

## COME TO THE WATERS...BAPTISM OF OUR LORD 12.01.25 dtw All Souls' 2025

The Baptism of Jesus is celebrated as the Epiphany by the Eastern Orthodox churches; in our western calendar it comes second to the Manifestation to the Gentiles symbolised in the visit to the infant Jesus by the Magi. Today I want us to look at *water* as a powerful theological image in the Bible. It is appropriate as we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord, to grasp the great significance that water has in the Christian life.

All the way through the Hebrew Scriptures and the NT, water carries with it rich themes: redemption, salvation, cleansing, refreshment, blessing, life or death. In Genesis, the Spirit of God moves over the face of the primeval waters of chaos to bring order and life. In Exodus 14 Israel is redeemed through the midst of the waters of the Red Sea, Pharaoh's host is drowned; Israel receives water from the rock. The Psalmist often refers to water. Ps 1.3: The one who delights in the Lord is like a tree planted by streams of water. Ps 107.35: The Lord turns a desert into pools of water and a parched land into springs of water. Isaiah prophesies (12.3,4) 'With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation, and you will say in that day, "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name; make known his deeds among the nations, proclaim that his name is exalted".' We turn to the NT and at the outset, there is John the Baptist with a baptism of water and repentance. Jesus is baptised by him before he inaugurates the very first Lent in his own body and spirit in the wilderness. And Jesus is the one who baptises not only with water, but with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Luke 3.16) He is the one who says to the woman at the well, "...those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4. 14)

You and I have been set apart, in Christ, through the waters of Baptism. And as with Jesus himself, God is effectively saying through those waters about each of us, "Here is my beloved child, set apart, to be a light to the world" The beautiful water rite in our baptismal service says it all – tells the whole story, from Genesis, through Jesus, to the one about to be baptised. That is why I like to pour the water slowly, visibly, deliberately, audibly, splashingly – as a visible sign of God's extravagant blessing. If you could ask just one thing today as you watch in your heart the Baptism of Jesus, it could be "Teach me Lord, to be set apart – for you and for others; help me to live the baptised life."

Water brings life – it can also cause destruction, havoc and death, such as in the case of floods or mighty storms at sea – the Boxing Day 2004 Tsunami was the biggest example in my lifetime. Back in 1981, when I was at St George's Cathedral in Perth, our home came close to being totally destroyed by fire, had it not been for the quick thinking of our neighbours in calling the fire brigade. Deborah was in Adelaide at the time and I was out for the evening. A faulty kerosene hot water system was the cause. After the fire there was no electricity, phone or even water as much of the plumbing had opened up in the heat. It felt strange, being there in the smoky dark, turning on a tap to find no water. One takes all these conveniences so for granted. Yet it was also comforting to know that it was water that had saved the house.

Another important thing about baptism from the Anglican perspective: I was baptised at the age of 4 weeks on Palm Sunday 1950 at St Barnabas' Pimlico in London. Sometimes people will ask why we baptise babies, as well as adults, seeing they have no mature understanding. The simple reason is because of who *God is*. God's initial choice of us is prior to and of greater consequence

than our choice of God. *God chose us.* In John's first letter, we heard the words, 'We love because God first loved us' and in John's Gospel Jesus says to his disciples, "You did not choose me; I chose you." This is the foundational reason, the foundation grace for baptism and why Orthodox, Catholic Faith in which we Anglicans partake, endorses the baptism of infants (as well as adults) – in keeping with the heritage of Jewish theology. It is in the recognition of God's covenant call upon God's chosen people. It is paramount in orthodox faith, indeed in Paul's theology of Justification by Faith. 'By Grace we have been saved through faith'; this is not our 'own doing, it is the gift of God'. (Eph 2.8) I don't know about you, but I find myself constantly challenged by that verse because the adversary would love to beguile me by 'my own doing', by *my* works, by *my* choosing. Some Christians ask, "Have you chosen Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour". I would respond, "My Saviour chose me!"

Our choice, while extremely important, is of a secondary nature. The plan is that each baptised child of God sees the authenticity of that choice that God has made personally for them and affirmed by their parents and godparents and the whole believing church, and then responds with their own AMEN. "So be it. God is mine and I am God's and Christ is my salvation." That is where the Sacrament of Confirmation comes in.

I am often privileged to set apart, in God's name, a house, a car, a wedding ring or two, by water. In a house, Holy Water is sprinkled in all the rooms as a sign of God's purifying and cleansing power and presence as his blessing is sealed upon that house and family with all their precious hopes and dreams, and in their going out and their coming in. Even if you've been living in your house a long time, it is never too late to have it blessed. I have sometimes celebrated a Eucharist in the home too, followed by some feasting and merriment. I highly recommend it.

And always remember, water is for sharing – learn to offer it, learn to wash feet in service. The night we had that fire I told you of, so many people just turned up in the dark – they didn't have to – they just cared – just like those amazing people in the Grampians and Los Angeles. My next-door neighbour literally brought me some buckets of water and I remembered the words of Jesus, "Those who offer you a cup of water in my name will by no means lose their reward". (Someone even brought a bottle of bubbly – she said it was the closest thing she could find to a fire extinguisher!)

Try meditating upon a glass of water sometime. What a precious opportunity.