

Sunday 10th January 2021 - *The 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**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark:

(Mark 1.4–11)

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

The Gospel of the Lord

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord.

Today the Church marks the baptism of Christ. Historically Christians have argued, and even fought, about pretty much everything to do with faith, belief practice and order. However, the idea that Christians should be baptised, regardless of when or how, has remained fundamental to the Christian faith since the time of Christ's first disciples. It forms the basis of Jesus' 'Great commission' to his followers; "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*" (Mt 28:19–20) In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul equated baptism to sharing in the death, burial, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ; a public witness of identity with Christ and his church and a sign of turning away from a life hampered by sin towards a new life in Jesus Christ. It might seem somewhat puzzling then when we consider that Christ himself was baptised, by John at the River Jordan. Baptism was not just something Jesus commanded his followers to do, but something he also personally experienced. Jesus was baptised because of his willingness to completely identify with the human condition. However, more perplexing still is the fact that that John's baptism specifically involved, 'repentance' and 'confession of sins'. If Jesus is, in Christian thought and teaching both divine and sinless why was he baptised? We can see that John himself was hesitant to baptize Jesus, he protests, "*I need to be baptised by you, but you come to me?*" (Mt. 3.14) Jesus's answer to John "*Let it be so, for it is fitting in this way for us to fulfill all righteousness*" (Mt. 3:15) contains two central themes in Matthew's Gospel. Firstly, 'righteousness' in Matthew refers to behaviour that accords with God's will, nature, and coming kingdom, a faithful obedience to God. So, in submitting to John's baptism Jesus shows himself to be the obedient Son who does God's will. Jesus saw his life as the fulfilment of all righteousness, just as Isaiah had predicted, "*...The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.*" (Is 53:11) Jesus identified with fallen humanity, by sharing

baptism, which would in turn be a vehicle for righteousness through participation in Christ. To understand the second theme, we need to understand what the meaning of repentance in this context. While Jesus identifies with fallen humanity, he is divine and not afflicted by sin. The Biblical call to repentance here is an urgent invitation to reorient our values, habits, loves, thinking, and behaviour to one that is rooted in the revelation of God's nature and coming kingdom. Broadly, repentance here might be thought of as a complete discipleship. So, Jesus' 'repentance' both models and exemplifies the dedicating of one's life to following God's will. The church's continued practice of baptism, just like the other universal of Church life, the Eucharist, is at the same time a transformational repetition of Jesus's own act and a active participation in the life of Christ and his Church. Christ offers us his body so that we might become his body. Similarly, we do not get baptised simply because Jesus did, rather we are baptised *into* him, and in turn he transforms us through the imparting of the Holy Spirit. Our baptism calls us to the reorientation and transformation of our lives towards the life of the divine in Christ. Christ's baptism is part of the reorientation and transformation of *all things*; the foreshadowing of the coming of his kingdom – the kingdom of righteousness and peace for which we are all to strive for and to proclaim to all whether they are baptised or not. **Amen.**

May God bless you all.

Additional collect:

Heavenly Father,
at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son:
may we recognize him as our Lord
and know ourselves to be your beloved children;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen**

CHRIST CHURCH, READING LATEST – PLEASE READ CAREFULLY:

During the period of the latest national lockdown (and due to the extremely high number of cases and increases transmissibility of the virus) it has been decided that Christ Church should be open for PRIVATE PRAYER ONLY from 10am to 12 noon each Sunday. There will be NO EVENING SERVICES.

SOCIAL DISTANCING, EXTRA CLEANING AND HYGIENE MEASURES, TRACK AND TRACE, AND THE USE OF FACE-COVERINGS WHILE IN CHURCH WILL REMAIN MANDATORY.

Please watch out for communications regarding developments and please do share this information with those who may have not received it.

If you have any queries regarding this please email Fr. Peter: fr.peterday@virginmedia.com or telephone: 07702043857

Please note: IF YOU, OR ANYONE YOU HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH ANYONE WITH COVID 19 SYMPTOMS, OR HAVE ANY SYMPTOMS OF 'COVID-19' YOURSELF, PLEASE DO NOT ATTEND CHURCH. If you are currently in a vulnerable category, please consider your visit carefully and do not risk your health. Please also note, toilet facilities will be limited and will be on request only due to the need for regular cleaning.

Wishing every blessing to you and yours - Fr. Peter