

January 10th 2016 – The Baptism of Jesus

Hello☺ Great to be here. Thank you for the welcome that Shelly and I have received. It's great to be here and I guess I had better start with something about me, so you know what you have let yourselves in for☺ I am 52 and been ordained 26 years this summer. This is my 6th post in that time and my first in Canada but I feel I know Canada well. After all, I am married to a Canadian☺. I love sport, particularly football (soccer), formula 1 motor racing and other motorsport, plus hockey (I used to have a table hockey game as a child). I like fast cars, sports cars and prior to coming I had to sell my beloved Mazda MX5 mk1 (which is called a 'miata' here I understand). I like movies. The new star wars is epic!! But most of all I love Jesus and while I am rector here Jesus will be our focus and at the centre of all we do.

Bacon tree joke...

So, having been in the desert in that joke, I want you to come back to the desert. We see a man by a river, surrounded by a crowd. The crowd are listening intently and some of them are being led by him to the river. And there something radical is happening. They are being baptised, an expression of discipleship that is not at all in the Old Testament – anywhere. And people are being baptised as John is speaking with such power. Everyone is wondering – is he the messiah?? John himself says clearly he is not the messiah but, quoting Isaiah, he explains that he is preparing the ground for the one who is, a man whose laces he is not worthy to tie.

Then another man comes to John. They are talking intently. They seem to know each other. Well – they would – for they are cousins. John is speaking with his cousin Jesus. But John seems hesitant. Jesus is then baptised by John and the Holy Spirit comes upon him in the form of a dove.

- Why does the lectionary have this event here, at the start of the year?
- Why did Jesus get baptised?
- What does it mean for us?

The first question will be answered as we answer the second and third.

So why was Jesus baptised? In Matthew 3 we read what they were talking about.

Matthew 3:13-15: 'Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?' Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.' Then John consented.'

This is the pivotal moment – the New Covenant starts to come into vision here. The Old Covenant/Testament starts to draw to its close. It's right that Jesus and John mark this this moment, this 'handover', together. Jesus is baptised and goes under the water – there goes the old – here is the new.

This is the start of Jesus' ministry. It's new – God is doing a new thing and it starts now for Jesus. Here he hands himself over to the will of the Father; publically and in trust. And he goes under the water – there goes his old life as a carpenter – up comes the new life – 'the ministry of the Son of Man'.

Baptism is a powerful symbol. Indeed water is used symbolically a lot in the Bible. Baptism is about a principle we see oft repeated in the Bible namely, before a new beginning there comes an ending. Or, to put it another way, there goes the old – 'death' – and here comes the new - 'resurrection'. This is how Paul puts it in Romans 6:4

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life".

New...risen...Then God the Father sends the spirit. Jesus handed himself over to God and then the Father empowered Jesus for ministry. Ministry is done by and in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit is given when we hand ourselves over the God. Never the other way round.

So what does all that mean for us? It is a time of new beginnings. Exciting☺!!! With new beginnings come endings. For example, the interim team's ministry will be moving elsewhere. I know they will be missed. Indeed, I am sad not to have the opportunity to work with them.

It's a time them of handing ourselves over afresh to all that our Heavenly Father has in store for us and, if any of that sounds scary, we draw to a close with the wonderful truths we read in Isaiah 43.

'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour; ...since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you ...

You are dearly loved by God. You are uniquely created. Not once, in all of history, has there been anyone with your particular set of character, personality and gifts. He did not make a mistake when he made you. You, yes you, all of us, are a crucial part of God's dearly loved family of St Lukes. And he has a plan for us. We know he wants us all to flourish and grow. He has been a work in us all; you during the interim, Shelly and I too – helping the two of us to let go of our former life and here we are together 😊, brought together for His vision, building the Kingdom, growing together in love, grace, fellowship and truth.

So he invites us, you and me, to hand ourselves over to Him, that He might anoint us afresh and fill us anew with the Holy Spirit. So I invite you to pray with me, that He guides us clearly. I invite you to pray with me that He will fill us with His Holy Spirit and I invite you to pray with me that He would use us for His glory.

Let us pray...