

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST 2006

Nicky Ing - 8th January 2006

Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11

It is wonderful for us this morning that we have baptized three young children...Thomas and Olivia and Catherine. Not just because we welcome them and celebrate their coming into the family of God, the Church.....but also because today is the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus. Our pew leaflet has a picture of Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist, and our reading from Mark's Gospel tells us the story. Matthew and Luke, in their versions of the story of Jesus, begin with his birth....the Christmas stories, which are so familiar to us....Luke has choirs of angels announcing Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, and Matthew writes about wise men coming from a far country to search for a king whose star they have seen in the sky. Mark, who in fact was the first person to write his Gospel, begins the story of Jesus not with the birth of the child but with the baptism of the adult Jesus....a public beginning from a past that we can only guess about.

Of course Jesus was one of many people who came to find John the Baptist. Mark tells us that all the country of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem journeyed out to the place where John was baptizing in the Jordan river. Jesus in fact had to make a three-day journey south from Galilee, to come to the place where he would be baptized. This baptism marks a very significant time for Jesus personally: He experiences his call to mission, he is anointed, empowered rather, by the Spirit of God...he is recognized as the chosen servant and Son of God. We read in the Genesis passage how the Holy Spirit of God.....powerful like a mighty wind... hovered over the chaotic waters of creation...our Psalm also reflected the power of God's spirit....In the reading from Acts of the Apostles, Ch.19, we find a group of early disciples who had not yet experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives....and how when Paul laid hands on them they were touched by God in a new way and experienced new gifts of tongues and prophecy...All our readings this morning teach us about the incredible power of God's Spirit.

To come back to the baptism of Jesus: we might want to ask why did Jesus, who was without sin, need a baptism of repentance to mark the beginning of his adult public life and ministry? What we understand from this is that in everything that Jesus says and does, God *identifies* himself with us...in every aspect of our lives. He stands by us, and with us, and for us, in our own great need for repentance and salvation. And as Jesus comes up out of the water, the heavens do not just open...we are told they are '*torn apart*' ...we will hear of that happening again when Jesus is on the cross, and the curtain of the temple is torn from top to bottom...out of this 'torn-apart' sky the Spirit of God, like a dove, comes down upon Jesus and God's voice declares 'You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.' There is an echo here of the dove which Noah sent out from the ark in Genesis Chapter 8....which eventually returned to him with an olive branch in its beak, as a sign of a new beginning for creation.....So Jesus' new beginning, is a sign for the world of God's new beginning....God will reach out to people

through the person of Jesus, in a new way...and whatever Jesus does will be accomplished by the power of God's spirit in him...that is the huge significance of his baptism. And there is a sign for us of the Trinity, too, in this scene of Jesus being baptized by John. There is the voice of the Father, the presence of the Son, and the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit, gathered in one place at one and the same time.

So this is a special day for all of us, in acknowledging our own baptism, and God's gift of the Holy Spirit to us. Most of us probably can't remember that moment...perhaps we were carried to the font, by our parents or our godparents....Our name was given to us, our commitment was spoken for us, and our future was promised to God. We were welcomed into the Lord's family...we were declared to be children of the same Heavenly Father, and inheritors together of the kingdom of God...do we really believe this for ourselves? Can I hear God saying to me personally... *'You are my beloved son, or my beloved daughter, I am well pleased with you.'* It is so important for us to realize who and whose we are, as people who belong to the body of Christ. We need to remind ourselves often of this truth, to accept that God truly loves us. And, also, that what started at our own baptism needs to be lived out in our own personal decisions. God's spirit is with us, all the time, calling us, forming us, making us his own. We have not left our baptism behind us...it faces us each day as God's desire for us in our daily living. So we need to be always open to the spirit of God...particularly when we have to face changes in our lives, and important or difficult decisions.... The Holy Spirit is the power behind all new beginnings, and if we are willing, and if we ask in faith, he will strengthen us for all that He gives us to do.

In the final words of the Psalm we read together earlier...(Ps.29 v.10)...I find these words very encouraging and comforting.

**' The Lord will give strength to his people:
The Lord will give to his people the blessing of peace'.**

May this be true for each of us today as we, God's people, embark on a new year, with whatever may lie ahead, in our families, in our work, in our Church, and in our wider community. May we experience His strength, and His peace. **Amen**