

# The Baptism of Jesus

8<sup>th</sup> January 2023

The celebration of Christ's baptism is always a special way to begin the year. This year the readings remind us of the way Jesus steps not just into human flesh, but that he chose to stand in solidarity completely with our human predicament. As he is baptised along with crowds of people seeking forgiveness and change, Jesus makes a clear statement that God is not separate from humanity, but is in complete and committed solidarity with us. The Father's voice, '*This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased*' is something that Christians through the ages have clung onto, especially in difficult times. As children of God, we too are beloved.

The baptism of Jesus is an event that is very important in Jesus' ministry. In this story we see clearly the trinitarian relationship between Father and Son and Spirit in the form of a dove. Jesus is affirmed by the Father whose voice from heaven speaks out in love and admiration, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

The events that occurred in Jesus' baptism are all signs of God's presence.

- **The heavens were opened.** We have all seen those beautiful times when the clouds part to allow the sun shine through dramatically- it's like the 'heavens open' and we can see hope and possibility. The term 'Heaven' is a symbol of God's presence, so the heavens being opened shows God's closeness to and love for humanity. God is interested in us humans- in our daily concerns and issues. God is not separated from us and we do not need to be special people or those who have achieved great things or a state of holiness by some particular standard to experience God's presence. It has often been said that 'God is as close as our breathing.'
- **The Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove.** In the Old Testament doves were a symbol of the arrival of good news – for instance when a dove brought the news that the flood had ended in the story of Noah. It has come to mean the symbol of peace and is a symbol of the Holy Spirit in Christianity. So the Holy Spirit came to bless Jesus in his earthly ministry which starts after his baptism. The Holy Spirit comes to us to affirm us in our own ministries too. God has plans for you and me; whatever our capabilities or age, there is always something that God is calling us to do and be. We need to be open to the gentle dove like whisperings of the Spirit. I have found that sometimes a call to participate in God's plan is loud and insistent- but often it is quiet and we need to be attuned to listening to what God is saying to us.
- **A voice from Heaven spoke,** "You are my son whom I love, with you I am well pleased." This confirmed Jesus' identity as the beloved Son of God and would have given him confidence to carry out his ministry. Our heavenly Father also affirms us ...when you are feeling down or isolated or not very positive for one reason or another, may I suggest that you spend some time meditating on God's love for you. This practice will develop in you a deeper passion for God's presence. I have found this quote from Henri Nouwen to be very true and helpful:

*Every time you listen with great attentiveness to the voice that calls you Beloved you will discover within yourself a desire to hear that voice longer and more deeply.*

### **Why did Jesus get baptised?**

Jesus is God's son, so he was sinless and there was no need for him to receive forgiveness. John tried to refuse to baptise Jesus saying that it was he, John, who should be baptised by Jesus. Christians believe Jesus was baptised so that he could show God's love for us. It was an act of solidarity, recognising that Jesus is both fully God and fully human. He is able to walk beside us in difficult times simply because he knows what we humans face; he understands the misery that one person can cause another. He 'gets us' and our pain. His baptism shows his great humility. He set an example for us to follow- we too are to walk beside others in their pain. We are not to hurriedly dismiss someone's struggles with a bland 'close -down- the -conversation' statement like 'O yes, I got over that situation' which only serves to make the other person feel vulnerable and unsupported. Instead we are called to be Jesus to them: to listen, to empathise and to walk with them.

Jesus' baptism also signifies that Jesus is greater than John the Baptist who was the last of the Old Testament style prophets. Jesus showed us how much God loves all types of people and he did this with power and authority which amazed the crowds and even left the disciples stunned at times. His baptism showed that Jesus had a special mission to fulfil ... Jesus is the Son of God who has come to teach about forgiveness and to overturn the religious structures which were preventing the common people from developing that close relationship with God which he modelled for us. He shows us how to live in the world wholeheartedly devoted to God the Father. His call to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17) is an urgent invitation to reorient our values, habits, loves, thinking, and behaviour according to a different understanding, one rooted in the revelation of God's nature and coming reign. And we take us this challenge because we are the beloved, because God first loved us

I like the depiction of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River on the pew sheet. It's a Gothic fresco in the ancient Tingsted church, in Denmark. Jesus is stripped down to the barest of essentials- we too have to come to God, leaving behind the accoutrements and trappings of what makes us feel OK if we want to experience God's healing and wholeness. The Spirit is there as the dove and an angel too stands ready to clothe Jesus anew. His robe is not the white we usually associate with baptism, but red, foreshadowing his mission which will entail his own self offering. God's spirit also wants to 're clothe' us, the beloved children, with the fruits and character of Christ.



And like Jesus, we too are pronounced 'Beloved' by our heavenly Father! The early Christians held onto this truth, especially as they contemplated the meaning of Jesus' words: 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.' John 15:9 It is good to also contemplate this: quieten yourself and relax your body. Listen to the Father's voice as God calls you 'beloved'. Savour this for a time and then tell God how you feel about being 'a beloved child of God.'

Song for reflection: [A Child of God, Trevor Ranger:](#)