

St Nicholas' Anglican Church, Mordialloc, Sunday 19th May, 2019 (Easter 5)

Revd Dr Sharne Rolfe, Vicar

Readings:

Acts 11:1-18

Psalm 148

Revelation 21:1-6

John 13:31-35

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

Sermon: Baptising Henry

In Christian communities a Baptism is always an occasion of the greatest of joy. And so it is with much joy that we welcome today baby Henry and his parents and family, his godparents and all the friends of the family gathered here this morning at St Nicholas' Anglican church. Baptism is the sacrament of admission into the Christian church, and through baptism a person becomes a member of the Christian church worldwide. Baptism marks the beginning of a person's Christian life and it always follows a declaration of faith in Jesus Christ. In the case of babies, such as Henry, this declaration of faith in Jesus Christ is made by the parents and godparents on his behalf. Baptism with water signifies the cleansing from sin that Jesus' death makes possible, and the new life God gives the baptised person through the Holy Spirit. In baptism, the promises of God are visibly signed and sealed. The baptised person is joined to Christ, and made a member of his body, the Church universal. Baptism marks Henry forever as the much-loved child of God. It is, therefore, a most sacred occasion. We are thrilled Robert and Liz that you have chosen to have Henry baptised at St Nicholas', and we are happy indeed that you are part of our community in Christ.

After Jesus had risen from the dead, he commanded his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In baptising Henry today, we are obeying that command.

Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, people request that their baptism or the baptism of their child take place in a separate service, not part of a Sunday Eucharist. That is of course absolutely fine. Henry's parents, however, asked for Henry to be baptised as part of our regular Sunday Eucharist and that is a great blessing, a blessing that goes two ways. For us, the community of faith that is the parish of St Nicholas', it is a gift, a blessing, that Henry is being baptised during a gathering of our community, because witnessing, being present at a baptism is an encouragement to us all in our faith, an affirmation of the hope we share as Christians.

Faith, as we all know, is about trust and hope - God is not like a mathematical formula that can be proven with rational deduction and thinking. Faith in God, therefore, is best defined, as it is in Scriptures (Hebrews 11:1) as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." One of the important things about communities of faith, such as ours, is that we help, we encourage each other in our faith. We support each other to hold on to that assurance of things hoped for, that conviction of things not seen. Having a family make the commitment of faith for their child in bringing that child to baptism is the greatest of encouragements to us as a faith community. So we say thank you to Henry's family for this gift, this blessing to us of the baptism of Henry here with us today.

Of course, the blessings flow both ways. In bringing Henry to baptism as part of our Eucharist today, Henry and his family and friends are also blessed by the living proof of a loving community of which they are now a part. We live in a modern western world sadly characterised by a tragic loss of community. Individuals and couples are often separated from their extended families. People rarely these days get to know their neighbours all that well. We are all so busy. Many people come and go from their homes day in day out and hardly connect with anyone. Loneliness and isolation

can be for many people one of the hallmarks of life in our busy, modern world. Churches remain one of the few places where a real community - of welcome, of mutual care and concern, of love and encouragement - may be found.

Liz and Robert and their young family are much-loved members of our Messy Church congregation, a community of young families that is growing month by month. It is a community that is in many respects the future of this church of St Nicholas' and indeed the future of Christianity. We have all been somewhat amazed at how quickly the Messy Church community at St Nicholas' has been established and are thankful to God for the blessing that it is to our parish. We know, because many of the young parents attending have told us, that this community is drawing people in because they feel a really sense of belonging, of care and support, indeed of love, when they are here. It is a beautiful thing to behold. We are so happy to have Robert and Liz, Lily and Henry as part of that community of Christ, that community of love. It is a newly-emerging community that truly demonstrates the new commandment of Jesus that we heard in our Gospel reading from John today: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another ... By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

On this fifth Sunday of Easter, at this special time between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, we are charged by God to be a community of love. God is love. And since God loved us so much, so we also ought love one another. And if we do love one another, God lives in us. There is no fear in love; perfect love casts out fear. So we are to be a community of love. And it is into this community of love, of God, that we welcome Henry today. May his life be one blessed with love, with hope and with faith.

+ In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.