



SUNDAY 8 JANUARY 2023

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

**The Parishes of:** Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington  
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

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## ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

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### **The Baptism of the Lord (A): Matthew 3:13-17**

Sam was unsure whether she was doing things right or not. Our conversation was an attempt on her part to hear herself finding the words to describe how she understood what was expected of her in breaking new ground in a task no one had done before.

It was a privilege to witness her emerging understanding. It included a pretty humble acceptance of approving comments received from others. We reflected on how God sometimes lets us know we're doing OK because trusted people tell us so. Seasonal examples come to us in the way Mary and Joseph were visited by shepherds who shared a message from angels about the significance and wonder of Jesus' birth. Likewise with Simeon and Anna, these holy veterans who met them in the temple - they gave them signals that confirmed God's approval. That kind of approbation is real gold. It must have meant a lot to them.

Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. Gospel writer Matthew's descriptive account gives us this explosive message of the Spirit descending on Jesus and the Father of all life speaking of how much he loves him and delights in him. It's beautiful.

We're witnessing the kickstart of Jesus' public ministry. It's written in shorthand and we should try to unpack it's meaning. Starting out on a new and very people-centred ministry exposes him to the curiosity, gossip and judgements of ordinary people. They may be poor, not well-educated perhaps, but they're not daft and they're very needy - like the rest of us. In human gesture and language he has to mirror the Father's love for them all in unmistakable ways. To teach a new understanding about a God who is love and to find a thousand means of expressing it, requires a soul-searching, imaginative and repetitive striving and it's serious, hard work. To have the assertive company of the Father and the Spirit as he begins the task is a simple and strong gesture of the very love he came to tell us about.

We've been baptised too. Most of us were too small to know it was happening. But we received the Spirit of God on that day. We became members of the Body of Christ, blest and charged with receiving and spreading love as Jesus did and continues to do through us. Get this. It's a great privilege and an awesome responsibility.

Water was poured on us - it's a sign of life. We're all more than sixty percent water, the brain about eight-five per cent - without water we're just not here. That life-giving water is storybook language about our sharing in God's own life. Because he loves, he gives. He wants us to live in his company all the time.

Because our individual baptism happened years ago, it doesn't just remain an historical event. We're walking through the waters of baptism all our lives. We are the Church here in our rime. Today is a reminder of love received, to talk with Jesus and to teach love. It's a big part of why he came and why we are here. Enjoy today's feast.



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**Pope Francis on praying for others**

Prayer of supplication is an expression of a heart that trusts in God and realizes that of itself it can do nothing. The life of God's faithful people is marked by constant supplication born of faith-filled love and great confidence. Let us not downplay prayer of petition, which so often calms our hearts and helps us persevere in hope. Prayer of intercession has particular value, for it is an act of trust in God and, at the same time, an expression of love for our neighbour. There are those who think, based on one-sided spirituality, that prayer should be unalloyed contemplation of God, free of all distraction, as if the names and faces of others were somehow an intrusion to be avoided. Yet in reality, our prayer will be all the more pleasing to God and more effective for our growth in holiness, if, through intercession, we attempt to practice the twofold commandment that Jesus left us.

Intercessory prayer is an expression of our fraternal concern for others, since we are able to embrace their lives, their deepest troubles and their loftiest dreams. Of those who commit themselves generously to intercessory prayer we can apply the words of Scripture, "This is a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people" (2 Maccabees 15:14).

- *Rejoice and be Glad*, para 154