



Reflection by Rev'd Tony Meek

Baptism of Christ
Luke 3.15-17, 21-22
12th January 2025

A few years back we were remembering the events leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall. I remember someone saying that President Gorbachev had been baptized and our faith tells us his baptism must make a difference. His grandmother had him secretly baptized by a Russian Orthodox priest. His grandmother put an icon of Jesus on the wall in every room in the house. Gorbachev's father was a staunch Communist and put a picture of Stalin next to each picture of Jesus. The Berlin Wall fell on November 9th 1989, some 35 years ago. On December 1st 1989, President Gorbachev was taken to the Vatican to meet Pope John Paul II. The two met and spoke in the Pope's private library for seventy minutes. That is the power of the Holy Spirit received at baptism. Baptism counts. Baptism makes a difference. And we should remember that it was Gorbachev's grandmother who was instrumental in all of that. We should remember it whenever anyone is tempted to suggest that we should ignore or resist approaches for infants to be baptised 'just to please Grandma'. At many points in history, in many parts of the world, it is the grandmothers who have kept the faith alive in times of darkness.

Our Gospel account today of Jesus' baptism should remind us of our own baptism. Why did Jesus ask John for baptism? Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins and Jesus did not need forgiveness. No wonder that in Matthew's account John objects to giving Jesus baptism, "It is I who need baptism from you, and yet you come to me." But Jesus insisted on being baptized, showing us his humility. All of Jesus' followers would be baptized and so Jesus too wanted to be baptized to show his unity with all of us. A new family was formed at Pentecost: the Church, and baptism was the means of entering the Church. The followers of Jesus would be distinguished by baptism. And from the earliest times, that baptism was given to infants.

What difference does baptism make to us? When Jesus was baptized God spoke and said, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased." When we are baptized in effect God says over each of us, "You are my son/daughter, my beloved; with you I am well pleased." Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit when he was baptized in the Jordan and we are anointed with oil during our baptism and like Jesus we receive the Holy Spirit also.

So what is your vocation since your baptism? Your vocation is to represent Jesus to the world. Because we fail in that vocation, we ask for mercy at the beginning of every Communion Service.

There have been many instances of doctors and nurses looking after particularly frail babies who have said that the baby began to thrive after it had been baptised. And you never know but that the infant may in years to come be another Mikhail Gorbachev!

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Christ. Let us celebrate and give thanks for our own Baptism, whether or not we were aware of it at the time!