

Day 4

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins... And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I... I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." 1.4-8

Baptism, or ritual washing, was a widespread practice in the many religions of the ancient world. We know it was practised in Judaism too (e.g. Lev 13.7), there being numerous pools on the south side of the Temple.

Judaism used full immersion ritual washing when a Gentile converted to Judaism, and spoke of it as a rebirth. There were strict rules to this purification ceremony: the



convert had to be stripped totally naked, and not so much as the string of a bean was allowed to cover the space between two teeth.

So what John offered wasn't radical, except that he was calling on Jews to be baptized. He was, in effect, saying that they needed to be converted to God's way as much as Gentiles.

For a Jew to respond to John's call to repent and be baptized took incredible humility, which can only have been the result of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

Amazingly, crowds flocked to John to be baptized. Something supernatural was beginning which the Messiah himself would complete by baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

? Reflect on your own coming to Christ. How difficult and humbling was it? Did it involve submitting every part and detail of your life to God for his cleansing?

 Lord God, as a father shows compassion to his children, so you show compassion to those who fear you. Help me not to be afraid to face my sins and my need for your cleansing grace. May I know the healing power of your forgiveness this and every day, through Jesus my Lord. Amen.