

2022-01-09 ... 10am Service Sermon ... Revd Sue Armstrong

Isaiah 43: 1 – 7; Acts 8: 14 – 17; Luke 3: 15 – 17, 21 – 22

'The Baptism of Christ'

What a wonderful reading to have at the beginning of the year! In our Isaiah reading we have God's promise of his love and care for his people; and we hear it said, all of life's problems shall not overwhelm you. Trusting in God enables us to survive the difficulties and to learn and to grow because of them.

Needless to say, this doesn't mean that we welcome problems, difficulties or disasters – that would not be human. But as we struggle through, what we learn about ourselves can change us, can give a better understanding and help us to empathise with other people, their needs and situation – Covid has made this very clear over the last two years.

Isaiah goes on to speak of God bringing people from all points of the compass to know and follow him – whoever turns to him becomes part of his family, cherished and supported.

It is often easy for us to look around at the faithful few and feel that we are indeed a last outpost and to wonder whether as such we are as important to God as big, bustling churches – this reading reminds us that we are, each of us, precious in his sight and loved. This doesn't mean of course that we shouldn't be trying to nurture those around us by our witness in the way we live, that we shouldn't try to encourage growth in our churches – but it can remove the guilt we can feel when our own family members aren't regular worshippers. Praying for them and for others is something we can all do.

In the reading from Acts we hear of Samaria, the province where Jesus challenged the woman at the well, having turned to accept the word of God and how Peter and John, the two apostles who had been closest to Jesus went there to give their witness and the gift of the Spirit through the laying on of hands affirming those baptised there as members of God's family.

We speak of an epiphany as a moment of clarity, when things are made clear, a revelation, and here we are in this season of the Epiphany when God is making clear his gift to the world, revealed (and accepted) ...

Firstly to Mary and Joseph fulfilling the prophecies

Secondly to the shepherds, those who lived and worked on the fringes of society, who accepted and rejoiced at the news

Thirdly to the wise men, the Magi, those seekers after truth who travelled great distances and brought gifts – the very best they could.

And now, when Jesus, accepting that the time has come to truly begin God's work in the world, we see Him receiving that affirmation from God: **"This is my beloved Son, in him I am well pleased."** PTO

Everything that has gone before summed up in our Christmas blessing is now to be made good:

*May the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds
the perseverance of the wise men,
the obedience of Joseph and Mary
and the peace of the Christ child ...*

All that has gone into the making of Jesus the man; his growing up in a loving, religious, hard-working home, with the awareness of those very different expectations is now focussed on God's calling and how he responds.

And with the knowledge and acceptance of God with him Jesus embarks on the mission he has been destined for:-

to bring and show God's love to the world in teaching, preaching, praying and healing. For us too as members of God's family our task is to show that love in how we live caring for one another and our world.