it,  
then put my hand right on top of her tummy!  
We could feel you kicking and moving inside.  
Wow! I couldn’t believe it. How could it be?”*

*“When we went to the clinic for the ultrasound  
- that’s just a fancy way of looking for you -  
the technician pointed to the screen and said,  
‘There! That’s your little one!’ And I looked,  
and looked again... I tried so hard to see you,  
all I could see was wiggly lines & blurry waves.  
How could that be you, you on a little screen?”*

*“Today - real early - your mother said it was time.*

*We came to the hospital; and suddenly you were  
here. You cried! Your mother cried! I cried too!”*

**Page 4**

*“They cleaned you up, weighed you, measured you,  
and swaddled you; then they put you in my arms.”*

*“Imagine! In my arms! And the nurse brought  
us here, to this rocking chair. So here we are.”*

*“And now you are one hour old. Aah!  
You keep looking at me! Who am I?”*

*“Lifting you up, I gently kiss your tiny forehead,  
and ever so tenderly hold you close to my chest.”*

*“Rocking, rocking. Who am I? I am your daddy!  
You are my child, my beloved, and I am so happy.”*

**PAUSE**

Today parents still bring their children to be baptized,  
each of them - publicly - affirming their child’s identity.

*“This is my child, my beloved, who makes me so happy.”*

Today congregations are still affirming  
their desire to welcome those children  
as part of the worldwide family of faith:

*“These are our children.... We love them  
and we want to get to know them better.”*

And today we acknowledge Jesus,  
who - by being baptized himself -  
speaks for God to all of us, saying,

*“These are my beloved children,  
and I’m very happy with them.”*

**Because, as Matthew's Jesus said,  
that's the right thing to do... Amen**