

Baptism of Christ
Isaiah 42: 1-9; Acts 10: 34-43; Matthew 3: 13-end
11 January 2026

Sermon: Standing at a threshold

Epiphany

One of the lovely coincidences of Epiphany — the season we're in now — is that it falls right at the start of a new year. Epiphany and New Year both carry that sense of fresh beginnings, new vision, and the possibility of moving forward in some way. They are what I like to call threshold moments.

A threshold is that point where something new begins to take shape, where change starts to happen. Now, of course, when it comes to New Year itself, all that's really happened is that a few seconds have ticked by and the number on the calendar has changed — and in my experience it takes about four or five weeks before I reliably write the right date! But our perspective gives that tiny shift a much bigger meaning. Those few seconds feel like a doorway into something new: a new diary, a new calendar, a new sense of what might lie ahead — holidays, hopes, or significant moments on the horizon.

Epiphany has that same quality. Again and again in the scriptures, there are significant moments when God's people begin to experience something new — a change that's coming, a calling that's emerging, a glimpse of God's future breaking in.

And today's readings are full of exactly those kinds of Epiphany moments.

Isaiah and Acts

Isaiah's words today come from a remarkable stretch of the book — chapters 40 to 55 — written when the Jewish people were exiled in Babylon. We're in about 539 BC, just a year before the exile ends. And Isaiah doesn't speak directly about the end of exile; instead, he speaks about the future. He speaks of a servant of the Lord who will come — one who will bring healing where there has

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been pain, light where there has been darkness, freedom where there has been captivity. False idols will fall away, and the worship of the one true God, Yahweh, will be restored.

A threshold moment if ever there was one.

Isaiah's vision prepares the people for their return to Judea — for the rebuilding of the temple, for a fresh start, for a renewed way of life shaped by justice, humility, and faithful worship. And Isaiah is clear: the people have a part to play. They must turn from the false gods they will inevitably meet again and embrace the life God is calling them into.

Our reading from Acts is set at another moment of profound change. Peter finds himself in the house of Cornelius — a Roman centurion, a Gentile, someone outside the Jewish faith. Cornelius has sent for Peter after a dream, and as Peter arrives, the Holy Spirit reveals something astonishing: that the call to follow Jesus is not limited to the geography of Judea, nor to the Jewish people alone, but is open to all who are willing to receive the Spirit.

Peter is standing on the threshold of a moment that will reshape the Church — a moment without which, humanly speaking, none of us might be here today. I'm sure God would have found another way, but still, the point stands.

You can almost feel Peter weighing it all up — the implications, the risks, the sheer scale of what God is doing — when he has this Epiphany moment:

“God shows no partiality.”

God welcomes people from every nation who turn towards what is right — who follow the way of Jesus, who are baptised, who receive the Holy Spirit, and who live lives that bear witness to all of this.

Threshold moments involve courage and risk — even Peter wobbled even after this. But what had been revealed to him, he took to the

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church leaders in Jerusalem, and eventually, with the help of others, it came right.

I do pray for that that same courage and risk in certain situations will be taken by our own *national* Church this year – but that's another sermon!

Jesus and John

The season of Epiphany gives us many moments when Christ is revealed — and today we come to one of the greatest of them: the Baptism of Christ. All four gospels record it. The details vary slightly, but they all agree on this: as Jesus rises from the water, the voice of God is heard, and the Spirit descends upon him, equipping him for what lies ahead.

I often find myself wondering what Jesus of Nazareth knew — and didn't know — before this moment. He knew his lineage, born in David's line in Bethlehem. He would have grown up hearing the extraordinary stories surrounding his birth — the ones we've just revisited at Christmas. He knew about that moment in the temple when, as a boy, he astonished the teachers. He had been raised with a sense of expectancy, surrounded by the prophecies of Isaiah.

But what was his mindset as he stepped into the Jordan? What did he understand of the path before him?

What we do know is that after this moment, everything becomes clear. The vision sharpens. The calling crystallises. He steps out of the water emboldened, ready to walk into the future God has prepared.

But there's a detail we often overlook — the reaction of John the Baptist. John's whole ministry has been to point towards Jesus. That's why he remains such a powerful role model for Christians: our calling, too, is to point towards Christ. Yet when Jesus stands

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before him in the water, John hesitates. He knows who is standing there. And he does what many of us do when faced with something overwhelming:

“I can’t handle this. This is too big for me. This isn’t my place. Lord, please choose someone else.”

It’s such a human reaction.

But in that moment, Jesus looks at John — and perhaps through the Spirit he looks at us too — and says, in effect:

“No. I want you to do this. And I will be with you.”

Those are threshold moments for us — the moments when we can either step back in fear or step forward in trust.

Us

So I wonder what thresholds we may feel we are standing along in our own lives.

Do you feel not you're facing Jesus in the waters of the Jordan - is he asking you to do something in your lives that you feel is too big or overwhelming?

As a parish we are very much on a threshold moment and 2026 is a year where a new vision will be realised and where we will follow the path that God has laid out for us. Just like Isaiah and Peter we cannot see *exactly* what that looks like at the moment, but if we take inspiration from today's readings we can see that if we keep our faith in the one true God, if we show that same courage and maybe a bit of risk like Peter did, and if we are prepared to follow what we feel Jesus is saying to us and asking us to do, and whatever the path of 2026 looks like, we can be assured that

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So I wonder what thresholds we may feel we're standing on in our own lives.

Do you feel as though you're standing with Jesus in the waters of the Jordan — sensing that he may be asking something of you that feels too big, too stretching, too overwhelming?

As a parish, we are very much at a threshold moment ourselves.

2026 will be a year in which a new vision begins to take shape — a year when we step forward into the path God is laying before us. And, just like Isaiah's people and just like Peter, we cannot yet see exactly what that will look like.

But today's readings give us a pattern to trust:

- If we keep our faith rooted in the one true God,
- if we show the same courage — and perhaps the same willingness to take a risk — that Peter showed,
- if we are prepared to listen for the voice of Jesus and follow where he leads,

then whatever the path of 2026 turns out to be, we can be assured of this:

We will not walk it alone.

The Spirit who descended on Jesus will strengthen us.

The God who called the servant will uphold us.

And the voice that spoke over the Jordan still speaks over us:

“You are my beloved. Do not be afraid.”

That is the promise we carry as we step across the threshold together. Amen

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