

Christ's Baptism

By God's Grace may I speak in his name who is Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Happy New Year, in case I haven't had a chance yet to wish you a happy 2021. 2020 has been a rough year. Do you remember how you started into 2020? When it was all new and fresh and we didn't know yet about all that was awaiting us during that year? And then we kept hearing more and more concerning things about this aggressive Coronavirus. We ended up in lockdown for months, all around the world we kept hearing of all sorts of crisis, the Hongkong protests, the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests around the world that followed, various wars breaking out, a very tense election in the US, a nail-baiting negotiation for a Brexit deal and Christmas amidst new Covid measures and continuously rising Covid cases and deaths. During the last days of 2020 there was a definite sense of people wanting 2020 to come to an end, with the hope that 2021 might be a better year. We are now ten days into the new year and things have not noticeably gotten better. We have continued to hear troubling news from around the globe and here in the UK and particularly in London, Covid cases have gotten so bad, that hospitals and their staff are at the breaking point. The mayor of London has declared a major incident and here at St John of Jerusalem we have come to the conclusion that we can't in good conscience continue to gather for worship.

So, is there really a difference between the old year and the new year? Is anything really going to change? Is there hope? Those are questions that can also come up when we look at today's readings. We first heard the beginning of the creation story. God creates something out of nothing. The Spirit of God sweeps or in some translations the Spirit hovers over the waters. God speaks "Let there be light" and there was light. Creation is born, all new and shiny, full of expectation and promise. But over a few million years, things change. By the time Jesus Christ is born, that creation aged. Within God's good creation,

many bad things have happened. It is marred by violence, hatred and all manners of pain and suffering. The world Jesus is born into is no longer new and shiny. The grand and brutal emporium of Rome has much of Europe, as well as parts of Asia and Africa in its grip. Where Jesus lived there would have been a few superrich people, while the majority of people was poor and struggling for their survival on a daily basis. The beauty and peace of the garden of Eden had evaporated for the most part.

That is the starting point for our gospel reading today. The Son of God, no longer the baby in the manger, has grown into a man, ready to enter into his public ministry. Here it begins, at the river Jordan. Jesus asks to be baptised by the wild looking John, dressed in camel's hair. He is baptised in water, like one of us. He identifies himself with the broken human beings, who are distorted through hatred, greed and jealousy. The human beings who are no longer new and shiny, but long to get back there. Who long to be washed clean from the dirt and dust of this world and their own failings. Jesus, the Son of God, chooses to not keep is distance from all that dirt and dust of the old creation, but he enters it and identifies himself with it, as he asks John to baptise him. And then something remarkable happens as he comes back up out of the water of his baptism. The heavens are torn apart and the same Spirit that hovered over the waters at the creation descends on Jesus in the form of a dove. Accompanied by the voice of God the Father, acknowledging the Son:

You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.

The Son, who is the beginning of God's new creation. A new era, a fresh start. There are echoes of the beginning of the beginning of the creation story here, but what is happening at Christ's baptism is also distinctly new and different. This is not out of nothing, but something new that breaks into what is old. And as we continue to follow Jesus' story into the desert, through his years of preaching, healing and ministering to people from all walks of life, to the cross and the empty grave, it becomes evident, that the old has not simply disappeared. It is still here, but into the old breaks the hope, light and healing power

of Christ's new creation. The new creation within the old creation. We too become part of that inbreaking new creation at our baptism. Like with the painful, difficult and exhausting parts of 2020, the old hasn't just simply disappeared in one full swoop, but something new has started, and the inbreaking slowly transforms what is old and broken. Throughout 2021 more and more people will receive a vaccine, and hopefully this will lead to the gradual disappearance of Covid. Slowly, slowly we hopefully will learn the painful lessons of 2020 and tackle together the difficult stuff, like the ever-expanding chasm between the superrich and the poor, racism and all manners of injustice and inequality. So, right now, at the difficult beginning of a new year, it is helpful for us to be reminded of our own baptism. That we have been made a new creation in Christ, although the old creation is still all around us. But we have also received Christ's baptism with the Holy Spirit, who continues to create new things within us and to bring forth the fruits mentioned in Galatians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Even though the old dirt and dust is still all around us, God is creating something new within and through us, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen