

## Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

### 9th January 2022 - The Baptism of the Lord - Readings (Year C):

1st: Isaiah 40:1-5. 9-11. 8-12. Psalm: 103. 2nd: Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7. Gospel: Luke 3:15-16. 21-22.

For the first time in Christmastide we see the adult Jesus. The babe of Bethlehem, now a grown adult standing by the Jordan ready to commit his life at his baptism. He joins the movement of John the Baptist. This fiery preacher offers Israel a ritual by which its people can make a break with their corrupt society. But why does Jesus submit to baptism, he who knew no sin? Jesus identifies himself with Israel and the whole of humanity and all its failings, and through baptism shares a solidarity with his people which will reach a climax when he submits even to death on the cross.

St Peter Chrysologus a great preacher of the faith in about AD 440 wrote: Today Christ entered the riverbed of the Jordan, to wash away the world's sin. John himself bears witness that he came for this: 'Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world.' Today the servant holds the Lord, man holds God. John holds Christ: holds him, as about to receive, not to grant forgiveness.

Today as the prophet says: 'The Lord's voice is on the waters.' What voice? 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Today the Holy Spirit floats over the waters in the form of a dove, so that by this sign it might be known that the world's universal shipwreck has ceased, as the dove had announced to Noah that the world's flood had subsided.

Nor does this dove carry a branch of the old olive, but it pours the whole richness of the olive on the head of the author of the new anointing, in order to fulfil what the prophet foretold: 'therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above other kings.'

Luke's interest is in the divine manifestations that happened, and notice that Luke says that Jesus was at prayer. The prayers of Advent were 'Oh that God would tear open the heavens and come down to us.' In answer to that plea, heaven opened and the divine presence was manifested in two ways: in the appearance of the Holy Spirit in bodily or visible shape as a dove; and in the majestic voice of the Father.

Luke is the evangelist of the Holy Spirit and prayer. He has already told of the coming of the Holy Spirit to Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah and Simeon. At the beginning of Acts he describes a dramatic scene at the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost. In all of these cases people received divine power from on high. At the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus his divine identity is proclaimed. He is the beloved Son of God the Father.

John the Baptist promised that Jesus would give them a baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire. At the end of his mission on earth the Risen Lord sent out the disciples to all nations instructing them to baptise people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. "In the name of" is a formula to express the presence and power of the person invoked. In the new life symbolised by the water of baptism, a person is lifted up into a new relationship with the three divine persons.

Today's feast is a good opportunity to reflect on our own baptism, and then on that of our own children and grandchildren, or us as godparents. Our identity as Christians is that: however young or old, we are adopted as God's daughter or son when we are baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And from that moment God holds us firmly in his hand as a parent grasps a child on a busy road. Our identity as his child is never in doubt. So whatever life throws at us, good or bad, and whatever other people may think of us, we are assured that he is the only one whose opinion ultimately counts.

God thinks we're important and loves us.

Like Jesus our mission is to accept and be thankful for that, and bring others to know and love him too.

Canon Philip Dyson