

The Baptism of the Lord

As we look back at our lives, most of us will be able to remember and identify key moments when the course of our lives changed. We may even be able to identify one moment which set a course which we followed for the rest of our lives and are still following.

Matthew mentions one of those key moments today. It was the time when Jesus left Galilee as a young man to go to his cousin John and be baptised by him at the Jordan.

We do not know anything about Jesus upbringing in Galilee except that Luke tells us that under the guidance and care of Mary and Joseph, Jesus grew in wisdom and maturity. He certainly would have grown up learning the tradition of his Jewish people and their hope for a Messiah and saviour. He would have been conscious as well of his own relationship with God his Father and his mission to do the work he had been sent to do.

So we can rest assured that it was as a mature and wise human being that Jesus left the security and relative safety of Nazareth to meet John at the Jordan. John was a prophet and religious leader whose baptism marked a readiness to change in preparation for the imminent coming of the Christ or the saviour.

Jesus' intention was to be baptised by John who did not like the idea. He must have recognised that Jesus was greater than he was and said that he was uncomfortable about baptising Jesus. Jesus insisted and he received the baptism of repentance, which he did not actually need. As he came up from the water the Holy Spirit came upon him and the Father's voice was heard saying that this was his Son, the beloved, on whom his favour rests.

I am sure if we asked Jesus which was the major turning point in his life; which was the key momentous decision, he would have said that it was his baptism by John in the Jordan. This is the point where he freely joined himself to the human race in its need for healing and peace; it was here that he was filled with the Holy Spirit and was driven to commence his work of healing and bringing the wholeness and peace of salvation to all people. It was here that Jesus' life giving work became public, a work which lead him to that supreme act when he offered himself on the Cross to be our source of reconciliation.

With Jesus we can all recall those moments when a significant change happened which altered the course of life. For Jesus it was his baptism and of course for us all, whether we realise it or not, it was our baptism. At his own baptism Jesus committed himself to us to do the work of his Father which was to transform, renew and complete humanity and creation. Filled with the Spirit he was and is the living presence of God bringing creation to fulfilment.

Our own baptism follows the same pattern in that it joins us to Jesus in his work for the world and for us all. When we were baptised we became members of his body and each of us became part of that great work which is Jesus' mission. In confirmation we were given a share in the same Holy Spirit who descended upon Jesus at the Jordan and each time we receive the Body and Blood of the Lord we are drawn more deeply into his Body and changed so that our lives might more reflect his image and purpose.

After his baptism Jesus set out to proclaim and to become the Good News of God. We are to do the same, except that we are already on the journey; the task has already begun for us and today we must renew our commitment and energy. In fact a beginning is always to remember that baptism in the power of the Spirit claims the whole of us: bodies; minds; relationships; activities; work; joys and sorrow that all of it might show forth Jesus and his promise to others.

A number of challenges follow for us.

The first is to pray so that our eyes may be open to his presence in our lives so that we may grow in our conviction that he is with us. With us in prayer and silence; with us in our relationships, with us in our struggle for peace, justice and freedom; with us as we search for wholeness and well being.

To recognise his presence and action in our lives will move us to give him thanks and praise. We will want to give thanks in every experience of our lives and we will want to give thanks perfectly together as we gather for the Sunday Eucharist.

The experience of Christ in our own lives and the difference his presence makes helps us to see that every human being is created for a relationship with him. Our work is that those who have not explicitly found Christ may find in us an encouragement to persevere in patience in that search for life which is the search for Christ.

It is at this point that our baptismal commitment parallels that of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is given us so that we might become his visible presence for the sake of those who search for him. Our whole lives must make present in word and in deed his life giving love. No part of our lives can be excluded from this task. It will embrace our thoughts and attitudes, our relationships whether intimate or less familiar; in fact all our speaking and all our doing.

“God’s grace has been revealed, and it has made salvation possible for the whole human race and taught us that what we have to do is give up everything that does not lead to God, and all our worldly ambitions; we must be self-restrained and live good and religious lives here in this present world, while we are waiting in hope for the blessings which will come with the appearing of the glory of our great God and saviour Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:11-14)