

St. Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

The first Sunday after the Epiphany—The Baptism of Our Lord—13 January, 2008

Revd. Rob Lamerton

Isaiah 42.1-9, Psalm 29, Acts 10.34-43, Matthew 3.13-17

This Epiphany season runs from last Sunday's story of the magi (the wise men) through to Lent. Sunday by Sunday we see an epiphany of the Lord! Something of God is made known in the humanity of Jesus!

The Baptism of the Lord is the first and most important of the 'epiphanies' of Jesus! "What about the wise men?" you say. Well, originally—before even Christmas was celebrated—in around the year 336, there was no Christmas and the Epiphany emphasized the baptism of the Lord. In those early days the revealing of God in the baptism of the human Jesus was the focus.

The Wise Men story points to the wonderfully inclusive message of the gospel—a Jesus for the nations, but the baptism of Jesus points to God's activity in his humanity!

When I prepare a family for the baptism of their child, I read this gospel passage (Matthew 3.13-17) and I point out that:

- Jesus is baptized "To fulfil all righteousness"—meaning to fulfil the scriptures or to do God's will.
- In his baptism the Spirit of God descends upon him. He is identified with God and anointed with his Spirit. The Spirit being like dove recalls the Spirit at creation, moving over the waters; new creation begins in the life of Jesus.
- Jesus' vocation as the Son of God is made clear! "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased"

Then I continue the story as Jesus goes into the wilderness and is tempted to abandon his calling—or at least he is called to twist it to suit his own human needs. If you are the Son of God, turn stones into bread, throw your self down, worship me, the devil says.

I remind the families that in the big wide world there are temptations to throw away our calling! Just as Jesus was tempted and tested so are we.

In our baptism, we identify ourselves with Jesus in his baptism and undertake to fulfil all righteousness—to do God's will! No doubt there are times when we fail and have to confess our sins and get up again. Nevertheless we identify ourselves as members of the community of Jesus disciples.

As disciples of Jesus, we become people of the Holy Spirit. Our baptism marks the giving of Holy Spirit to us.

Peter in his speech to Cornelius' household in today's second reading says that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power much the same as Isaiah says that the Spirit of the Lord is "put upon" the Servant of the Lord.

In Peter's words he says the Spirit enabled Jesus in doing good and healing. The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah is enabled to be righteous to live in a covenant relationship with God, to be a light to

the nations, to open eyes that are blind and bring freedom to captives.

Yes God's Spirit enables us in the work of feeding the hungry, healing the sick and social justice, but the Holy Spirit also relates to the simple and everyday tasks of enlightening people helping them see the way ahead—setting people free from blind prejudice and malice, or simply from twisted thinking.

On Friday, I conducted the funeral of a young man who had taken his own life at the age of 24. After the funeral, his mother said to me, "I wish he had talked to someone like you before all this!" Now I don't imagine that I would have done any better than any other person, but isn't that what it needs, someone who can give us some other options? Someone to get us thinking along a different track? How good would it have been for that young man to have someone open his eyes to the many wonderful options life offers! Such conversations when they happen are "of the Spirit".

We are people of the Spirit! Freed from having to have a written rule for every occasion, free to think and pray about what God might want us to do in any situation, or to ask "How might Jesus deal with this?" Free to act in compassion and in truth!

The only way I can relate what was for me the prompting of the Spirit is in relation to my visits to my parents before they both died last year! I felt called, urged to visit. Logic told me "Why worry, there's no need at the moment." Yet I recall a sense of urgency about seeing them, and in each case it was timely, as I had meaningful time and a prayer with Josie and began to get some answers from my father, Bob.

Finally: in Jesus' baptism he is made known as 'Son of God' with whom God is pleased! In his life, this is immediately challenged as he goes into the wilderness.

I tell those who bring young children for baptism that, as they go out into the wilderness, *not* to forget that, whatever happens, their baptized ones are sons and daughters of God. Wherever they are and no matter, "how far or wide they roam", that they are marked as children of God

Jesus' baptism is the epiphany (being made known) of God in the human Jesus!

In Jesus' baptism he undertakes to do the will of God. So too in our baptism!

Jesus' baptism is about God's Spirit being "poured out", anointing him! Our baptism is also about receiving that same Spirit to enable!

Jesus' baptism is about being sons and daughters of God.

At our baptism, the epiphany of God in Christ is made known to us and in us so that, through us, God in Christ may continue to be made known in the Spirit poured out in the baptism and life of every new believer!