

+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we are celebrating the Baptism of our Lord. The cycle of the church year moves quickly through the life events of Jesus. It seems just yesterday we celebrated his birth in our Christmas services. Then only last Sunday we remembered the Epiphany of Jesus, his manifestation to the wide world, lit by a star. Throughout the week in our services, we have been reflecting on the lack of information the bible provides on the younger years of Jesus. From his birth until the last record at the age of twelve which concludes the infancy narrative in the gospel of Luke until his baptism as an adult there is nothing about Jesus in the canonical texts of the bible. The lack of information might frustrate us as we are people who want to know all the facts. It is a symptom of the time in which we live that we need to know the answers. Information is instantly at our fingertips so long as we have power to charge our devices and data to feed our hungry needs.

No such luxuries existed in the time of Jesus or indeed for many generations thereafter. People relied on their faith and confidence in the truth of the biblical witness to know that it did not matter that we do not have all the facts. Faith takes us into a different space than undisputable evidence and hard data. Faith gives us permission to let go of our reliance on technology and believe. We still might not have any clue about Jesus' life after infancy and before baptism, but we can have faith to believe that God's intention was and is to reveal to us all that is necessary for salvation.

The season of Epiphany continues beyond the arrival of the wise travellers to the infant Jesus. The season continues through his baptism and concludes with the event of the Transfiguration, which we will celebrate some weeks from today. The season of Epiphany is about seeing signs of Christ in the world. Today we remember Jesus' baptism by John in the river Jordan. The baptism is an epiphany, a revealing of the Son of God, just as the arrival of the wise people from non-

Jewish lands who recognised the Son of God as an infant was another epiphany. The baptism is a powerful epiphany. The very sky appears to be torn apart and the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus in the form of a dove. And to complete the revelation, the voice of God is heard, 'This is my Son the beloved; with you,' God says, 'I am well pleased.'

The time is therefore right in God's keeping for the Son to begin his work on earth, the work which will end in the Easter story, in crucifixion, death and resurrection. So, we do not need the facts about his life in between birth and baptism because it contains nothing critical to the message God intends us to hear.

This baptism takes us to the beginning. It is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, his relationship with God as beloved Son heard thundering from heaven, from a divine space breaking into this created and broken world. This is God's intention from the beginning, from the moment of creation, from the first day. The reading we have listened to from the book of Genesis takes us back to the beginning, to the first page of the bible, to the first day. Then, in the void of beginning, deep and dark like the womb which nurtures us before birth, God breathed. The wind of God's breath was the Holy Spirit, that same Spirit that descended upon Jesus at his baptism. This Spirit belonged to Jesus as it did to God in the divine realm of Trinity, of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit distinguished the baptism of faith in Christ as Son of God from the baptism of John, by water alone, to wash away the sins of the people. In this way the people in the inland regions of Asia Minor and in the city of Ephesos learned about baptism into Christ, as we hear from the Acts of the Apostles. They learned that this baptism is for life, a commitment which needs no repeating, which changes the orientation of a person toward the divine source of being.

Just now as we live through these challenging times it is good to be reminded of beginnings and God's hand in the ongoing processes of creation. Our own baptisms are beginnings, when we commit, or our parents and sponsors commit us, to life in God. The stability of our world seems to be unravelling in places and the experience is surreal and can seem frightening. The reality of our fragile existence meets us face to face in uncontrolled disease and in collapsing pillars of the life to which we have become accustomed. Who has not seriously thought about the long term consequences of continuing unabated the way of life which in the western developed world is indulgent, greedy and inward looking, and in the less developed world is overcrowded and life is cheap? Rampant disease is one thing which hopefully will be overcome before long, but the desecration of the planet is another. Creation yearns to be made whole and clean, but the pollution of human habits wages war with nature. Without meaningful change, one day the balance will tip over to the other side.

What will it mean that the long held icons of democracy can so easily fall, as we witnessed this last week in the storming of the Capitol in the United States? The world is in a volatile space and the authoritarian alternative to the democratic freedoms of the people is closer than ever. The last two years have seen a rush of civilian protests for various causes, from desperately trying to hold onto dissolving democracy in Hong Kong, to the smashing of statues and burning buildings as people struggle to create real equality between races, even as violence infiltrates at every turn, undermining peaceful demands for justice with gunfire and brutality.

In this season of Epiphany as we live through these changing events, we look for the signs of Christ's presence and God's hand in enabling the salvation of the people. We look for the signs of hope and we hold onto our faith because our faith assures us that God is with us, that God is beginning and end. We look into our corporate human memory and remember the beginning, when the world was

yet formed, and the Holy Spirit breathed energy and life and the cycles of creation began. We remember the baptism of Jesus, this sign of assurance that God intends us for life and love. When everything can seem unstable and uncertain let us hold fast to faith, to believe without seeing or knowing everything, without being able to fix everything that seems to be wrong. We can only change ourselves for the better. Faith enables us to make these changes and if enough people make changes and turn toward God then the world will become a better place.