

## **Sermon for Sunday 9 January 2022**

### **Baptism of Christ**

**Isaiah 43: 1 – 7; Acts 8: 14 – 17; Luke 3: 15 – 17, 21 – 22**

#### **God's Kindness**

As I was writing my sermon this week there was some chat on our St Michael's choir Whatsapp group about Long Christmas. Why do we rush into January and get so serious about New Year's Resolutions? Why the diets and the exercise programmes? Why not snuggle up for the rest of January and keep on enjoying those winter treats?

Well, as I said on the Whatsapp group – I'm all for long Christmas! In fact I'm rather slow at getting the decorations down. One of the readings that we have on Christmas Day, from Paul's letter to Titus, talks about "the goodness and loving-kindness of God" (Titus 3: 4). And that's what I want to focus on today. The goodness and loving-kindness of God.

Besides Christmas, one of the joys of the last six months or so for me has been baptisms. And baptisms are a sign of God's goodness and loving-kindness. As I often say to families, baptism is a gift from God. It's not about naming our children, or dedicating them to God. It IS about God pouring down His blessing – cleansing from sin, renewing, sending His Holy Spirit upon the person baptised, and bringing them into His family, the church.

Today we're thinking about the baptism of Christ, which happened when He was an adult. We have fast-forwarded about 30 years since last week and the visit of the wise men. For some time Jesus' cousin, John had been drawing the crowds to see him and to hear him preaching. He told people they must get ready for the coming of God's Holy One by turning away from evil-doing and being baptised - a sign of repentance for the forgiveness of their sins.

Then Jesus turns up, and stands in line with the motley queue of people waiting for baptism. People who know they need God's help to turn

their lives around. There's nothing outwardly remarkable about Jesus to show that He's different. But in some versions of the story John is reluctant to baptise Jesus, because he recognises Him as His Lord. But Jesus insists. It's a bit puzzling that He does this. Jesus didn't need to be cleansed from sin and forgiven. He could have just joined in and helped John, or even baptised John. But he doesn't. He gets baptised too. So why?

Well - by being baptised Jesus, who doesn't need to be forgiven for anything, shows how completely He identifies with all of us sinful human beings. In Jesus all the goodness and loving-kindness of God comes right down to our level. Emmanuel; God really is with us, in all the messiness of our real lives.

And Jesus comes up out of the water, and spends some time praying. And then the Holy Spirit descends on Him in bodily form like a dove. And the voice of God the Father says: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22)

For Jesus, just about to start out on His ministry – what a wonderful affirmation those words must have been. God the Father, showing His love to God the Son.

For us, those words are a moment of revelation. Jesus, the Beloved of God the Father, is the ultimate expression of the goodness and loving-kindness of God towards all human beings. Sent to show us in human form what God is like and how much He loves us. Even prepared to die for us on the Cross.

Our Old Testament reading, from Isaiah, reminds us that God has always loved His people. These words were written when the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon. God promises they will be restored to their land. Despite their past disobedience, God's love remains constant. He says, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." (v1) It's not because of anything they have done, but simply "Because you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you." (v4). He reassures them, not that

everything will now be easy, but that when they go through trials and difficulties He will be with them:

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” (v2)

We can still take these words as speaking directly to us. They are God’s reassurance to us. If we’re facing something difficult – whether it’s a worrying visit to the dentist or something much more serious – it makes all the difference, doesn’t it, if we know that someone we love and trust is with us. God says that when we face difficult times He will be right there with us. We are not alone!

In all the uncertainties of this new year; as we wonder whether any of our hopes and plans will actually happen – or whether it is worth planning at all; as we wonder whether we or those we love are going to get Covid. With all

our concerns for our young people. With our sense of powerlessness to alleviate the suffering of so many across the globe. Knowing that so many of our problems have their source in the failings of human beings. With all of this, we can know that God is on our side. He always has been, and He always will be. He made us, and He just loves us. He sent Jesus to come right alongside us, living a human life, but showing us what God is like. In Jesus, God has done EVERYTHING for us, and He offers to be with us, always. Now that’s long Christmas!

O Lord, open our eyes to your Presence  
Open our minds to your grace  
Open our lips to your praises  
Open our hearts to your love  
Open our lives to your healing  
And be found among us. Amen (David Adam)

*Revd Diana Young*