

Baptism of the Lord

Over the past few months we have perhaps become more grateful than usual for the gift of water as we have been washing our hands more carefully and frequently than before. Water is essential not only for washing but for life itself. The Bible often speaks about water and if you have visited the Holy Land you will understand why water is even more important in that part of the world.

All of today's readings speak about water. The first reading speaks of 'the rain coming from the heavens and watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth' (Isaiah 55:10). The responsorial psalm, which today is not a psalm but another reading from Isaiah speaks of 'drawing water from the well with joy' (Isaiah 12:3). The second reading refers to Jesus 'coming with water and with blood' (1 John 5:6), perhaps a reference to Jesus' side being pierced after his death (John 19:34). The Gospel reading speaks of Jesus being 'baptised in the Jordan by John' (Mark 1:9). Rain, wells, rivers, all important sources of water in the land of the Bible, not only in Biblical times but even today.

Obviously the focus on water is because of today's Feast, The Baptism of the Lord. In the life of Jesus this event marked the end of his 'hidden life' and the beginning of his public ministry. That it happened in the River Jordan is significant, because it was the Jordan River that the people of Israel had to cross to finally enter into the promised land (Joshua 3:14-17). In the calendar of the church, this feast marks the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. Today we heard from the Gospel according to Mark, and after an interlude next week, in two weeks' time we will begin following the Gospel according to Mark which will be our gospel for this liturgical year. I will say more about some of the specific characteristics of Mark as our readings unfold.

Today is also a good opportunity to reflect on the significance of our own baptism, whether it is an event that we can remember, or whether it is something that happened to us when we were still infants. Through Christian baptism we too enter into a 'promised land', a 'new inheritance' as we are united to Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection. We give thanks for this great gift but also are aware that it is a mission. We are called like John the Baptist to bear witness to Jesus and to lead others to him.

Before Covid we would remind ourselves of our baptism when we blessed ourselves with holy water on entering and leaving church. Now we have to make do with sanitising our hands! Nevertheless when we next wash our hands at home we can pause for a moment of gratitude to God. Gratitude for the gift of water which is essential for many aspects of life, and gratitude for the water of baptism through which we have been given a share in the victory over sin and death which has been won by Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

For video version of the homily: <https://youtu.be/f3sFg9fFlzg>