

Homily for 12th January, The Baptism of Jesus, Holmbury and Wotton

Texts: Isaiah 43: 1-7, Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'

Isaiah 43: 1b



I very much doubt if anyone here can remember the events of their baptism because at a guess all of us were 'dunked' well before any form of memory set into our consciousness. I certainly do not remember mine, but I know it took place in the parish church of Harpenden and of the three Godparents chosen by my parents one was as it were satisfactory and the other two not. These latter had been chosen by my parents on the basis that they were vague relations, childless and reasonably well off so seemingly a good choice; thus you can imagine my Father's fury and contempt when their baptismal present to me was, wait for it, not a silver spoon but a woolly ball. Then no more gifts until my wedding when it was a cut glass vase and finally in her will my Godmother whom I had never clapped eyes on left me not just one but six silver spoons so that most unexpected bequest might just have appeased my Father! I just hope that all of you had far more proactive Godparents not just as regards the gifts that they might have given you over the years but more importantly the interest they have or had shown in your general welfare and if they were truly God-like parents provided you with a role model of Godly living to emulate in your spiritual journey..

Today we celebrate the baptism of Jesus not as a tiny baby as one might expect being so close to the day on which we celebrated his birth but as a fully grown, mature man of some thirty years old. It certainly didn't involve any symbolic baptism over a small church font but full

immersion in the waters of the River Jordan. And certainly, no woolly balls but of infinitely more worth and altogether more wonderful and awe inspiring there was first a dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, descending from heaven and then the voice of God Himself proclaiming; 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' Truly a unique baptism which completely and utterly outshines any that we have ever experienced. No doves, no voices from heaven in our baptism services but there are words that are used in those services that I think carry huge significance for all who are baptised. The first of these is when after the actual baptism has taken place everyone present proclaims; 'We welcome you into the fellowship of faith; we are children of the same heavenly Father; we welcome you.' Such wonderful, warmly embracing words which help to remind us that in part God's purposes in sending His own Son to us was to enable us to understand and to believe that whoever we are we are **all** adopted children of God. As Isaiah prophesied we are as God's adopted sons and daughters called, be it from the north or from the south, to become an integral part of His family, embraced loved and cherished by Him as unique individuals. We are brothers and sisters of Christ Himself, which is the most humbling thought but also, it has to be emphasised, one I certainly believe to be true. Christ the Son of God spent His entire life revealing all the grace and wonder of that divine love for us through his humanity, his care for all in need, his healing, His showing us another way in which to live our lives; His way, the way of that second commandment: 'Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.' And of course, ultimately, He showed his love for us, the adopted children of God, by giving up His life for us that we might be given forgiveness and redemption of the sins that we all commit both individually and collectively which darken God's world and separate us from God. Whoever we are we need that forgiveness, that redemptive power which Isaiah speaks of with those wonderful reassuring words: 'Do not fear, I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. That redemptive power symbolised in the washing clean of sin in baptism to be followed by that quite beautiful image of being clothed with Christ. The redemptive power made possible by Christ's life-giving sacrifice upon the cross.

The cross with which we are signed at our baptism, the cross that reminds us that it connects earth and heaven so we are always enabled to be in touch with God and He with us and whose outstretched cross beam will for ever remind us of the love in which we His children are held.

And following on from this are the other words of the baptism service I want to draw your attention to and these are when the baptised are given a lighted candle and instructed to 'Shine as light in the world to the glory of God the Father' and this instruction is followed by these

words: 'You have received the light of Christ; walk in this light all the days of your life.' Shortly we will be lighting candles and thus reminding ourselves that no matter what age we are now that baptismal instruction still holds firm. We are each and every one of us called to do our utmost to shine the light of God's love into the dark places of the world. And here I would like to remind you that by and large no matter the size of a candle the flame they emit is virtually the same size. The little seemingly unnoticed deeds of love can shine every bit as much light as the big, grand gestures do. And here for proof of such a claim let us look at those two candles we lit at the beginning of this reflection. One big candle, one very small candle but there is virtually no difference in the size of their flame. In God's eyes surely every time we reveal in our lives the light of Christ, the light of love they are all equal. I pray that throughout this year we may all continue in one way or another to shine as lights in God's world and in so doing help bring about the dawning of God's kingdom here on earth.

Loving Lord grant that the light of your love be born in us each and every day so that we might be enabled to give light to all those whom we meet whoever they may be, both from the north or the south, and most especially bring that light to comfort, reassure and give hope for the future to those who are in any sort of darkness. Amen