

## Homily for 15<sup>th</sup> January Holmbury

**Text:** John 1: 29-42

At a guess no one here who has been baptised was fully immersed in water as would all those who were baptised by John the Baptist. He believed in a really good dunking in the River Jordan no token splashing with a scallop shell as has just happened with Niamh. And of course, John would not have been baptising babies and indeed there are some denominations who to this day conduct their baptisms with consenting adults only and not babies or young children who haven't a clue as to what totally unexpected indignity is going to be placed upon them. Incidentally in doing a little research for this talk I discovered two facts namely that in the early church there was a lot of heated debate as to how much water exactly should be used in baptism until a leading Bishop named Cyprian wisely stated that the amount of water was inconsequential and, secondly, that the technical term for pouring water over the head is affusion so now you know. Hence, I'm sure that the font contained just the right amount of water to affuse Niamh just a short while ago to ensure that she was properly baptised.

But the question now is just what do we think happens as we baptise this child? I think we would all agree that the likelihood of a dove from heaven is, if not a complete impossibility certainly infinitesimal. Such a happening was surely reserved solely for the baptism of Jesus though it would certainly be a novelty to have a few doves fluttering around the church this morning.

But back to my question and as to what is happening when someone is baptised and to answer that in full would probably mean keeping you here for at least another hour but I will spare you that particular ordeal this morning and concentrate on one aspect only and that is the official welcoming of Niamh into the body of Christ, the family of Christ.

At his baptism in the Jordan Jesus was recognised as the true Son of God and in our baptisms we are recognized and welcome as the adopted children of God. Yes, we all have our own unique families and sadly as we are witnessing with the Royal Family such families are not always full of mutual joy and love but the family of God is of a different nature. There are no exclusions, no judgements as to just who should or should not be a part of that family; **all** are welcomed; all accepted for just what they are which in the great majority of cases is often quite a messy mixture of the good and the bad. Niamh will not always be this angelic baby and when she is a stroppy teenager as all teenagers usually are at some point or other her parents Sean and Lindsay. may look back with longing to those early years when by and large they were viewed as gods to be trusted and obeyed. Whereas stroppy teenagers are convinced that their

parents are simply there to obstruct and deny them in every possible way their objectives and their wishes. Niamh may well as that stropky teenager also find God an unwanted intrusion into her life but just as her parents will still love her however annoying she may be so will God because as St Paul tells us nothing, but nothing, can separate us from the love of God. Like it or not Baby Niamh like all of us is forever a part of God's family even when we choose to try to deny that fact.

In the second part of today's Bible reading we hear how after his baptism Jesus set about calling his first disciples, his first followers to become part of his earthly mission. Followers who would learn from his teaching and his example the way of Christ; the way of embracing all God's children; always ready to love them, always ready to forgive them for their wrong doing, their sins. And ever since that time Jesus has continued to call people to follow him and to be part of that mission. The mission expressed in those words of the Lord's Prayer we will be saying together later '**Your** kingdom come, **your** will be done.'

As one of the very newest official members of that uncountable family Niamh too has a mission; a mission to shine as a light in the world using her very own special God given gifts. To shine that light into the dark places wherever they may be encountered bringing the healing of love, the healing of hope, the healing of forgiveness the healing of peace to God's broken world. And that is the mission of all of us here baptized or otherwise to be lights in the world. Lights to offset the darkness and reveal the good that I believe is within all God's children. To bring about, not the kingdoms of this world which are so often corrupt and tarnished by the abuse and misuse of power, but the kingdom of God which proclaims and brings justice, righteousness and joy to all.

May God grant that whoever we are as we leave this church today we are renewed in our mission as part of the family of God to always act as lights in his world.