

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Can you remember your baptism? I can't, I was baptised less than two months after I was born. If like me you can't remember that moment when you became a member of God's family, you may well remember the time when you first acknowledged God.

*Ask for shared memories*

On this the first Sunday of Epiphany we are reminded that Jesus' baptism is an epiphany, a revealing of God incarnate who is present in our world. The baptism of Jesus continues the story begun some thirty years earlier. The story we heard last week in the arrival of the Magi. The baptism shows that shows that God is still speaking to the people, that there is Good News, that there is salvation and that God is with them.

*Hold a baptism candle.*

This candle represents baptism. It is the candle that is given to the newly baptised to help them remember that they are adopted into God's family. In it is seen the light of Jesus. As Jesus was revealed to the Magi through the light of the shining star, so this candle reminds us that we too need to follow the light.

The gospel reading begins by refuting the questions and assumptions of the crowd. They were searching for the Messiah, for the light. Was John the messiah? Adamantly John refutes any suggestion that he might be the messiah, describing rather some of the characteristics of the messiah.

To put this into context we need to realise that no one in living memory had seen or heard a prophet, in point of fact the last prophet, some 400 years earlier, was Malachi. The messengers from God had been silent for many years. There had been no light. Therefore it is quite understandable that the people had misread what they were experiencing and adding two and two together had made five.

How often do we misunderstand a situation? We are only ever able to use our experience to interpret what we see and hear. That is just what the people of Jesus' day were doing.

Now Luke does not tell us who baptised Jesus – the text we heard today tells what the messiah will look like, but doesn't say that John baptises Jesus. In fact, before Jesus has been baptised, John has been arrested. Luke seems to be being rather coy about the who, why and how of Jesus' baptism. All we are told is 'Now when all the people were

baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised'. Thus avoiding further adding fuel to the theory that John was the messiah. Luke has changed the focus from John, to a very sharp image of Jesus. Let there be no doubt, Jesus is the main man, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. He is the light. *Light the candle*

But why was Jesus baptised?

But first, why were the Jews being baptised?

For Jews, the rite of baptism was for the admittance of Gentiles to become followers of the Jewish faith. John preaching a baptism of repentance to the Jews placed them in the same context as the Gentiles. They were being asked to recognise that simply being Jewish was not good enough for their salvation and on-going relationship with God.

However, Jesus underwent the baptism of Repentance along with everyone else and at the same time, and declared both his solidarity with humanity and his separateness, his distinctive divine nature.

What is the first thing that Jesus does after his baptism?

He prays!

Jesus recognises God's call. It is then that his father formally recognises him as his Son and anoints him for the task by the Holy Spirit. The descent of the Spirit and the divine voice are the response to Jesus' response. Jesus prays, and the dove/spirit descends in bodily form to underline the reality of the infilling of Jesus with the spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus for the start of his earthly ministry as a response to Jesus prayer.

God is demonstrating, in a way that the Jews would have understood, to symbolise God's covenant with Jesus. They would have remembered the dove in Genesis, when the spirit hangs over the waters as the dove is sent out, which revealed the covenant made between God and Noah.

The old covenant is replaced with the new covenant of Jesus.

Jesus' baptism marks the start of his public ministry. His baptism is his initiation into his new life, his public ministry. This is Jesus' official starting point, not his arrival; rather it is his gateway into his mission to all people. Jesus' baptism unites him with sinful humanity, in a way most often recognised in the crucifixion.

Jesus is the light of the world. *Lift the lit candle*

When we think of Jesus' baptism, we think of our own baptism and what that means to us. Baptism is an initiation into the Christian family; it marks the entry into God's family. It is an entrance, an introduction, a new beginning and as the new baptism service shows it is an important turning point. In the new baptism service there is the opportunity for those being baptised to physically turn from facing the congregation to facing the paschal candle, to turn from friends and family and to face Christ.

Through our baptism we too have a new beginning, we are part of a world wide family, and are reminded that God has known us since we were conceived and that is why God chooses to redeem us; not because we are worthy, but because he loves us for who we are, for who we can be.

Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of the adult Jesus speaking. God's voice is once again heard on earth among humanity. Again God communicates with His people. The light has come into the world.

And if our baptism is to truly mirror Christ's baptism, then it falls to every baptised person to mirror Jesus in the here and now, to show the light of Christ. For Jesus his baptism was the starting point of his adult ministry.

How we are to show Christ's light (*lift lit candle*) will be revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. We are to be witnesses to the Good News that Jesus revealed.

Throughout this season of Epiphany we will see Christ revealed. Today in his baptism Christ is revealed as the adult, ready to begin his adult ministry.

Today God is compelling us to look again at Christ's baptism with fresh eyes and an enquiring mind. To look and see that God is revealing through baptism the promise of God's love and grace, God's protection and offer of salvation, and the love and fellowship of God's community. We are called to share that promise of love, that promise of companionship, that promise of welcome into God's Church, into his family.

As we leave the church building today, my prayer is that we hold the light of Christ in our hands and in our hearts and that we share it with those in the world. (*Pass the lit candle to a member of the congregation*) Amen