

Sunday 10 January 2021

The Baptism of Christ

Isaiah 43: 1-7

Restoration and Protection Promised

43 But now thus says the LORD,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
² 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.
³ For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Ethiopia^[a] and Seba in exchange for you.
⁴ Because you are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you,
I give people in return for you,
nations in exchange for your life.
⁵ Do not fear, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
⁶ I will say to the north, "Give them up,"
and to the south, "Do not withhold;
bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from the end of the earth—
⁷ everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."

Mark 1:4-11

The Baptism of Jesus

⁴ John the baptizer appeared^[a] in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with^[b] water; but he will baptize you with^[c] the Holy Spirit."

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved;^[d] with you I am well pleased."

Sermon

God says, through the prophet Isaiah, "Do not fear for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you" "I have called you by name"

Each one of us has a name. When we meet someone for the first time it's the first personal thing we tell them about ourselves. We usually carry our names for our whole lives and to some extent, they form who we are. For each of us, our name was chosen for us at birth by someone who loved us who wanted to say something about who *we* were, who *they* were, and perhaps something about their hopes for us as we grew up. No parent just picks a name out of a hat for a

child – often hours and hours of deliberation go on, to find something that feels just right. For example...anyone here named after a relative?

Anyone know what your name means?

Anybody got any unusual reasons for having their name? (eg “Zoe”)

The Isaiah reading reminds us that we are called by our names by God. He isn’t just calling a whole mass of people in general – he is calling *you*, as an individual, because you, as an individual, are important to him. How different that sentence feels if we put our own name in there...

[*name*] do not fear for I have redeemed you – you are mine],

Isaiah tells us that God promises to be with us when the waters seem to almost drown us – there is this wonderful image of baptism as something which is scary and powerful, but through which God promises to keep us safe and lead us on closer to himself.

So God calls each one of us, with all our individual gifts and weaknesses, to get to know him and to live in his light. He already knows who we are and what we are like, and he calls us not to become a different person, but to become more and more who we really are inside, when the sin and the fear are set aside. There is no-one that God rejects as being too mean or too full of doubt or too degenerate – he calls us all. Acknowledging that call and making a response to it, though, remains our responsibility.

Remember - Jesus didn’t have to go to John to be baptised - in fact John almost thought he ought to refuse to do it!

Jesus also didn’t have to spend 3 years essentially homeless while he spread his message. He didn’t have to speak in ways that were unacceptable to his own people or touch untouchables and break taboos. He didn’t have to choose to live in a way that would ultimately lead to crucifixion. He had free will just like us – but Jesus chose to be baptised – and he chose to allow God to be known through him.

We are asked to make the same choice – to allow ourselves to be baptised by God’s Holy Spirit daily, so that we can share his love through being the people we were meant to be. We hear in our gospel, “And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.”¹¹ And a

voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved;^[4] with you I am well pleased.”

”. If I really want to see heaven on earth, then I will have to start by being prepared to let God change *me* – and each one of us here faces the same challenge – the challenge to be open and honest with him in prayer, to listen to him when he tells us who we are, and to be prepared to live the life that he has imagined for us.

Let’s finish our thoughts by going back to names.

Jesus was given his name by Gabriel, when he came to announce Mary’s pregnancy to her. He was, she was told, to be called Jesus, because it means, “one who saves”.

It was his calling to save us. Now he calls each one of us by name - to listen to his voice, to answer his call, to allow ourselves to be saved by him, to share his good news in word and deed, and to be thankful. Amen

As we say our Creed now, you might want to think about the baptism promises that you made (or that were made for you as a baby) to follow Christ and to trust him with your life. At the end of the creed I’d like to encourage you to make the sign of the cross on your forehead, using the bowl of water you have in front of you, to recommit to him.

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I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.