

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : January 10th, 2021
“The Baptism of Christ”

BAPTISM OF CHRIST – 10 JANUARY 2021

For those of you who have been baptised, I wonder whether you know the date of your baptism – and indeed whether you actually remember it happening? Some of you may indeed remember because you might have been older when it happened. But for many others, including me, it is all shrouded in a fog of mystery. I know the place where it happened and I know the date - because I used to have a battered silver christening mug with the date inscribed – 9 months or so after I was born. But of course, along with many of you, I remember nothing else. Yet it was at our christening that we were baptised and began our Christian journeys. Possibly for the first time publicly at that service, our Christian names will have been proclaimed. In the liturgy we use at a baptism today are the words “God knows each of us by name and we are his”. In Isaiah 43 we read: “thus says the LORD, he who created you, do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine”. Our name is important to us. Popular today are ‘naming ceremonies’ when proud new parents show off their new child to their family and friends in a non-religious ceremony. Our name is important to us. We all instinctively react very well when someone we might only meet occasionally remembers our name – such as restaurant owners or pub landlords – remember them?! I worked with a Bishop once who called everyone ‘mate’ rather than use their name. He soon stopped when the Dean exclaimed ‘even my plumber does not call me ‘mate’! Our name is

important to us. One of the unexpected benefits of being on zoom for worship is that we can learn each other's names – though there are still a few people who curiously seem to be called 'ipad'! Mark's Gospel, the lead Gospel for this year, includes nothing of Jesus' birth and early life but opens at his baptism – where Jesus 'goes public' and begins his ministry. Today we read of John's baptism of Jesus which marked the beginning of his journey. This was true for Jesus and is still true today for all those who continue to profess the Christian faith. John the Baptist, strange man as he sounds to have been, responded to the call of God and worked to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus and he did this in the most dramatic way by baptising Jesus in the Jordan – and Jesus then experienced the voice of God saying to him "you are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased". And for those who drift away? Well, there are these comforting words found in our baptism liturgy: "We all wander far from God and lose our way: Christ comes to find us and welcomes us home. In baptism we respond to this call." So, this morning for those who have been baptised, we give thanks for our baptism, whenever it was. We give thanks for those who helped launch us on the right path – and we give thanks too for those who continue to encourage us on our journey as a Christian. The link of today goes back to the feast of the Epiphany – of God revealing the child to the world. As we were baptised 'into Christ' so we must now be those who reveal God's glory in our lives two thousand and twenty-one years later. Amen.