

Sunday 10th January The Baptism of Christ – Deacon Corinne

Jesus must have been a bit of a surprise for John, after all the expectations which had built up down the generations of what the promised Messiah would be like! Here was no powerful leader, who would sweep everything that got in his way aside but, rather, Jesus stood humbly before John asking for baptism.

What then happened to Jesus immediately after his baptism tells us something vital about the purpose of Jesus' ministry and also the characteristics which were to mark it; that yes he'd come to fulfil God's plan, but that he'd do it by humbly identifying himself with God's people, sharing every aspect of their lives and, indeed, their deaths.

How would this bring about what John expected? When Jesus came up out of the water of baptism, he received God's spirit, God's breath in a new way. As the words of Isaiah are echoed, the Jewish readers of Matthew's gospel would know that the rest of the passage speaks of hope and tenderness.

When we are baptised into the body of Christ, several life-changing things happen. We make a covenant (or a covenant is made on our behalf, which we ratify at Confirmation) We promise to worship God, to resist evil, to proclaim the Good News, to seek Christ in all persons, and to strive for justice. We then receive the Holy Spirit, which empowers us to keep our promises.

We also get to claim as our own the very same words that Jesus hears from God in heaven, "You are my beloved son, in you I am well pleased". As we are incorporated into Christ's body, we hear God say to each one of us, "You are my beloved son, or daughter, and in you I am well-pleased".

How do you remember your baptism? Not the specifics of the event which, for many of us, happened when we were babies. No, what I am asking is, "what does your baptism mean to you"? "Who does your baptism say that you are"?

No matter what successes might come our way during our lives, surely, there can be nothing better than God looking directly into our eyes and saying, "I am proud of you"....and God repeats that every time we come to the altar. "You are my beloved son/daughter. I am proud of you". It is the blessing which God gives to Jesus and is the blessing which he gives to each of us, too.

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his ministry; and so it is for us. Our baptism marks the beginning of our journey of discipleship as we live out our baptismal calling throughout our lives.

One of the challenges to us, especially in the Covid-dominated year through which we've all lived, is to learn afresh to be surprised by Jesus; and the thing to remember is that Jesus has been out there before us, and will be with us through whatever wildernesses we might find ourselves in.

The other thing to remember is that Christ came to fulfil God's plans, not ours, and sometimes it's difficult to see what these plans are. However, if we listen carefully, God will lead us and give us moments of vision and glimpses of his greater reality.

The Good News is that at the centre of this reality we'll find our loving father affirming us as his children and, through our own baptisms, is asking us to participate with him in demonstrating that no darkness, whether global, national or personal can overcome the light which Christ brought into the world.