

The Baptism of Christ 10th January 2021

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis 1:1-5)

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' (Mark 1: 9-11)

This week I've been taking down my Christmas cards and on one of them I found this little verse:

Out of silence, music
Out of darkness, light
Out of uncertainty, promise
Hope was born that night.

I don't know where it's come from – Google hasn't been able to help – but I've been reflecting on those words for a few days. With it being from a Christmas card the first image that came to mind was predictably the scene of the birth of Jesus with a host of heavenly angels singing their hearts out. But then I read the set passages for this Sunday, the festival of the Baptism of Christ, and this verse seemed to offer a much broader picture, one which I think resonates with our current situation.

Our gospel reading for today, tells of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when the heavens opened and the Spirit of God came down upon Jesus confirming his relationship to God. This was a moment of change and transformation. John the Baptist had already been working towards changing people's connection with God by calling them to repent and symbolically washing away their sins through baptism. But John promised that there was more to come, that he would be followed by one who could connect the people to God more directly, through the gift of God's Spirit.

The power of the Spirit would have been known to the people through the ancient scriptures. In the first chapter of Genesis we're told that the spirit of God that swept over the waters. This spirit of God was what began the transformation from darkness into light. As the followers of John recognised the spirit descending on Jesus their understanding of him changed. With hearing the voice of God affirming Jesus as his only Son he was revealed to the people as the Messiah, God living among them. John had promised them that through him they would be baptised in the Spirit. It was what they were looking forward to so expectantly. So then, as Jesus was baptised, God came right into their lives, transforming their relationship and demonstrating God's love for humanity as shown in his Son.

We're in very uncertain times at the moment. Life looks very bleak for many people but, as today's readings give us to understand, God's Spirit can break through unexpectedly and unannounced, giving our world a taste of God's heavenly kingdom. Our challenge is to recognise those moments for what they are. They won't be as spectacular as that experienced by the followers of John when Jesus was baptised, but we might be able to see the Spirit moving in the kindness of neighbours and the joy of shared laughter, even in the promise of a vaccination. I think if we might recognise those moments as little revelations of God's spirit then life becomes less uncertain. Each little epiphany can help us to see our world in a different light. Then, as we transform our outlook, our faith in God's love is reinforced and we can look forward with hope in our hearts. Amen