

A Sermon for the Baptism of our Lord

Today we mark the feast of the Baptism of our Lord. Christmas and Epiphany, and this feast day, all combine to create an ongoing celebration of the revelation of Jesus to the world. We are in an entire season where we are called to reflect upon and rejoice in who Jesus is, and his presence among us on earth. We could well and truly call the period from Christmas to Epiphany as 'Revelation-tide' as we first learn of Jesus' birth, and then learn more and more about who he is and what he has come to do.

There are two interesting parts of the Gospel narrative - the first is a discussion as to whether Jesus should be baptised by John, or John should be baptised by Jesus. There is an unspoken debate about authority and power, with the implication that Jesus is greater than John, and that Jesus should be the baptiser, not the baptised, but Jesus, in humility and in order to fulfil custom and tradition, is baptised by John.

This is all done so the latter half of the story can take place, and it's the more important part. Jesus' baptism ends with the declaration from the heavens itself that he is God's beloved Son, "with whom [God] is well pleased". It is a moment when Jesus is declared to be precisely who he is, and the whole world is able to see, learn and understand this.

Baptism is something open to all, so today is an opportune time to reflect on not only Jesus' Baptism, but our own and what it means. Ultimately both come down to a single complex concept - identity.

When we are baptised, we affirm our identity as Christians. Whether this affirmation is made for you in your infancy by loving parents and Godparents, or you make it yourself as a child or an adult, baptism is a public declaration that you see yourself as a child of God, and wish to live according to the teachings of Christ. It is about embracing something within yourself, and proclaiming it to the world with joy and enthusiasm.

One of the most wonderful parts of baptism is the moment where, in turning to Christ, people declare that they find great value in this faith - that it teaches them to look to something higher and nobler, kinder and more loving, and to seek to be guided by those things in their daily life. It is the embracing of the empathy and

compassion that Jesus both embodied, and taught throughout his earthly ministry.

The other excellent part of baptism is the community's encouragement of the newly baptised. They stand as witnesses and supporters of the baptised, celebrating with them. Faith is a journey that we undertake together as a whole community, not only as individuals, though the path is different for all of us. It is important to remember what we are never alone on this journey, and that we have the goodwill, support and encouragement of those around us, whether spoken or unspoken.

As I have said before, being a person of faith does not prevent us from negative experiences, but it does allow us a way to navigate them with resilience. It allows us the opportunity to look for the good, to look for moments and people of compassion and mercy in times of difficulty, that help us carry on and feel encouraged. It also allows us to give thanks for those good and positive experiences in our lives, knowing that we did not earn them, that we are not owed them, but have received them as a gift of love and grace.

Baptism is the beginning of our public journey of faith. It is precious and it is wonderful. I hope that we will use this feast to celebrate both Jesus' baptism and our own. Let us celebrate that at his baptism, Jesus was declared to be God's beloved son, and that through our own baptisms, we have also been made part of that divine family, and made welcome, and we too are fully known and fully loved by God.

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All Saints, South Hobart and St Raphael's, Fern Tree
The Feast of the Baptism of our Lord
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