

Sunday January 10th, The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

In our Gospel today, Mark 1:7-11, we see John the Baptist's prophecy that the coming Messiah would baptise others with God's Spirit begins to be fulfilled as the Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism. *'And a voice comes from heaven, "You are my son, the beloved; my favour rests on you.'* Today we can think of God the Father saying those words to us, on the day we were baptised. Sadly there have not been many baptisms during the present situation. Ridiculously only six people are allowed to attend (surely nine might have made more sense – the child, the parents, the Godparents and four Grandparents?).

When each of us was baptised, each of us went through a huge life changing event. We became Christians. We entered the family of God. It's very easy to say that: we became a Christian; we joined God's family - but many people who say it, be it evangelicals on video or parents seeking admission to the junior school perhaps don't fully acknowledge the true importance of baptism and what the baptism service is all about.

These days at a baptism service to emphasise the fact that we are entering the Church spiritually, a child also enters the church physically, being greeted at the back by the priest. From the outset the words of the baptism service stress the importance of the Sacrament and the great responsibility the parents are taken upon themselves in putting their child forward for this Sacrament. Then the sign of the cross is made on the child's forehead; the cross being the sign of the Christ's victory over death and his promise of resurrection, which, by nature of the sacrament of baptism the child will be able to share in.

After the liturgy of the Word, the child is prepared for baptism with an anointing with the oil of catechumens (those about to enter the Church) and a prayer is made that the child is set free from original sin, the tendency within us to think we can do without God. Once the child has experienced God in their lives we pray that they will always have the strength to resist evil and wear Christ, as St. Paul says, like a suit of armour.

Only then we move to the font. The water is prayed over, reminding us how at the creation of the earth, God separated land from water; how God's Spirit breathed over the water at the creation of life;

how the waters of the great flood rid the world of sin; how the Moses parted the waters, leading the way to the promised land; how blood and water flowed from Jesus' side on the cross; and how, as we celebrate today, Jesus himself was baptised in the Jordan by John. A profession of faith is made, not by the child, of course, but by the child's parents and godparents, as they make a declaration on the upbringing of their child. And then, just before the priest baptises, the parents are asked once again if they are really sure they want to have the child baptised. It's too important a step to be taken lightly. Finally, water is poured on the child's forehead three times, as they are baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

But the baptism ceremony is not over: the child is anointed again, with the oil of Chrism, that like Christ they may become a priest (someone who serves others in the name of God), and prophet (someone who shares their faith, to the point of death) and a King (to reign one day with Christ in heaven). The child is wrapped in a white robe, symbolising how they have been born again and a new, pure and whole creation. Finally they are presented with a candle, lit from the paschal candle, as we pledge to pass on to them our faith in the resurrection of Jesus.

The concluding prayer of the baptism service, said around the altar, looks forward to the life of faith which has been opened up to the child through baptism, and the other Sacraments which they are now free to receive, not least receiving the fullness of God's Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

A wonderful service, lasting not much longer than the time it will have taken you to read this, yet having effects which last far beyond this world. As today we celebrate Christ's baptism, so we are reminded of the day we received this great Sacrament, that truly life changing day when we became members of God's family, became Christians, and began a journey which ends, not in death, but in eternal life. On our baptism day the words this is my beloved son, this is my beloved daughter were spoken to us. Let's remember those words today, and every day of our lives - and our eternal lives.

Lord,

thank you for the precious gift of baptism,

that we can publicly declare our love and passion for you.

Lord, we ask for your goodness and blessings to be poured out on your faithful servants.

We pray that you would work deeply within our hearts and souls

to renew and refresh our baptisms each day.

Come guide our footsteps, give us hope and a vision for the future.

Today, the past is gone. We stand free and whole,

loved and forgiven within the kingdom of God.

Encircle us with your promises and fill our hearts with joy forever!

Amen.

Once again Eileen has helpfully provided us with a knitted version of the biblical scene of the Baptism of the Lord.

And for a hymn today how about 'O Let All Who Thirst, Let Them Come To The Water.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huERPUnO-bo>

And as there is probably nothing on TV this afternoon, why not grab a cup of tea and a biscuit and try this Baptism of the Lord Quiz, with biblical reference hints if you don't know the answers. Answers are at the end of this Message.

- 1.) John would prepare the way of the Lord, according to which prophet? Matthew 3:3
- 2.) Where did John preach? Mark 1:4
- 3.) What was John's main message? Mark 1:4
- 4.) What was John's clothing made of? Matthew 3:4
- 5.) What was John's diet? Matthew 3:4
- 6.) What did John call the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to watch him baptize people? Matthew 3:7
- 7.) What did John say about the man who would come after him? Mark 1:7
- 8.) Who did the people think John was? Luke 3:15
- 9.) What is one of the primary purposes of baptism? Luke 3:3
- 10.) John said he baptized with water, and that Jesus Christ would baptize with: Luke 3:16
- 11.) Why was John confused when Jesus came to him to be baptized? Matthew 3:14
- 12.) Why did Jesus need to be baptized? Matthew 3:15
- 13.) By what method was Jesus baptized? Mark 1:10
- 14.) What form did the Spirit momentarily take following Jesus' baptism? Luke 3:22
- 15.) Whose voice could be heard from heaven following Jesus' baptism? Matthew 3:17
- 16.) What did the voice from heaven say after Jesus was baptized, according to the record of the apostle Matthew? Matthew 3:17

How did you do?

Don't forget to take extra care regarding social distancing and all the other safety restrictions when at Mass or Private Prayer, or when out and about. Stay safe and well, and protect yourself and others at all times.

Have a great day.

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.

1. Isaiah 2. The wilderness 3. Repentance and Baptism 4. Camel hair 5. Locusts and wild honey 6. A brood of vipers 7. That he was unworthy to tie his sandals 8. Christ 9. Remission of original sin 10. Fire and the Holy Spirit 11. He felt unworthy of baptising the Saviour 12. To do all that righteousness demands 13. Full submersion – we are told he came up out of the water 14. A dove 15. God the Father 16. 'This is my beloved son, my favour rests on you.'