

The Baptism of Our Lord.

Isaiah 42:1-9; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

You are blessed, in you God is pleased.

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What does it mean to be blessed. Apart for the 'bless you' which is said almost automatically when someone sneezes, what does it mean for someone to offer you their blessing, or for you to offer blessing to someone else?

In today's first reading and our gospel, God declares a blessing on both whomever the prophet is speaking of and on Jesus. The words used in both these readings are very similar - here is my servant / this is my Son; my chosen / the Beloved; in whom my soul delights / with whom I am well pleased; I have put my spirit upon him / the Spirit of God descended like a dove.

God is saying to both of them, continue on the track you are travelling, you are travelling in the right direction, continue with my blessing. Isaiah is reminding the people of Israel that even though they are currently in exile, God has not abandoned them; God is still at work among them, restoring them to be a blessing. The pattern of servanthood continues from Isaiah to Matthew, in Jesus God again sends a servant who will bring justice, who will 'bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free and declare the year of the Lord's favour'. We may not be able to remember our own baptism, for most of us, we were but small babies, but God's blessing was given to us just as it was given to Jesus. We join in the pattern of servanthood, we also are being sent by God to bring justice to the world.

But blessing comes with responsibility. Following his baptism, where he received God's blessing, Jesus lived in obedience with the will of his Father, the will of God for how his life would end up. Jesus played the hand he had been dealt. And that is what we too are called to do. Take the hand we have been dealt and play it. During Jesus public ministry, there were many opportunities and encouragements for Jesus to stop doing what he was doing, to change direction and take a safer option, but he declined, he continued to walk in the direction God was leading him, he continued to walk toward the cross.

Sometimes we may feel unworthy of the blessing we receive, but God does not ask us to be worthy. When we think of that well known parable, the prodigal son, the father waits to bless his returning son, not because he is worthy of the blessing, but because he loves him and wants to remind him of his love. God's blessing is given, not because we are worthy of it, but because God loves us. God's blessing depends not on our faithfulness, but on God's.

At Jesus' baptism, we hear God's powerful affirmation to Jesus - 'I love you, You are mine, I am pleased with you'. This same affirmation is made to everyone who is baptised, we may have been too young to remember hearing it like Jesus did, but it is ours none the less. We have all received this affirmation, yet sometimes we struggle to live it. We need to hear God's voice saying this powerful affirmation to us. When Jesus heard these powerful words he immediately went into the desert to prepare to give his whole life to God, as you and I hear these words, we too begin to live our lives inching forward tentatively walking the path laid before us, confident in the knowledge that the One who stands behind the words is there with us. As we grasp the meaning of what our Baptism means for us, we hear that loud, clear invitation - 'come in, be washed, you are much loved by God and by the Church, you belong'. Take a moment and reflect on where your baptismal journey has brought you so far. What have you done as a result of your life in Christ? How has Jesus led you to use your talents and gifts for righteous actions? What has been joyful for you on this journey? The answers to these questions are not easy to come by, we may look at our lives and wonder what we really have done, we may look at our lives and doubt we have really achieved anything. But sometimes the results are not for us to see, but for others to feel, our results may not be noticeable to us, but if we live a God centered life, if we are aware of our neighbor and live a life striving toward God, all is not in vain.

You belong. In our second reading, Peter announces a monumental reality - God's salvation is for all. Not just the elect, not just the Jews, but for all. God is revealed as an impartial God, the character of God's community is impartial, the dividing lines have been obliterated. The liberating mission for which Jesus was anointed with the Spirit involves God's restoration project in fulfillment for Isaiah. Peter and the other disciples were commissioned by the risen Christ to preach repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' name to all nations. In God's salvific plan, all now really means all.

We are called to continue that commission. Through our baptism, we are called share the good news of Christ's salvation. We are commissioned to be aware of our neighbourhood, be

aware of our community, the needs of the poor, the needs of the marginalised, the outcast, we are commissioned to 'bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to free the oppressed' we are commissioned to share the good news that salvation is for everyone, no borders, no boundaries, no dividing lines and that all are blessed.

Baptism is the sacrament in which we declare – in which God declares – we are the sons and daughters of God. We can look in the mirror and say, 'look at me, I am the child of God, I am beloved, with me God is well pleased'.