

Baptism of the Lord A

First Reading *Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7*

Thus says the Lord: Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have endowed him with my spirit that he may bring true justice to the nations.

He does not cry out or shout aloud, or make his voice heard in the streets. He does not break the crushed reed, nor quench the wavering flame. Faithfully he brings true justice; he will neither waver, nor be crushed until true justice is established on earth, for the islands are awaiting his law.

I, the Lord, have called you to serve the cause of right; I have taken you by the hand and formed you; I have appointed you as covenant of the people and light of nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to free the captives from prison, and those who live in darkness from the dungeon.

Second Reading *Acts 10:34-38*

Peter addressed Cornelius and his household: "The truth I have now come to realise," he said "is that God does not have favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him. It is true, God sent his word to the people of Israel, and it was to them that the good news of peace was brought by Jesus Christ – but Jesus Christ is Lord of all men.

You must have heard about the recent happenings in Judaea; about Jesus of Nazareth and how he began in Galilee, after John had been preaching baptism. God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil."

Gospel *Matthew 3:13-17*

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. John tried to dissuade him, "It is I who need baptism from you," he said "and yet you come to me!" But Jesus replied, "Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that righteousness demands." At this, John gave in to him. As soon as Jesus was baptised he came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice spoke from heaven, "This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him."

Meditation

The annual season of light draws to a close. January may be quite bleak in northern climates, but the solstice has passed. Light has won out over darkness and we have celebrated the bright hope of salvation. We have ritualised once more the cherished customs of Christmas.

Families, stores, and communities regularly package their Christmas decor and store it away for eleven months. For the Church, our season of birth and manifestation is not packed up and stored. The feast of the Baptism of the Lord does not tie up all the loose ends of the plot or neatly summarize the mystery. It remembers one more aspect of Christmas, but it also sets the stage for the week-by-week unfolding of the mystery of Jesus through the recounting of each synoptic gospel.

The evangelists present the baptism of Jesus at the start of his public life because the varied details of their accounts unveil his identity. Like the servant praised in Isaiah, Jesus has come to do God's will. He is consecrated in the Spirit. He is the beloved Son. These proclamations about Jesus summon us to fuller awareness of the paschal mystery. Through baptism we are the body of Christ, facing the same mystery of dying and rising. We too must be open to the Spirit, conscious of our relationship to God. Thus we can live a life of discipleship and begin to understand the true meaning of history. From his fullness we have all received everything that we need so that we are able to reveal to the world the Word that brings life. This is Christmas.