

St Nicholas' Anglican Church, Mordialloc, Sunday 12th January, 2020 (Baptism of our Lord)

Revd Dr Sharne Rolfe, Vicar

Readings:

Isaiah 42:1-9

Ps 29

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-17

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: Baptism

Today is the 1st Sunday after the Epiphany and it is the day we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord. This event of Christ's baptism is recorded in all four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in similar, if not identical text. Although we know relatively little about the life of Jesus and his cousin John during the previous 30 years, all their earlier lives were part of John's and Jesus' preparation for this moment: The start of Jesus' earthly ministry as the Son of God. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist says to the Pharisees, "Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me." And when he saw Jesus approaching he said "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." John is reluctant, as we hear in Matthew today, to baptise this Lamb of God. Understandably so. But Jesus answers him clearly: "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness." And we are told John consented, and the baptism went ahead.

One can only imagine how Jesus felt being called by God to come to the river to be baptized by John, and the impact this event would have on his life. We are told that just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, the heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." What an incredible encouragement that must have been for Jesus. We all do best when we are encouraged. God didn't say, "You've lived a good life up till now, Jesus, but from here on you need to do better." Or try harder. Or be greater. No, God said, "With you I am well pleased". We all know how liberating it is to be told by someone we

respect that we are doing a good job. I think this statement by God would have remained with Jesus through all that was to come. For from this day forward during his ministry, Jesus was continually challenged by the expectations of the Jewish leaders. They expected the messiah to be a powerful king who might defeat the Romans. Instead the itinerant Jesus lived in poverty and healed the sick, fed the hungry, and encouraged the poor. Jesus' power, as we've spoken about so many times before, was entirely counter-cultural, so evident in last Sunday's epiphany event and in so many other examples as well.

These words heard at Jesus' baptism, "You are my son" are very special; and each and every one of us at our baptism becomes too a child of God, able to call the Creator God, "Parent". At every baptism it is declared: "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." Rowan Williams, that great theologian and past Archbishop of Canterbury, in his book "Being Christian" makes a number of interesting statements about baptism. Baptism is a beginning, the prologue to a book waiting to be written. It is not an event, per se, but a way of life. At Baptism, we are handed a map, but then we have to take the trip. It takes our whole life to finish the journey we begin when we're baptized. What does it mean for us to live out our baptisms? Our baptism demands that we struggle with what is right and what is wrong, what is important and what is not. Baptism invites us into a relationship with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Rowan Williams wrote that Jesus was born into the chaos of the world. We, the children of God, face similar chaos in our world. We need to tell the truth in a world that often protects itself at all costs from real honesty. We need to give in a world that seems so much of the time to prioritise consumption, taking; we need to serve in a world that wants to be served; and pray, contemplate, in a world that seems to want to be entertained, every moment of every day.

So on this day when we commemorate the baptism of Jesus by John in the River Jordan, let us also reflect on our own baptism and what it means to us, here and now. We give thanks that through baptism we are called to a new birth in God's Church, that through baptism we rise to newness of life, and are called to live as a disciple of Christ, to fight the good fight, finish the race and keep the faith. Through baptism, God brings us all out of darkness and into his marvellous light; we become a member of the body of Christ, a child of the one heavenly Father and an inheritor of the kingdom of God. And for that we give great thanks to God.

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

