

Wednesday 6th May 2020 – reading and reflection

Collect – 4th Sunday of Easter

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
raise us, who trust in him,
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Luke 3.15-22

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” ¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

¹⁹ But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done, ²⁰ Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

Reflection

Do you remember your baptism? I was only a few weeks old when mine took place so there is no chance that I would. However, I know it took place not just because I found my baptism certificate a few years ago when needing to find papers for ordination selection and because I’ve seen photos of the day, but also because I believe that my baptism, in a roundabout kind of way started me off on my path of faith and continues to guide me in my own vocation and ministry today.

I wonder about yourself. Is your baptism a key event in your journey of discipleship? Did it set you off on your route ahead (whether consciously or not) or is it just something that took place a while ago and you were reliably informed that you were in attendance? Whatever the case may be for us, Jesus’ own baptism is an earth-shattering event. Almost confirming the words of John the Baptist, that someone is coming with Spirit, with fire and exuberant

energy; the heavens open up, the Holy Spirit descends and a voice speaks from heaven. It is a dramatic episode to say the least.

The voice from heaven comes to confirm Jesus' messianic calling. This is the encouragement and strength that Jesus needs to begin his short time of public ministry. And also gives an indication of where that career will take him. The heavenly voice echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah 42.1: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations". The voice commissions the Messiah as the Servant, the one who will suffer and die for the world. The voice is at the same time a wonderful affirmation of Jesus' vocation, and a clear reminder of where it is to lead.

However, it is reported here in the Gospel of Luke with strangely little fanfare and seemingly sandwiched between two bigger passages of the chapter. That of John the Baptist preparing the way for the Messiah of the world, with all its foreshadowing and foreboding, and a genealogy of Jesus affirming his place in the ordinary reality of the human race all the way back to Adam, missed out today probably because it is a long list of very difficult names to pronounce!

Although maybe its low-key placement amongst these two stories is precisely the point. Each of our own baptisms, whether we can recall them or not, are earth-shattering events where God reveals himself and encompasses us. We become incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church, with the multitude of the faithful not just in the present but also of the past. We become linked together. And yet it is but the start of something much bigger – a journey with the divine. Our baptisms are not just a one-off event but accompany us throughout our lives.

Together the baptism story and the prophetic words of John the Baptist, tell us who Jesus is and where he is going. As we make his story our own, in our prayers, in our life, in our lived out faith, and indeed in our own baptism, we too should expect both the exciting energy of the Spirit and the quiet voice of God. Reminding us of His amazing, affirming love, care and support, as we travel the path of our own vocation and the uncertain journey that lies ahead.

Do you remember your baptism? If not, at least look back at the path you've trod already with Christ and put one foot forward in faith. For the baptism Jesus shares with us opens for us the possibility of becoming beloved children of God with him, the beloved Son, in whom God is well pleased. Amen.