

**2021-01-10 Sue Diggory**

**Epiphany 1 - Genesis 1 v 1 – 5 and Mark 1 v 4 – 11**

***New Beginnings***

Today our Bible readings are both about new beginnings; the beginning of the universe with the creation of the heavens and the earth in the book of Genesis, and the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry as he is baptised in the river Jordan, from Mark's Gospel. This is of course, a massive jump in time from the visitation of the Magi, remembered last week, yet there is also continuity as we encounter another Epiphany moment, another moment of sudden and great revelation.

So today it is quite a surprise that as we encounter another Epiphany moment, we are witnessing the commissioning of the adult Jesus, the grown man who *'came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan'*

Each of the four Gospel writers give us an account of Christ's baptism, signalling that this was an important event, but it is also an event which presents us with some difficult questions.

Why did Jesus the perfect man, the one who was without sin come to John? Was it simply to identify with humanity, as some scholars think or was it more than that, was it an event that shows us more of the reality of who Jesus is, the one who John tells us *'will baptise you with the Holy Spirit,'* the life giving presence of God and not just the water of repentance.

Yes, Jesus is going to fulfil God's ancient plans for his people, his promises that were made centuries ago and never forgotten, yes God's Spirit will be poured out into the world and yes God's people will be rescued once and for all BUT to do this Jesus must fully and humbly identify with the whole of humanity, he who was without sin must be prepared to take their place, to be prepared to share in their penitence, to be prepared to live their life and ultimately be prepared to die their death.

So, being baptised by John was a necessary part of God's plan for the salvation of his people, it was part of the servant nature that lies at the very heart of the ministry of his Son, Jesus the one who came and comes as Emmanuel God with us.

As Jesus emerges from the water he sees *the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him*, and here we have our Epiphany moment, a new beginning as Jesus receives God's Spirit in a new way, in the form of a dove, a symbol of the peace that he has come to bring, and as he hears the voice from Heaven, the voice of his Father, declaring his Sonship as *the beloved, with you I am well pleased.*

From this moment on baptism is transformed, it is no longer just about repentance it is now also about the outpouring of the Spirit, the Spirit who would now be available for all, it is in effect a new beginning, as God's kingdom is ushered in, in a new way.

In the introduction to the baptism service we read that; 'Our Lord Jesus Christ has told us that to enter the kingdom of heaven we must be born again of water and the Spirit, and has given us baptism as the sign and seal of this new birth. Here we are washed by the Holy Spirit and

made clean. Here we are clothed with Christ, dying to sin that we may live his risen life. As children of God, we have a new dignity and God calls us to fullness of life.'

Sentiments that are echoed in today's collect as 'we know ourselves to be your beloved children.' A fact that nothing can change, no matter what life may throw at us, and we are having a lot thrown at us today, we can rest in the sure knowledge that we are all children of a divine parent, and brothers and sisters of and in Christ.

Again, in the baptism service we hear 'Heavenly Father, by the power of your Holy Spirit you give your faithful people new life in the water of baptism. Guide and strengthen us by the same Spirit, that we who are born again may serve you in faith and love.'

And so as we reflect today on the Baptism of Christ on this second Sunday of the New year, and Epiphany Season, this may be a good time to ponder on our own baptism; whether we actually remember it or not, when promises were made either by us or on our behalf.

Perhaps today with all that is going on around us it is a good time to consider how open we are to the ongoing transformation of our lives by Holy Spirit as we journey on with Christ. Are looking for a new beginning, not only to the end of our current lockdown life but to the next step of our journey with the beloved, with whom God is well pleased.