

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> January

Isaiah 42:1-9

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-end

The Epiphany season is about Jesus being revealed to the world. Last week we thought about the wise men – foreigners who travelled far in response to a sign they had seen in the stars. Who journeyed across the desert to pay homage and worship this new King of the Jews. We thought in particular about what this had to say of Jesus being revealed to the nations – to those outside of Judaism – as the one come from God to save the world – to bring peace and reconciliation not just for the Jewish people, but for everyone. And we thought about how everyone includes those people who are not like us.

Today the scene shifts. In our gospel story – the story of this Jesus – we have moved on some 25-30 years. Jesus is now a grown man. We are told little of what has happened in the interim. His formative years are in many ways a mystery to us. Matthew's gospel has reference to Joseph, Mary and the young child Jesus fleeing to Egypt as refugees and then later returning to live in Nazareth; Luke's gospel has reference to a single incident when Jesus was around 12 years old – an incident about him getting left in Jerusalem and impressing scribes and scholars with his knowledge and his wisdom. But apart from that the gospel stories are silent. We can only guess. We can assume that Jesus - God who came to live as a human being - enjoyed a fairly normal childhood – learning and growing; playing and developing. Living as a normal human being; being one of us. As the gospel of John puts it “the word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.” And I think its reasonable to assume that Jesus as he grew slowly became aware of his calling, his purpose, his mission.

And so we come to today's gospel story. Jesus being baptised. We could ask all kinds of questions – deep and difficult theological questions – about why Jesus had to be baptised when John's baptism was about repentance. Surely, we might say, Jesus was without sin and so without any need to repent personally. But I think all we have to know is that he went through this as a mark of solidarity with the human race – to show his humanity. Fully human. In life as

he would be later in his death. A public declaration that he was one of us and one with us..

We can imagine how Jesus felt as he stood before John waiting to be baptised. How this meant the beginning; the commitment to the life he had become more aware of and more prepared for as he grew. This step of baptism, of identification with sinful humanity representing the commitment to and acceptance of the life of self offering and ultimately self sacrifice; how once this step was taken there could be no turning back. He was on the threshold of something that would change his life and change the world. Going through this act of baptism was more than an act of solidarity with humanity – it was a declaration of his intent.

And we can ponder too on what happened after the baptism and how Jesus must have felt as he heard the voice from heaven and witnessed the descent of the spirit in the form of a dove. The public affirmation of who he was and the declaration of God's unconditional love and acceptance of him This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased

Jesus revealed as the Messiah, the Son of God, the one loved by God. The one foretold and anticipated in the Old Testament – in readings like the one we had from Isaiah. The one who would demonstrate the height and depth and breadth of the love of God. To all people for all time. The public affirmation; the public revelation if you like of Jesus, his purpose and his mission. This is my son. This is the one you have been waiting for. This is the start of something new and wonderful.

So how does all this help us today? What can we say about how this story affects our lives?

I think a clue to that is in the short reading from the Acts of the Apostles. We might wonder why it has been chosen to complement the gospel. Perhaps the reason might be when Peter says “we are witnesses of these things” and “He commanded us to preach and to testify about him”

The voice at Jesus' baptism proclaimed the truth about him not just to Jesus but also to those who were present. In time those who witnessed it (like Peter) proclaimed the truth to others who were not there. The gospel message was passed on and has been passed on through the years and the centuries. The

reason we are here today is because that message was – at some time and in some way – passed on to us. Proclaimed to us. Revealed to us.

And I am sure we can begin to see how we fit into this sequence. It's a bit like a relay race where the baton is passed from one to another. We have that baton now – but who will we pass it to and how will we do that?

We might well look around our church and dream of more people, of families, of children and young people coming here to worship. But they can only hear if the message is proclaimed. As the apostle Paul says in that well known passage from Romans

*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*

*<sup>14</sup> But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?*

Maybe the thought of proclaiming the gospel message might fill us with dread and horror. It might conjure up images of soap boxes and street corners; of sandwich boards and declaring the end of the world is nigh.

But that's not what I'm thinking about. Most of us were passed on our faith in more gentle ways. By parents, grandparents, friends, teachers. By people we knew and trusted living out lives which in themselves proclaimed the gospel; lives that we admired and whose example we wanted to follow.

There a quote that is often (probably erroneously) attributed to Francis of Assisi. *Preach the gospel at all times – use words if necessary.* Whether he said it or not, I'm sure there's truth that often the best way to pass on what we believe is simply to live it out. Actions backing up and reinforcing our words.

A while ago I was talking to the Diocesan advisor on youth work and I said we have no young people (teenagers) in our churches, and virtually no contact with any.

Not true, she said, think of all those members of your churches who have teenage grandchildren (or even great grandchildren). Your church members have far more contact with the young than you would imagine!

Many of us are in privileged positions when it comes to encouraging and influencing our grandchildren. The books we buy them, the things we talk about, the love we show them, the time we spend with them.

We have noticed that at our Messy Church on Saturdays that in many cases its grandparents that are bringing their grandchildren along. Encouraging them in the faith when perhaps their parents don't wish to or haven't got the time to. In some small way proclaiming the gospel, revealing the truth about Jesus.

And I am sure there are plenty of other ways we can be part of this passing on the truth. To friends and neighbours and family.

The Epiphany season is about Jesus being revealed to the world. Something that didn't stop 2000 years ago, but still continues in our words and deeds – in the day to day living out of our faith. We are all called to be part of that revelation.