

Week of 11th January 2021

LOVED BY GOD

St Mary's Way Value: Trust; Challenge.



A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ. So John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am- and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.' Now when all the people had been baptised and while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, the Beloved. My favour rests on you.'

Day 1: This week, we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of our Lord. Many of us will have been baptised as babies and don't remember anything about it. But it wasn't that way at the time of Jesus: people were baptised as adults, just as Jesus is in our Gospel story this week. Baptism would happen in a river or a lake, and people would be submerged completely under the water. They did this as a sign that they were sorry for their sins- by sinking under the water and rising up again, they believed the water made them clean of their sins and they could rise up out of the water into new life. They wanted to wash away the bad stuff in their lives and make a new start.

Each year in January, people often make resolutions to make a new start in a similar way to those who were baptised in Jesus' time.

Discuss/ reflect:

- Do you believe in 'new starts'? What sort of people try to make a 'new start'?
- Can anyone have a new start? How?

Lord, at the start of this year, help us all to make new starts. Where we have made mistakes, may we learn from them and not repeat them. Let us take what has been good from the last year and continue to grow. Amen.



Practical suggestion:

The resource for day 1 talks about baptism being a new start and compares this to our tradition of making new year's resolutions. Take some time to think about/ discuss: How are you going to start this year differently? And how are you going to make sure you keep it up?

Video:

On day 3, we reflect on what it means to be a child of God. Watch this video and see if it helps you understand how important you are to God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lt4eQ2nyJDk>

Day 2: In this week's Gospel, Jesus comes to the river Jordan to be baptised by John. As we mentioned yesterday, this was a very different kind of baptism to the baptism we have today. The baptism Jesus had was about acknowledging the wrong that people had done and beginning again. It's not just good for our own development to admit when we are wrong. For families or communities to live together, we all need to be able to forgive and move past the wrong someone has done. This is the example that Jesus was giving to us through his baptism. Jesus had not committed any sins, so he didn't need to be baptised, but he wanted to show us the importance of saying sorry and forgiving each other by setting us an example that we can follow.

Discuss/ Reflect:

- How do you and your family forgive and forget?
- What changes can your form make to make everyone happier?

Lord, help me to face the truth about myself. Help me to hear my words as others hear them, to see my face as others see me. Give me enough humility to accept my own weaknesses for what they are and- when I need to- the grace to say 'I was wrong – forgive me.' Amen.



Day 3: After Jesus' baptism, we see a powerful declaration of God's love for Jesus:

"Heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, the Beloved. My favour rests on you.'"

It is a beautiful image of love. As children of God, this is also how strongly God feels about each one of us. And it is shown in a special way in the baptism service: the baby is wrapped in the white shawl to symbolize them being wrapped in God's love. Faith is believing this. In fact, believing and knowing that we are loved is what gives us self-esteem, and enables us to love others.

Discuss/ reflect:

- Do you believe you are loved by God? What makes it easy and difficult to believe this?
- Where do you think you have learned about love and how to love others? Who has shown you/ been your example?

Lord of the loving heart, may mine be loving too. Lord of the gentle hands, may mine be gentle too. Lord of the willing feet, may mine be willing too, So I may grow more like you in all I say and do. Amen.

Day 4: In this week's Gospel, John is quite clear about who he is and his role in life:

"people were beginning to think that John might be the Christ. So John declared before them all, 'someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am.'"

Instead of taking the credit for himself, John points the way to Jesus. Once they met, John even sent some of his own followers to be Jesus' first disciples. John knew that what he was doing was important, but it was not as important as what Jesus would do. It must have taken a lot of humility for John to step aside and make way for Jesus.

Discuss/ Reflect:

- When can it be good to put other people first?
- Can you think of some examples of people who have done this in your life/ local community?

Reflection: "I have three precious things which I hold fast and prize. The first is gentleness; the second is frugality; the third is humility, which keeps me from putting myself before others. Be gentle and you can be bold; be frugal and you can be liberal; avoid putting yourself before others and you can become a leader among men." (Lao Tzu)