

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson  
**8th January 2023 - Baptism of The Lord**

Readings (Year A): 1st: Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7. 2nd: Acts 10:34-38. **Gospel:** Matthew 3:13-17

St Matthew knows that this day was important not only for Jesus but for all of his followers. Each gospel account presents the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove, and the Father speaking from heaven, “This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him” (a quotation of the first reading) The Blessed Trinity.

Matthew is fond of a first and last trick. Something he wants to stress is mentioned at the start and at the end of a story or episode. I pointed this out at Christmas with Emmanuel God-is-with-us, at his birth and at the end of his gospel ‘Lo, I am with you always to the end of time.’

Now the first appearance of the adult Jesus is on the day of his baptism; and at his last appearance, on the Mount in Galilee, he tells his disciples to baptise all nations ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’

The first is the model of the last. The baptism of Jesus is seen as a model of Christian baptism. The revelation of God at the baptism of Jesus enlightens us about the effects of Christian baptism. It establishes a person on a new level of relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The baptised person enters the family of God as a beloved child of the Father now entitled to pray Abba, Father. Under the waters of baptism we are embraced in the cleansing and healing love of the Son, who entered the rivers of human life to be one with us.

But why does Jesus submit to baptism, he who knew no sin? Jesus totally 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. **Christ humbles Himself.**

In his Baptism in the River Jordan, which John the Baptist was unwilling to perform until Jesus told him to go ahead “to do what righteousness requires”, Jesus is lowering himself, literally, so that the rest of us may be raised up.

This mystery is celebrated daily in the mingling of water and wine at Mass: Pouring a little water into the wine in the chalice the priest prays quietly “By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity”.

In Baptism Jesus sets the example for all who follow him.  
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. 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 a 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 are 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.