

# Baptism of Our Lord 10 Jan 2016

[Baptism of Christ C January 10, 2016](#) Textweek

Isaiah 43: 1-7

Psalm 29

Acts 8: 14-17

Luke 3:15-22

We are still very much in the process of unwrapping the gift of Christmas with our Sunday readings; and so for all those who have packed away the decorations, eaten the last of the turkey and the ham and so think it's all over for another year, we are brought back to the reality that it is not over it is only just beginning.

And today's gospel marks our 'just beginning' in a wonderfully affirming way;  
"You are my ...Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

For us to hear that affirmation in context let's start with a brief look at the first reading.

Isaiah was specifically addressing one particular group of people, he was speaking to the people of Israel; and sadly, the people of Israel thought, and many still think, he was only talking to them and to no one else.

However, when I used to tell my children to brush their teeth, I was also specifically addressing them, and giving them some clear direction, or understanding; but what I uttered was not specific to them only, rather I was imparting a universal understanding and directing it to them.

Likewise there in the first reading Isaiah's message is tagged as a universal message in the very opening lines;

"now thus says the LORD, the one[he] who created you".

As the creator is the creator of all, then although in this instance the audience is Israel, the one who created Israel is also the one who created you and me, and so what Isaiah imparts to Israel is equally applicable and addressable to each and all of creation.

It is worth reading again and seeing yourself as the subject of the text, for as we unwrap the gift of Christmas, we will find ourselves in that unwrapping, and in Isaiah we discover the divine perspective of who we are;

"you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you".

The psalm seems to have been carefully chosen to continue the unwrapping of last week's gospel. Seven times the psalmist sings of "*The voice of the Lord*"; and although the writer of the psalms didn't have the insight of John's gospel, we do; and so we can hear the echoed in the seven fold refrain "*The voice of the Lord*", that Word; that Word that was in the beginning, that word that became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

Once again, the subject of the text is a lot closer to home than we imagine, and so we might read the text again, looking for ourselves in its unwrapping.

The reading from Acts provides an account of some early churchmanship, and is perhaps one of Luke's devices for underlining the authority of Peter; however in the process it unwittingly separates 'Baptism' and the 'receiving of the Holy Spirit'.

With the unwrapping of enlightenment, we might now appreciate that Luke's separation is actually more real than the simplistic initial understanding of the process of baptism; for in baptism, as in the laying on of hands, we only make visible that which is already gifted.

Our liturgical movements are themselves an unwrapping of the divine gift that is waiting to be made visible.

These opening three readings all have some value in providing both context and perspective and it is with that in mind that we can now again look at the gospel reading.

Luke, like Isaiah, is specifically addressing one particular group of people, and he is seeking to resolve and to clarify the relative positions of Jesus and John the Baptist. Both these figures had followers and both had insightful messages that were applicable within their own time and place and also universally outside of both time and place.

Coming to the text in the present we no longer need Luke's clarification of who's who; however the text itself still has a context in the present day, and as we are unwrapping our Christmas gift we might be mindful that Mark's gospel uses the baptism of Jesus as his introduction to the whole of his gospel, Mark's nativity parallel is *the baptism of Jesus by John*, so this narrative is very much a valuable part of our unwrapping of Christmas.

As we contemplate the unimaginable possibility of finding ourselves in the nativity manger, we might look at the two figures presented in today's narrative.

Classically, John the Baptist points the way to the one who is coming, the "*one who is more powerful than I*"; he points the way to Jesus, and in that same process Jesus then finds his way in John's baptism; it is a delightful theological knot.

However, the knot is untied when we read the narrative not as a literal story of two persons, but as a drama played out between two different aspects of ourselves.

John points the way, if this were a real documentary account of events, then once John had baptised Jesus, and had seen for himself the Messiah, and the dove of the Holy Spirit alighting, then of course he would immediately have become a disciple...

But this is an inner drama that we might unwrap for ourselves, seeing in John the very passion of our faith, our knowing and our vision for the Christ-likeness and Christ-like ministry that is our fullest potential; and of course all of us are adept at pointing the way to others.

However in unwrapping the gift of Christmas, we're not looking for our 'John', we seeking the Christ child, the very word become flesh.

Early in the process of discerning my vocation I read a book by Abbot Columba Marmion and in it he described his fear, and his fear was also my fear.

It is the fear of becoming a signpost, pointing the way to others and going nowhere yourself.

And in today's gospel this is what we might contemplate of ourselves, are we the same as John, ready to express the potential and at the same time waiting for "*one who is more powerful than I*" to actually accomplish the vision.

If we continue to be John, and not be transformed by our baptism, then we will never realise the one more powerful than I, that which is more than our ego; and most likely our fate will be the fate of John, it will end in death and the display of our heads on a platter.

However if we allow that same self, to more fully unwrap the gift of Christmas, the Word that became enfleshed; if we allow ourselves to receive our baptism and so recognise our Christ-likeness then this truly is the beginning of Christmas and not a putting away till next year.

Finally a quote from Columba Marmion, his insight of what he found in unwrapping the gift:

Oh, my dear child, I would wish to engrave on your heart in letters of gold this truth, that no matter how great our misery, we are infinitely rich in Jesus Christ, if we unite with Him, if we lean on Him, if we realize constantly by a firm living faith that all the value of our prayer, and of all that we do comes from His merits in us.