

**Date: Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019**  
**Epiphany 2, the Baptism of Christ.**  
**Occasion: Sunday Eucharist, 8.0 and 10.00**

**Readings: Isaiah 43.1 – 7; Acts 8.14 – 17; Luke 3.15 – 17, 21 – 22.**

### **Defining Moments**

I like the sea. To speak of it conjures up images of adventure, dangers overcome, of young men like my grandfather and father leaving hearth and home to forge a living from the oceans. In my grandfather's case it was on sailing ships, in my father's cruise liners in peacetime and in wartime braving U-boat packs to bring food and equipment from the Americas. As a boy I was more or less convinced that notwithstanding Churchill he saved the nation single handed by riding the ocean swell with the wind blowing in his hair. This image was so powerful that in my memory it was able to withstand the fact that at Port Erin in the Isle of Man, my first experience of real sea, it was in fact cold and dirty, wobbly and wet.

Defining moments are pretty much like that. In the mind's eye we can pinpoint the moment – the very moment – when everything became different, when in practice, it is seldom if ever as straightforward as that.

Because life is messy.

Because even the most significant moments are messy, complicated and as decisive as they seem to be in hindsight. So when we celebrate Christmas – and Epiphany, don't forget, is part of Christmas – we celebrate the messiest, most human – yet stubbornly defining moment anyone could ever think of.

Christmas, Epiphany and Candlemas is a time of difficult journeys –

by Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem,

by the Magi to Jerusalem and the dangerous encounter with Herod,

by the Holy Family to Jerusalem to observe the proprieties, only to be told by Simeon just how ghastly it's all going to be.

by people heading out to the River Jordan to listen to John, as we read in this morning's gospel.

and today we remember the beginning of the most difficult journey of all – by Jesus to the Cross.

In all the toing and froing of people watching, listening, reflecting and – yes – offering themselves for a baptism of repentance, where it's perfectly possible that Jesus coming forward was virtually unnoticed, even with John's declaration,

In all this toing and froing, something does indeed change; everything changes.

Because a man says yes, this means for Luke, and, I hope for us, that this is indeed a defining moment. In the midst of all the topsy turvy goings on of a popular venue and its star attraction (John of course, not Jesus), Jesus steps forward. John's astonishment and hesitation is recorded elsewhere. For Luke, the main concern is to pinpoint the moment,

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because that moment fulfils human history, which for my money makes it a moment worth pinpointing.

Because, in spite of – or rather, because of all the human stuff, it is after all a defining moment.

It's tempting, though wrong, to think that this is the point where he becomes the Messiah and some early Christians thought this. Some groups still do. They were and are wrong because it's never that neat, the Incarnation of the Son of God is just not that neat. It can never be neatly pinned down because it is God revealing god's love in the reality of human experience.

So, as we've already noted, it involves journeys, pregnancy, birth and all the customs surrounding it. It involves the Messiah, the Christ coming to a river and revealing himself for what he already is. To the eyes of faith this is a gesture that anticipates the fulfilment of his life back in Jerusalem, this time to face humiliation, torture, execution – and the fullness of life in His Resurrection.

To put it another way, the baptism of Jesus makes it absolutely clear that the living God not only can, but desires absolutely to work through the messiness, heartache, disaster, joy, wonder and delight that is human life to reclaim it for a love that is so powerful the only thing we can think to call it is eternal life.

To put it yet another way, just because something is complicated, messy, dirty, wobbly and wet doesn't, in God's purposes, prevent it being a defining moment, a moment that defines us.

It is a moment that takes us on a journey with Christ: from the repentance of John, we are taken, in baptism, into the life that Jesus lives and shares.

So if we want to be true to Jesus' baptism, to our own baptism into his life, then we are called to be a messy church (to coin a phrase),

to be a community that is defined by the difficult journey to, with and on behalf of Jesus, the Christ, the beloved Son, in whom the Father is well pleased.

AMEN.