

Reflection for Epiphany 1 The Baptism of Christ. Luke 3: 15-17. 21-22

We could be forgiven for thinking that our readings are taking an enormous leap moving from the Nativity and Epiphany to the Baptism of Christ by John the Baptist. This may not be such a quantum leap as we imagine. The events surrounding the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem mark Jesus out as extraordinary. We could say but these happenings surrounding his birth, the visit of the shepherds and the gifts of the wise men, are a way of saying 'watch this space – something is going to take place - this is going to be different - keep watching, keep listening!

We know that Jesus took on our humanity, he became fully human and subject to the same joys and temptations of life that we experience. What we cannot be certain of is at what stage Jesus became conscious of his divinity and the role he was to undertake. We are given to understand that Jesus was about 30 years of age when he started his active ministry. It is at this time, that Jesus approaches his cousin John the Baptist for his own baptism. The baptism of John we associate with the washing away of sin, but for Jesus, whom we believe to be without sin, His baptism is something rather different. When Jesus enters the River Jordan to be baptised by John this remarkable event happens; we are told that the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descends on him in the form of a dove, the voice from heaven, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased."

So, if the events surrounding Jesus' birth could be interpreted as 'watch this space', this is the sign saying now it is happening! It now begins! It is the affirmation of Jesus as Son of God and marks the beginning of his ministry and his journey towards crucifixion in Jerusalem.

Again, we cannot be certain if this was for those around at the time, or how much of this was confirmation to Jesus, how much he was aware prior to this. In any event, it is a very public affirmation of Jesus. So, far from being a huge gap, it is a continuation; as Jesus is shown to the world in the Epiphany, this very public baptism of Jesus affirms him as the Messiah, the chosen one of God and the hectic, exhilarating and terrifying ministry of Jesus is set in motion by this affirmation.

As we see the start of another New Year, we may have a mixture of optimism, perhaps a little trepidation - what will happen? Will the dreaded virus recede? Uncertainty may impinge on our optimism, but what we can be certain of is that Jesus came for us and His Spirit remains with us. While we frantically pack away our Christmas decorations into their boxes it is good to remember that **Jesus is not just for Christmas, but for life!**

*Lord of life, we thank you for the moments in history
which have pointed towards the mystery of baptism:
especially Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River,
when you opened the door of heaven
to proclaim him to be your beloved son
and sent the Holy Spirit down upon him.
May we carry forward into the new year
our hopes and expectations,
and help us to renew the spirit of love
in response to the great gift
of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen*