

Today we celebrate the baptism of our Lord in the Jordan River by John the Baptist and with this celebration, the culmination of Christmastide.

The event of Jesus baptism is proclaimed in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and in the gospel of John, we hear how John the baptiser witnesses to the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus, identifying him as the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.

In each gospel the main focus of Jesus baptism is at the time when he is coming up out of the water, and the heavens are opened and the Spirit in the form of a dove, descends upon him. And a voice from the heavens says *this is my son with whom I am well pleased*.

Rowan Williams offers us an image of what happens at this point in time. He writes, *Jesus' baptism is, a descent into the depths from which new creation comes, the depths of watery chaos, because this baptism is like the very beginning of all things*.

*In Jesus baptism, as he goes down into the water, he descends into the murky waters or the chaos of this world. With his descent the Spirit comes down upon him, to equip him to begin the new creation.*<sup>1</sup>

Now when we turn our minds back to the beginning of creation in Genesis 1 we recall how the Spirit hovers over the chaos and out of chaos the world comes into being. The whole event of Jesus baptism echoes the beginning of creation in Genesis 1 and just as God proclaimed that creation was "good" in the beginning, God proclaims the goodness of the Son at Jesus baptism.

So as followers of Jesus, our own Baptism is a new beginning for us, also. We are baptised into a new creation in Christ. This is all a gift to us, from the Father, through the Son, by the working of the Holy Spirit in the Word.

This new life doesn't mean that who we were before wasn't good enough. It's not like we aren't God's children before we're baptized. We're God's children from the moment God creates us. Baptism is when we receive the freedom to be who God creates us to be in new awareness, dedication and connection.

In our baptism we take part in the rite that uses the outward and visible signs of water, oil, the cross, the Paschal candle, and the people of God. All of these things connect us to the Body of Christ, to all of those people who have gone before us, walk with us now, and will follow us on the journey of following Jesus.

In our own baptism something seriously theological happens as well.

We go with Jesus into the human condition at it's most terrible - we go with him to the cross. And it is in the love of God that we are also raised with him in the resurrection.

In a personal sense what this means is that we are enabled to be in touch with our own inner need of God's Spirit for re-creation, and to be in touch with the murkiness around us, the muddle, the suffering, the neediness of human experience.

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<sup>1</sup> aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/2572/archbishop-of-canterburys-visit-to-the-diocese-of-gloucester#Study Accessed 10.1.19.

And in this we are not alone for to be baptised is to be incorporated and welcomed into the church as Christians, in the name of the Trinitarian God: in the name of the Father who calls, and in the Son who is the Word of the Father to humankind and of the Holy Spirit in whom this offer of the Father in the Son really comes to men and women to sanctify and to redeem. Each baptised person is therefore appointed by baptism to be a messenger of the word, a witness to the truth, and a representative of the grace of Christ in the world.

Jesus baptism in the Jordan nearly 2000 years ago is a profoundly wondrous event that speaks about the grace of God in the world in forgiveness and newness of life.

I know that for many in this day and age, baptism has lost its sense of importance, however the profound wonder of the first sacrament of baptism never changes.

St Hippolytus of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century writes of the wonder of Jesus baptism and our own as those who follow him: *'He who is present everywhere and is absent nowhere, incomprehensible to the Angels and withdrawn from the gaze of man, has come to baptism as was his good pleasure... Could anything be more wonderful? The Source without limits that engenders life for all mankind and is beyond all understanding is covered by the poor waters of this world'*.

At his Baptism, Jesus chose to be with us where we are, to enter into solidarity with us, mortal and fragile as we are. In so doing, he laid himself open to the ways of the world.

His baptism is the preamble of the Crucifixion. The whole destiny of Jesus is contained within it. It is the culmination of Christmastide because it is the source of the impetus that will carry us on to Easter.

Today I am baptising two little children and today in the power of the Holy Spirit they will enter into something more than what the world has to offer – they will enter God's realm where, with him, there is eternal hope in which all things are made possible.

Let us pray

*Dear lord, we give you thanks for our own baptism and pray that we will live out the vows promised at our baptism so that we may be effective witnesses to you in this world.*

*We uphold to you Alexa and Eric who will be baptised today – may they grow into their fullness in you and radiate in this world your wonder, your joy and your love.*

The Lord be with you