



SUNDAY 10 JANUARY 2021

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: Mark 1:7-11**

I listened to Andy talking about the good old days. He's a dyed in the wool Newcastle United supporter and can name full teams at the drop of a hat. His favourite hero among a raft of others is Jackie Milburn who died in 1988. 'Wor Jackie' as he was known was Newcastle's top goal scorer until Alan Shearer passed him in 2006.

Jackie was a pitman from Ashington and in 1980 received the Freedom of the City of Newcastle along with Cardinal Basil Hume and a dignitary from Scottish and Newcastle Breweries. I was there. Jackie told me that day he was unsure of how to address a Cardinal, but he needn't have worried, Basil rushed over to him and asked for his autograph. I left the two of them talking animatedly of memorable goals securing trophies for the Club.

Status aside, these two men were passionately on the same page, sharing a love of the game and how its whole liturgy played out on the pitch. It was good to observe.

Humanity is a language so deep, so basic and so linked up, that rapport can be swift and unifying. Life-saving actions of many people come out of an instinctive drive to do what you can - on another day the potential casualty could be you.

Our God bonded himself to his people by joining us in the down-to-earth, hard graft of human life. Jesus came from Nazareth, a nowhere of a place in Galilee, itself a neglected northern province with little to shout about. No airs and privilege known to us marked his early life - until the day he stunned John the Baptist in the queue for baptism.

Being plunged bodily into the River Jordan was a ritual way of signalling a desire for forgiveness. The Son of God didn't need it, but powerfully expressed his solidarity with the sinful and shameful who did. Our God immersed himself as deep in his people as he did in the river's waters. What a way to identify with the problem.

The occasion exploded into an expression of deep love - God the Father's voice of approval and the empowering gift of the Spirit, kick-started a public ministry of commitment and self-giving we're still striving to grasp and copy. Jesus served and saved, healed and taught, exorcised and challenged, supporting the underdog. He breathed mercy, walked compassion, and confronted injustice in self-absorbed careerists.

He left behind a community of followers, inspired and expected to do the same. We're part of it. Our task, as he did, includes cutting through the structures and accretions that cloud the message of God's infinite love of a people who need help and affirmation. In our baptism we met him and received his Spirit as the guide and energy to continue his presence. Just do it.



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### **Pope Francis on our values**

If you think abortion, euthanasia and the death penalty are acceptable, your heart will find it hard to care about the contamination of rivers and the destruction of the rainforest. And the reverse is also true. So even while people will argue strenuously that these issues are different in moral terms, as long as they insist that abortion is justified but not desertification, or that euthanasia is wrong but polluted rivers are a price to pay for economic progress, we will remain stuck in the same lack of integrity that put us where we are now.

I think COVID-19 is making this apparent, for those with eyes to see. This is a time for integrity, for exposing the selective morality of ideology, and for embracing the full implications of what it means to be children of God. That is why I think the future we are called to build has to begin with an integral ecology, an ecology that takes seriously the cultural and ethical deterioration that goes hand in hand with our ecological crisis. The individualism brought on by the technology has its consequences.

*- from Let us Dream: The Path to a Better Future pages 34-5*