



Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

† Sunday 13th January 2019

Cycle of Prayer: Peace on earth in a year of Jubilee celebrating God's mercy
Keynote: God reveals the plan of freedom and renewal for all nations

Prophet Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11

There is a majesty and at the same time an intimacy here between the Lord God and the prophet: *'Console my people, console them,'* says the Lord God, *'speak to the heart of Jerusalem.'* The Jews are now in exile in Babylon, their city Jerusalem having been destroyed. For the exiles the *'time of service is ended... the sin atoned for.'* Now the prophet announces the good news of the return to the Jewish homeland, *'A voice cries, "Prepare in the wilderness a way for the Lord. Make a straight highway for our God across the desert. Let every valley be filled in. Every mountain and hill laid low... then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all mankind shall see it" – for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'* This image is of a royal progress, complete with baggage train and retainers, a great and powerful king coming, – so the road must be levelled and cleared to make way for this important coming. From earliest times, Christians have applied this text to the coming of Jesus as Messiah king, and in the gospel today, John the Baptist also speaks out calling all mankind to make a way for the coming Lord.

Responsorial Psalm 103 (104) – a psalm in praise of God's boundless care of creation

Letter to Titus 2: 11-14, 3: 4-7

Writing to his fellow missionary, Titus, the apostle Paul reminds us: *'God's grace has been revealed, and it has made salvation possible for the whole human race.'* The apostle urges us: *'to give up everything that does not lead to God, and all our worldly ambitions; we must be self-restrained and live good religious lives here in this present world, while we are waiting for the blessing which will come with the Appearing of the glory of our great God and saviour Christ Jesus.'* Paul gives us a timely reminder that nothing we have done can make us deserving of the grace of God. *'When the kindness and love of God our saviour for mankind were revealed, it was not because he was concerned with any righteous actions we might have done ourselves,'* but Paul tells us *'...It was for no reason except his (God's) own compassion that he saved us... by means of the... water of rebirth and by renewing us with the Holy Spirit which he has so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our saviour.'* So God's loving mercy is undeserved but bountiful for those ready to repent and change.

Gospel according to Luke 3: 15-16, 21-22

The evangelist tells us, *'A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ,'* I like this sense of 'expectancy'. We are caught up in this important episode in the public life of the Lord. But first John declares his own lesser importance: *'Someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals.'* Then John announces that the one who is yet to come: *'Will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'* The scene is set, and Jesus walks among the people beside the riverbank. Jesus steps into the waters to be baptised by John. And here the evangelist records: *'Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape, like a dove. A voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you."* Today we may pause for a moment in prayer, to contemplate the significance of this divine event.