

Sunday 10th January 2021 Baptism of Christ

Collect

Eternal Father,
who at the baptism of Jesus
revealed him to be your Son,
anointing him with the Holy Spirit:
grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit,
that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Old Testament reading

Isaiah 42:1-9

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.
Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

Sunday 10th January 2021 Baptism of Christ

I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.
I am the Lord, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.
See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

Psalm 29

1 Ascribe to the Lord, you gods,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his Name;
worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.
3 The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders;
the Lord is upon the mighty waters.
4 The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice;
the voice of the Lord is a voice of splendour.
5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees;
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon;
6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.
7 The voice of the Lord splits the flames of fire;
the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
8 The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe
and strips the forests bare.

Sunday 10th January 2021 Baptism of Christ

9 And in the temple of the Lord
all are crying, "Glory!"

10 The Lord sits enthroned above the flood;
the Lord sits enthroned as King for evermore.

11 The Lord shall give strength to his people;
the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

New Testament reading

Acts 10:34-43

Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Sunday 10th January 2021 Baptism of Christ

Gospel reading

Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Reflection

This Sunday the church celebrates the Baptism of Christ, the second of the five insights into the nature of Christ which Tony listed last week. These are the theme of the Sundays of the Christmas season, ending in the Feast of the Presentation forty days after Christmas Day on 2nd February.

It may seem a little rushed to celebrate Christ's baptism as an adult man just after we've celebrated his birth, with all its emphasis on the baby; but where else in the church's year would you put it?

Anywhere else would take away some of its significance.

Each gospel gives us a record of the baptism of Christ. John and Mark, who give us no narrative of the nativity, both begin with it as the first appearance of Jesus. Matthew and Luke bring it in straight away after the birth stories. It marks the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

Today's Old and New Testament prepare us for the gospel story with the before and after picture. Isaiah's prophecy describes the Messiah who is to come and the new world he will bring about. Through gentleness and strength, righteousness and God's spirit the servant

Sunday 10th January 2021 Baptism of Christ

will turn the world back to a loving God. Peter's speech in the house of Cornelius a Roman centurion, sets out how Jesus did this through the ultimate sacrifice, and how all who repent and believe are reconciled with that loving God.

Both these readings stand on either side of the baptism account, as it is at His baptism that Jesus is acknowledged by God as His Son. "This is my son", says the voice that is heard and recorded in all our gospels. Have you noticed that from now on God does not speak; but Jesus, who is one with the Father, does? At his baptism Jesus receives the blessing of the Father to begin the ministry which continues to this day. This is the insight into His nature that we celebrate today. He is the blessed Son of the Father.

You could ask...why did Jesus get baptised, when baptism is all about repentance? He had nothing to repent of as He was without sin. This was certainly John's response when Jesus came to him for baptism. He thought their places should be reversed! But Jesus insists. Baptism and repentance do go together. We have enshrined that in our liturgies and practices. Being baptised does not mean sin goes away, however, and we need to keep on repenting...as we well know! That is also enshrined in our liturgies and practice. The difference is that there is also forgiveness for the one who trusts in Christ, as Peter tells us at the end of that speech in today's reading.

Whilst baptism re-assures us that we can be forgiven, it is not "all about repentance". It also shows us that we belong. It is a sign that we are part of the body of Christ. Jesus' baptism is a sign of one-ness with us. We are all part of the same thing...the body of believers, the church, the children of God, those who have faith in redemption through Christ's amazing sacrifice.

The words which introduce the sharing of the peace, merging words from Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12, tell us where we belong.

"We are the body of Christ. In the one spirit we are all baptised into one body..."

Sunday 10th January 2021 Baptism of Christ

Then we proceed to demonstrate that sense of belonging by our actions.

In His baptism, Christ is showing that belonging, and opening it up for us.

Belonging, being part of community, seems to be a key concept at this time of lockdown, with all its accompanying concerns and anxieties. We should be caring for one another, even if that is shown best by keeping away from one another! We look out for the needs of the more vulnerable and we are considerate toward our neighbour. As Christians we continue to pray for our church, each other, our world, our communities and the suffering. And as those who belong to Christ we are His hands, eyes and feet in His world. At present we cannot physically meet together to be that body. Our church buildings have closed for now, but our church community is alive and kicking. It has been all the time since the churches last closed, even for those who could not resume worship. Somehow it did not feel anywhere near as devastating to send out the notice to you this week that we have to close as it did last March. We have proved that we are very much a community, and, moreover, a community which has served, and will continue to serve, the wider communities where we are.

On Monday, I received some responses to the closure email. Here is one of them from a church member:

“The church building may be closed, but the church community will remain open and connected through our fellowship with each other and God.”

We are the body of Christ....and we don't have to be in the building to be that body. By His baptism, which we celebrate this Sunday, Christ began that community, that place of belonging. We carry that in our hearts. May His presence be a blessing to us all now and in the days to come.

Alison