

Sunday 12th Jan 2020 Isaiah 42:1-9 Acts 10:34-43 Matthew 3:13-17
Baptism of Christ - a culminating activity of faith or the launch of a new ministry?

Intro:

Happy New Year if I have not seen you yet in this new year and new decade!

Today is the day in the church calendar when we remember Jesus' baptism

Sorry to those of you who were expecting to still see the nativity scene here at the front of church. I had a momentary blank on Tuesday with some willing helpers and we put it away along with the tree. My apologies.

Today, the baptism of Christ Jesus. His physical birth we were celebrating a couple of weeks ago and today, as we remember his baptism, I want us to think of it in terms of celebrating the birth of His public ministry.

Before we think about that, let us look just briefly at the other 2 readings - from Isaiah and Acts. In both these passages we can see that those who believed in God had a part to play in bringing about His Kingdom in all nations.

Let's look briefly at the passage of Isaiah

2 thirds of the way down that passage (vs 6&7) the Lord says to His chosen people Israel

I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nationS, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

The people of Israel knew that they were God's chosen people. They knew that they had favour with God. And sometimes they thought that gave them exclusive rights.

Here God is saying to them... I have given you to be a light to others. I want you to **share** all that you know of me, the ways that I have taught you, I want you **not** to keep that to yourselves or count yourself as so much better than others.

No! I want you, as my covenant people, to do something new - to take my light to other nations so that their blinkers can come off, they can come out of darkness and they too give praise and glorify me.

This was a challenging concept for the people of Israel. They thought that they would always have exclusive rights and relationship with Yahweh.

But God had other ideas. For Him they were to be a light to the nations!

And in the reading from Acts which is an account of the acts of the apostles, the early believers and followers of Jesus, written by the disciple Luke, we read these words

We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem (vs 39)

Peter is speaking and he is urging all those who have gathered in the home of the the Gentile man - Cornelius - to understand that Jesus did not die on the cross just for those of Jewish ancestry but for people in EVERY nation. He tells them that God shows no partiality. He came and lived and died and rose again for people from every tribe and nation.

Peter is telling them that as they have witnessed all that Jesus did first hand, they are now commanded to preach and testify to the truths found in Jesus so that everyone has the chance to

choose for themselves whether or not they believe this because *everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through His name.* vs. 43

Isaiah was telling the people of his day that they were to take the light of God to the nations around them

Peter was telling the early believers who had witnessed Jesus' life first hand, that they were to be witnesses to all they had seen and to preach the truth of the Gospel of Christ to all nations.

And today is the day we remember the Baptism of Christ.

Jesus baptism marks the start of His public ministry. It marks the change from his living as Jesus the son of Joseph the carpenter to living out His life explicitly as Jesus the son of God.

It marked the beginning of his next 3 years of life, the beginning of a remarkable journey that lead him to the cross and beyond.

Infant baptism is possibly the part of my ministry that causes me the most internal debate.

Why? Because all too often, it would seem, the parents of the child being baptised assume that the baptism of the baby, and sometimes the confirmation of the teenager, is the culminating activity of faith rather than the launching commission of a new way of living.

Despite the conversations that I, and others, have with the family of the child being baptised, stressing that baptism is the start of a new chapter in the faith journey of the child, too often I suspect that there is a belief that it is all right now... everything has been done.

That is not what I believe about baptism and it is not what I understand to be what happened with Jesus at His baptism.

We heard from Matthew that God affirmed Jesus as His Son, His Beloved with whom He was well pleased.

At his baptism Jesus was affirmed in his identity by His heavenly Father **and was then sent out** in to a new form of ministry.

His baptism was a confirming of His identity **and** a commissioning of his ministry.

In our Baptism services we help people to understand that they are created in God's image and belong to Him as His children... we mark them with the sign of the cross, we talk about how Jesus welcomed children to him and explain that we are all welcome to come to Him.

We do talk about the commission that is then upon the life of those who have been baptised, how they are to be ambassadors for Christ and take the light of Christ out in to the world... we even give them a special candle to remind them of this.

But too often we don't see them again. And I wonder why? Do people, do we, see baptism as the culminating activity of faith **or** the beginning of a new form of ministry and a new way of being faithful to God?

How to we see our own baptism? Do we think of ourselves as having a ministry for God? Or is that something just for priests and pastors??

As well as being the day we remember Jesus' baptism it is also, in some churches Plough Sunday

In the Middle Ages ploughs were sometimes kept in the parish church, and some churches kept a 'plough-light' – a candle that burned over the plough throughout the winter. In days when work was scarce in winter, the observance looked forward to the time of sowing with the promise of a harvest to come.

Some Christian communities have reintroduced it as a focus for asking a blessing on human labour near the start of the calendar year.

Do we think of our work... paid or unpaid... as being part of our ministry? Part of our calling? Somewhere that we each have a part to play in cultivating God's kingdom wherever we are? part of being affirmed and commissioned as ambassadors for Christ?

TTT: Not done it for a long time and I am sorry!

What will you be doing this time tomorrow?

Where have you seen God at work this week?

What can we pray for for you?

Church of England 21 days.....Everyday Faith booklets / app

How are we and how can we become a community capable of forming people who will witness to God's truth? wherever and whenever God gives us the opportunity?

One way is through prayer...

Prayer: prayer sheets to use each day according to which day of the month e.g.. today is 12th and on 12th of each month we shall pray that all of us in church will grow in confidence in how we share our faith with others...

Please include Rev Jane - either on day 5 or day 21 (Asst Area Dean)

Jesus was affirmed in his identity by his heavenly Father and then went out to serve Him in his explicitly ministry.

We are also to be affirmed in our identity in Christ - as loved children of God

And then we are to live out our lives worthy of the calling that Jesus has given us - to be a witness to his light and an ambassador for him.

Font: If you would like to, mark yourself with sign of cross as you come up to communion as a sign of your commitment to serve God in this coming year

Almighty God, In the power of the Holy Spirit, send us to serve your Church, to be able to make disciples of Jesus. In the power of the Holy Spirit, send us out into the world to build your Kingdom...for your glory. Amen