

## **Baptism of the Lord**

The tropical low that was once cyclone Imogen has been producing rainfall in parts of Queensland this week that we find hard to imagine. Rivers are raging and towns are flooded. Water has the power to give life in abundance or to bring death and destruction.

Water is our focus here today. We go with Jesus to the River Jordan as he submits himself to the Baptism of repentance that John was offering. As we get closer to the river, we can hear John telling people that someone is coming after him who is much more powerful than he is. John feels that he is not even worthy to act as his servant. "I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit." John wanted those who came to him to experience being overwhelmed in the waters of the Jordan and to come out of the water gasping for new life. John's baptism was one of purification. It was meant to prepare the people for the Messiah whose coming they longed for. It allowed people to admit of their sinfulness and to realise that they needed a change of heart and mind if they were to be ready for the new life that the Messiah would offer.

Mark tells us very simply that Jesus came for baptism. Jesus submitted to John's baptism of repentance, not because he had committed any sins himself, but because he was fully one with us and he felt the weight of sin

around him, and as we shall soon see, he closely identified with those who were the victims of sin.

This was a new moment for Jesus. He had grown up in a community that felt the burden of helplessness and oppression. He was part of a religious community whose leadership was empty. He knew the intimate love that God had for him. With that love within his heart, he longed for something better for himself and for his people. He went to John to listen to him and he accepted the invitation to be baptised. This was the turning point in Jesus life. This was the moment that God revealed to him the depth of his love for him. As he stepped out of the water the heavens were torn open. For so long the devout people of Israel had prayed that God would tear the heavens open and come down among them again, so that they could hear God's prophetic word to them. Jesus heard that Word. He heard the Father say to him, "You are my Son, the Beloved, my favour rests on you." Jesus heard his Father consecrate him as his anointed one, as his chosen one, as his Messiah.

Jesus saw God's Spirit descend upon him like a dove. I read that it is the image of the descending that is even more important than the image of the dove itself. But even so, the presence of doves in the Hebrew Scriptures can signal the kind of Messiah Jesus was going to be. It can suggest something of the new creation that Noah and

his family experienced after the destruction of the flood, when the dove sent out no longer needed to return to the ark. But perhaps the dove speaks more to us of the kind of gentle love that God has for his people that was described in the love poem of the Song of Songs. “Arise my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely.”

Jesus had come to reveal God’s face, not in majesty and power but in gentleness and compassion. Jesus had come as the servant of God who would bind up hearts that were broken, give liberty to captives and set the downtrodden free. From the moment of his baptism, Jesus could no longer return home to a life of obscurity. From here on he would gather around him disciples who would learn from Jesus what God was like. From here on Jesus would share with his disciples the intimacy that he shared with his Father. They too would learn that the voice of God was sweet, and his face was lovely. They would learn that they were beloved sons and daughters of God on whom God’s favour rested.

When we were baptised we were invited into this intimate relationship with Jesus and his Father. We were gifted with God’s own spirit of love. When we were baptised we were invited to become companions of

Jesus. Jesus made a promise to us that he would walk with us every day of our lives as our companion to share with us our hopes and our joys, our pains and sorrows. Jesus entrusted us to a community of faith who would love us and support us on our journey. When we were baptised we became one with Jesus and one with his church.

As God’s Church we gather to hear God’s Word proclaimed to us and to deepen our communion with Jesus in the Eucharist. This year we will be listening mainly to the Gospel according to Mark. Each of the Gospel writers gives us different insights into who Jesus is for us. At the beginning of Lent we will have an opportunity to discover some of Mark’s insights when Fr. Michael Trainor will open up Mark’s Gospel for us. May each of us be truly engaged in the story of Jesus this year and allow Him to be engaged in ours.