

The Baptism of Christ '26

The Baptism of Christ is a wonderful 'Epiphany moment', is it not, when the heavens opened? It was an unforgettable event which fulfilled the Prophet Isaiah's own words:

"I am the Lord, that is my name."

The Holy Spirit descends like a dove and that epiphany becomes a sacramental moment for all time. John the Baptist made this happen however reluctantly or humbly; it was if you like, the moment that turned his own life and calling around...showing Christ as the Anointed One, God's chosen and beloved.

That's why our own baptisms matter so much whether we remember the event or not. They mark out that wonderful moment in time when those closest to us said their public thank you for God's gift of a new creation, and a new life screaming out for attention. And today's collect is still our collective and individual prayer of recollection and hope:

"Grant to us who are born again by water and the Spirit, that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children."

We don't choose our parents of course, but God does choose us, and he calls us by name.

I wasn't able to go to my friend's funeral on Friday in Ely Cathedral but I did watch it later on YouTube. And for me, the most moving part of his Requiem Eucharist, was right at the end, when Fr. Jim's coffin was silently sprinkled with holy water by the Dean, and then censed with the perfume of

prayer, as if to reach up to the heavens. Baptism is the sacramental sign of being adopted by our Creator God and it is pure gift, freely and unconditionally received. It lasts a lifetime regardless of what we achieve or don't achieve. Baptism marks out our belonging to Christ and within that local community, called 'Church' where all Christians celebrate their sacramental belonging.

Now I know that our Church font is not the River Deben, but quite a few have sampled a symbolic sprinkling of their own over the years at St Mary's; and many a priest has witnessed the magic of that great mystery of initiation which we treasure as our Baptism.

But a personal word of caution. I have only presided over a handful of Baptisms here over the last 5 years...as if to suggest that Covid has somehow caused a great pall to hang over us? I just don't know. But perhaps we do need, all of us, to encourage our young parents about today's Gospel and the example Jesus made so openly and publicly.

I don't know what you thought of my poster a few weeks ago, at the top of Church Street? "Drive-Thru here this Christmas, and Stay awhile." I thought it was brilliant and the numbers were double last year's! Seriously though, I hesitate to take any responsibility for this sudden wave of enthusiasm and I am not really one for gimmicks or 'soundbites'.

I just wonder whether we need to be more confident about our telling the Good News; that our adoption into any and every Christian family is the very first step of coming to

encounter the overflowing embrace of God, his streams of welcoming love which can transform into rivers and oceans, and they do! We shouldn't conceal or hide this wonderful, epiphany truth.

Perhaps my next, new poster, could read: 'Drive-Thru here and get adopted' but I think people would start talking... which is really what this homily is about.

Let's be more upfront about those special epiphany moments in our lives when our riverside town can boast so many baptism enquiries, that our PCC will demand from our new Bishop a new curate to help! That we start up a new toddlers group...the possibilities are surely there for supporting and nurturing those young families who are reaching out for a new faith journey of their own, within a nurturing and welcoming Christian family.

To be adopted and hallowed, by God's grace, at any age of course, is a privilege and a joy - as it is to know, the sheer depth, volume and outreach - of His unconditional love and acceptance of us all: as His baptised, His chosen ones.

Glory be...

AMEN.

