

Sunday 7th November 2004, Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Haggai 1:15 - 2:9
- Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21
- 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17
- Luke 20:27-40

10am

Welcome to the many who have come for Noah's baptism.

Although Noah's baptism signifies something that has been real for Noah in

- God's spirit in his life
- His presence among the Christian family, — here at St Philip's — and at — Home Church

It is also something of a beginning as Noah is formally baptised and welcomed — What has been is affirmed and we look to What will be.

Infant baptism recognises that our response to God's call to us in Jesus — our being disciples is worked out and influenced by our Christian Community (Noah has two!). And so as Noah is baptised, he is baptised into Christ.

In that, he is incorporated into the Spirit of Christ but he is also incorporated into the family of Christ, and our promises reflect that. As a child is born into a family and learns the customs, traditions and beliefs and values of that family so too is a child born by baptism into the Christian family.

- Customs
- traditions

- belief
- value

It is about all of us being disciples of Jesus — apprentices — sitting at his feet to learn of God to experience His Spirit poured out.

It is interesting to know that if Yasser Arafat dies, the Palestinian people (or at least those supporters of Mr Arafat) will hope to bury him in the El Aksa Mosque or the Dome of the Rock, which is built within the area of the Jewish Temple. The Muslim Shrine dates from about the 7th century and it is believed that the prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven from this place.

It is also thought to be where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac.

So it is at least disputed territory and of course it would set a very poor precedent for the Israeli Government to let Yasser Arafat be buried there.

The original temple built by Solomon about 970 - 930 BC, became the central sanctuary for Jewish religion and according to Deuteronomy, it was only here that sacrificed lambs could be offered.

This temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587/6BC, but then in 520BC, when the captive Jews had been returned from their exile in Babylon, Haggai (with Zecharahiah) instigated the rebuilding of the temple.

But the temple was destroyed again in 167BC and then rebuilt by Herod, only to be destroyed again by the Romans in 70AD.

So the temple has been part of Jewish hope and expectation for many years.

but it was Haggai who stirred up the rebuilding in 520BC.

In six addresses dated from the 6th to the 9th Month of the Year 520BC, Haggai encouraged Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the High Priest (joint leaders of the Judean community), to assume official leadership in the reconstitution of the temple. He also urged the

priests to purify the worship of the people.

These two steps were urgent practical steps towards unifying the religious life of the people as they settled back into their homeland.

But Haggai also saw them as a necessary preparation for the age of the Messiah.

He believed that on their completion, the wonderful era foreseen by the earlier prophets would come — for then

1. God would bless the people with fruitfulness and prosperity
2. the Gentiles would be overthrown
3. and Zerubbabel would be established as the messiah/king on the throne of David.

Now The reason for reading this passage, apart from the importance of the Temple etc., is that historical references to Zerubbabel point in most cases to his being the son of Shealtiel — but in 1Chronicles he is the son of Pedaiah.

It has been conjectured that Zerubbabel was the child of a levirate marriage, where Shealtiel died childless and Zerubbabel was borne to his widow by the deceased man's brother. So that legally, the offspring of Pedaiah was legally the son of Shealtiel. a

There may be other explanations, **BUT** it does connect with the gospel story in a couple of ways.

- Zerubbabel is of the line of David,
- There is the connection with the Temple **and** its rebuilding. (Jesus and the new Temple.)
- The reference to levirate marriage in the gospel story.

In the gospel story, Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem — so Christian writers are seeing the inauguration of the new age in that the Messiah has come. But in Luke's gospel, it is **NOT** in triumph but in humility. It seems to me that what we have is the unknown messiah in the midst of the people answering questions about the age to come — today the Sadducees appear only here in Luke's gospel — (the name is derived we think from

Zadok the priest.)

Sadducees were a conservative, aristocratic, priestly party, worldly minded and willing to cooperate with the Romans. Patriotic and pious people opposed them. They differed from the Pharisees in that piety was not their main agenda and they also rejected the oral tradition valued by the Pharisees. This accepted only the written tradition of scripture and denied any form of after life. ["sad, you see"]

So they raise this idea of levirate marriage to refute any idea of resurrection. The difficulty is that by Jesus' time, levirate marriage had fallen into disuse and there are few references to it in scripture. (It may reflect their conservative approach to written scripture.)

But it shows the fraudulence of their argument.

They approached Jesus with negative and closed minds and so any discussion was doomed.

Zerubbabel became an honoured king and much was written about him. Jesus in his message today reinforces the idea that God is the God of the living and that the new age he brings is about life with God — whether it be here **OR** in that which is to come!