

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : January 9th, 2022  
“The Baptism of Christ”

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**THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST – EPIPHANY 1 2022**

Between Christmas and the New Year, I had a good clear out in the Vicarage. Papers that I really do not need any more have been shredded. Old sermons which I will never preach again have been consigned to six black plastic sacks. There were numerous trips to the tip with other sundry rubbish - all very satisfying. But amongst the papers, I came across was an envelope which I had retrieved from my mother's effects after her death in 2011 but which I hadn't got round to opening. In it, I was astonished to discover all my old school reports, ranging from the age of 4 up to leaving school at 18. They made interesting reading, as you might imagine. Amongst the comments at my infant and primary schools: "Michael is very helpful at keeping everything in the classroom neat and tidy". "Michael is very friendly and welcoming to visitors to the school". "Michael must resist the temptation to make lessons into a social occasion". And finally, most embarrassing of all: "Michael can be naughty at times". Thankfully In my secondary years, the comments dwelt more on the fact that, whilst I worked and tried hard, I found my academic work quite difficult and challenging.

What I suppose I realise is that, although I have changed down the decades, probably it was as a child that the essence of my character and personality was formed and which has carried on into adulthood, though hopefully I am less naughty. I will leave others to evaluate whether or not that is true of me. But the same might possibly true for many of you. If you could read your old school

reports, their comments might well reflect the sort of person you still are today. But all these childhood characteristics don't mean that we can't change down the years, particularly in trying to change our behaviour and attitudes for the better.

No sooner have the decorations come down, than we are reflecting together on the Baptism of Christ. Luke gets straight to the heart of the ministry of Jesus, which began with his Baptism by John in the Jordan – the event as Luke records it when Jesus was, if you like, commissioned in to his ministry; when God confirms his identity and his calling. God calls Jesus by name – as he calls each of us by name; he knows us and loves us as individuals, with our own unique set of gifts and talents and problems. We are each as unique as our DNA.

So, it is good today to think back to our own baptism, whenever it was, since each person's baptism is not only their decision to commit themselves to Christ, often through their birth family, but also God's calling to each by name. We are told that at Jesus' Baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove, as he stood praying. God was confirming Jesus' identity as his Son and affirming his calling as Saviour of the World. The final verse is significant – and could almost replicate an end of term report for Jesus from God: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

So as baptism marked the start of the ministry of Jesus, so the rite of baptism continues to this day to be an important first step for men, women and children to take. It is, of course, still the privilege of the Anglican Church to play a significant part in the rites of passage for every person who lives in a parish community, whether or not they attend church. And of the three – baptism, marriage and funeral – it is baptism that is often the one where seeds can so readily be planted in the life of a person, of whatever age. I'm afraid that I am old fashioned enough to be of the view that anyone who lives in this parish can be given baptism, for you never know what seeds will be planted by that small but significant act in the lives of even the most unlikely families. Time and again, I have found that a person's Christian journey did begin with that request of the local parish priest "will you baptise our baby" even if that

journey may have been unseen for many years. In his New Year message this year, the Archbishop of Canterbury said this: “When we plant a seed, we don’t see the fruit immediately. But under the surface, God is working with what we have planted”.

So today, give thanks for the ministry of Baptism still carried out in all its different shapes and forms. Give thanks for the seeds that are sown by baptism and for the harvest they can bring forth. Above all, let us all today give thanks for our Baptism, whenever it was. And, if God were to write a report for us, we all hope and pray that he might repeat these encouraging and affirming words: ‘You are my son, my daughter; with you I am well pleased.’

Heavenly Father, at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son: may we recognize him as our Lord and know ourselves to be your beloved children; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**