

Second Sunday after Epiphany 15 January 2017

[Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42](#) from Vanderbilt

[Epiphany 2A, January 15 2017](#) Textweek

In today's gospel we once again look at the writer's account of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist; the interaction between John and Jesus, and what that interaction reveals to us.

It can be helpful for us to look at the 'Baptism of Jesus' as if it were a classic West-End play; a piece of theatre deliberately scripted to give the audience an insight and experience that is beyond the everyday.

We leave the street, and go into the theatre, a quiet cocoon; we switch off our phones and carefully, expectantly, we deliberately attend to the unfolding drama.

When Shakespeare, or the gospel writer, scripted the 'Baptism of Jesus' it was to give us an understanding of a life experience that is perhaps not so fully recognised within our usual everyday activity; and so it is important for us to be aware of the everyday expectations of the audience being addressed.

In some respects the initial audiences for the gospel plays are very different to ourselves, the audience of today; and yet in many respects we are of course quite similar.

So first we should be mindful of the initial audience and of the everyday reality that serves as a backdrop to this particular drama.

Before the drama unfolds on the stage we have the overture from Isaiah and a prologue from Paul; and in many respects these give us an opportunity to tune-in.

The Isaiah overture asks us to be attentive;

"Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away";
the "*O coastlands*" being a poetic way of addressing the people of Fremantle.

And as we '*listen*' and '*pay attention*' we are drawn to that part of ourselves that is beyond the everyday; Isaiah awakens our primordial and eternal nature; he evokes our very souls.

We are being drawn into opening our minds to an appreciation of ourselves 'before we were born'; opening ourselves to our Divine nature; and so seeing ourselves as "*a polished arrow*". And then we hear ourselves being spoken to,

"You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

Already, before the drama begins, the overture echoes the narrative of the gospel drama;

"you are my beloved, with whom I am well pleased".

And perhaps we begin to entertain the thought that it is us, we, me, who are being addressed with the very same words that Christ was addressed with.

However, before that thought develops the overture continues; and now, the one who formed me in the womb to be a servant of God says:

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

And once again we are drawn beyond our understanding of ourselves.

It is too light a thing that we build up the Anglican Church in Beaconsfield.

It is too light a thing that we attend church every Sunday

It is too light a thing that we carry on doing what we are doing

For what we hear is;

"I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

As the overture comes to an end with the words "*the Holy One of Israel.... has chosen you*" we become open to the idea that we, each of us, is a polished arrow, a servant called to bring light to all nations; we are, each of us, chosen by the holy one.

By now the theatre is dark, we no longer see the walls of the church, we no longer know exactly where we are; but, we sit with eyes fixed to the stage waiting for the drama to be played out before us. We sit as polished arrows looking forward into the unknown, into the expectant unfolding.

Paul's short prologue echoes an opening letter a starting point for us; and it speaks of "sanctified in Christ Jesus", "all those ... in every place", it speaks of "Grace.... and peace".

And once again we hear that it addresses us, and it names us as those

"called to be saints";

and as those

"not lacking in any spiritual gift".

The magic of the theatre has transformed us, we are no longer pew-bound laity performing in accord with a well-established ritual orchestrated by an ageing priest; we are polished arrows, lacking nothing and called to be Saints.

And from that 'knowing' of ourselves we encounter the gospel drama, and the interaction of Jesus and John.

These two 'prophets' from ancient times each had a following; here we see the polished arrows in flight; and in the moment of the theatre we see ourselves projected into the drama as if the drama itself was our own reality; John and Jesus are we really like them both?

We wonder that the drama puts one ahead of the other; John says:

"After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me";

and the "*before me*" echoes the 'before I was born' from the overture.

But, always questions arise, John was surely already a flying arrow, a prophet bringing light to others; and yet he sees even more in another.

Both came from the wilderness, was that was where the bow was drawn that launched them into life?

We question where we are in this Divine dialogue; John sees more in Jesus; perhaps this is an awakening to his higher self, his better self, his fuller humanity.

There is a wonderful life dynamic being played out before us and it draws us into the drama so that we glimpse ourselves realising the same.

There is no pouring of water over a font in this drama, rather a recognising and a realising of our higher nature.

Like John we can imagine ourselves letting go of our own self-righteousness and our own well practised rituals, so that we too can see the “Son of God”; the Divine made manifest in us, the reality of being one of the prologue’s Saints!

As the movement of the drama continues, we see two disciples following the action and then gathering a third to share their new found delight; we witness the building up of community. And if the play continued we would no doubt see this movement reaching to the end of the earth as was illuminated in the overture.

As the curtain comes down the gospel echo “thanks be to God” takes on a real sense of gratitude for what we have seen. The lights slowly come back on and the everyday once again reappears; and then what?

A quiver full of arrows; individuals quivering in fear of tomorrow!

Or will some be launched from the wilderness of today to discover themselves as Saints and to find, like John found, a higher self as seen in Christ?

We are each one polished arrows

Peter Humphris