

Reflection for the First Sunday of Epiphany. Matthew 3:13-end

The readings set for this morning mess with our sense of order and chronology. We are just getting used to the arrival of Shepherds and Wise men to view the Glory of God in the baby Jesus. Now here we have the mature figure of Jesus coming to John by the river Jordan. There is, however, a link, more of this shortly.

Jesus joins with the others waiting to be baptised in the River Jordan. We do not know how much contact there has been between John and Jesus as they are growing up. We know that they are about the same age. In all probability their lives would have taken differing paths in the intervening years. Jesus waits His turn, when John turns to face Him, he recognises Jesus at once not simply as a relative but as the chosen one of God. So, John is reluctant to baptise Jesus, "I need to be baptised by you", he says. Jesus' response is simple, "Let it be so", this is the proper way, so please do it". We may immediately question this. John's baptism is for the washing away of sin and yet Jesus is without sin, so why the need for this to happen at all. By being baptised, Jesus follows the script, the script written from the foundation of the world that the Christ of God should descend into the darkest depths of our human condition, that He should let the cold waters of our sins and sorrows close over him, that he should drown in our wretchedness and all so that we might live. Jesus is joining with us becoming one with us, sharing in our humanity.

John goes along with Jesus' request. As Jesus rises from the water something extraordinary happens: the heavens are opened and the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in the form of a dove and the voice of affirmation that we will hear of later. The voice which says, "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Here we have the link between the readings. The Shepherds directed by Angels go to worship the newborn child, The Wisemen directed by a star do the same. In doing so they recognise the presence of God in human form come to earth for us all. John the Baptist for his part recognises Jesus as the fulfilment of his role. It is this recognition, this awareness of the Glory of God that is once more affirmed.

"This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Lord of all time and eternity, you opened the heavens and revealed yourself Father in the baptism of Jesus your beloved Son: by the power of your Spirit complete the heavenly work of our rebirth through the waters of the new creation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

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