

*Luke 3: 15-17,21-22      Acts 8:14-17      Isaiah 43: 1-7      (Psalm 29)*

Many times I have found myself in places which have **taken my breath away**. For example, my first visit to Malham Cove in the Yorkshire Dales, to the **Mull of Galloway** in Scotland, or **in France, Mont St.Michel** or the **Tarn Gorges**. In each case, I was made to realise that whoever created a universe with **such landscapes** was **way beyond my comprehension**. But my spirits were lifted by the **sheer beauty** of the situations. For a while, I was **transported into another realm**, and the memories have stayed with me over the years. **Glimpses of glory !** (Brian Davies)

However, **great events** often have **everyday** settings and appear **not** to be very **significant**. Today's Gospel scene is set around an **insignificant river**, and involves a **wandering prophet** and an **unknown carpenter** from Nazareth. Hardly the **ingredients of a world-shattering drama**. Yet here the great **drama** of our **redemption** reaches a **high point**.

The arrival of Jesus for John's **baptism of repentance** is the **coming of God himself**; the **words** from the Father in heaven **identify Jesus** as the one in whom **the Holy Spirit and all the fullness of God** dwells -the one **prophesied by Isaiah** as the **anointed Servant** who would have the **Spirit of the sovereign Lord within him**.

**Baptism** not only celebrates **our commitment** to God; it also celebrates **God's own commitment to us**. The baptism of **John** was for the **forgiveness of sins**. Jesus did not **need** forgiveness but he wanted to show his **solidarity with us**, that he was **fully human**. Throughout the country, **due to John the Baptist**, many people were moving **towards God** and Jesus now **identifies himself** with these people.

At the baptism of Jesus something **very special happens**. Here, the voice of the Father is heard **speaking personally** to Jesus and saying, '**You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased**'. Isaiah had used this phrase, in chapter 42, before moving on, in chapter 53, where he describes the **predicted Messiah** as

having a dual role of **King and suffering Servant**. The **cross** and the **crown** being his destiny.

Its interesting to note that at the baptism of Jesus we have a **rare biblical image** of the **trinitarian nature of God**, as we have the **voice of God** from the heavens, **Jesus** coming up from the water, and **the Holy Spirit** descending in the form of a **dove**.

The **point** of the baptism of Jesus by John is that we hear **God saying to us**, as to his **Son**, that he **loves us** and is **pleased with us**. The joy of today's reading from Isaiah is **what we are promised** in the baptism. We are **created by God**, says Isaiah, for his glory, and that's **why he chooses to redeem us**. **Not** because we have **earned** redemption but because **he loves us**.

**Baptism** by John was **for repentance**. He was telling the **descendants of Abraham** that they **now needed God as never before**, so they needed the baptism he (John) offered, which symbolised **the washing away of sins**. Many people responded. Here, God was doing **something new in Jesus; A new era was beginning**.

The **baptism** offered by Jesus is **different** to that by John. It is still a **turning away** from something, but **primarily** its a turning **towards Jesus Christ- repentance and reformation**. Its a baptism of **water, fire and Spirit**. . As **he** stands with us in baptism, so **we turn** to the **new life** he offers us **as Christians**. We recognise the **deadly consequences of sin** and rise to the **resurrection life** of the one who conquered death. We are the **beneficiaries** of what Christ has **done for us all**.

**Jesus** baptizes us with the **power to do God's will**, and you'll recall the **baptism of fire at Pentecost** experienced by believers. His baptism by **John** was the **announcement** of the **start of his earthly ministry** and was **one step** in his **identifying** with **our humanity and sin**.

But baptism isn't a **destination, an end** in itself. Its a **bridge from our old life**, enabling us to **turn the corner** into a **new way** that opens up **real life** to us. We become part of **Christ's new community** and are **challenged** as to whether or not **we** are following the **way of Christ**.

'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are mine' (Isaiah 43:1b). **God cares for us all, as individuals.** He loves **each one of us personally**, and he is **always** with us **in our joys and in our sorrows**. As **we recall** the Baptism of Jesus, we **know** that he is with us forever **with his saving love**, and gives us the **courage to live our life in faith**, until we meet him, **in all his eternal glory, face to face**.

Amen.

(Let's pray)

Lord, you humbled yourself and received baptism at the hands of your cousin, John the Baptist; help us to follow you, and not to get ourselves wrapped up in pride.

By your baptism, you took our humanity into the cleansing waters, give us new birth and lead us into life as children of God.

By your baptism the material world became charged with your holiness, make us instruments of your transforming of this world.

Today we renew our worship, and rededicate ourselves to your service; mould us into your image, and help us to respond to your eternal love.

In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.      **Amen**