

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2026. Epiphany 2. Benefice Holy Communion, Gilling.

Next week I will be re-commencing the confirmation classes for the students at Ampleforth College in preparation for the wonderful event later in the year where the Bishop of Whitby will anoint and confirm them. Last year I was very moved by the words he used when giving the candidates their communion wafer, “become who you are”. It is truly a great event when these young people stand and confirm the promises that were made on their behalf by their parents and Godparents at their baptism.

In that service the confirmation candidates claim their baptism as one of their greatest comforts. What do you find in life that comforts you? There are lots of practical things that we can do. But it's a little different for us all. It might mean going for a walk, or listening to music, or reading a book, or working on a puzzle. It might mean spending time in prayer or meditation. It might mean being here right now, being reminded of God's love and care for you, and returning that love through worship. But what brings us comfort can be different at different times in life. Throughout though one thing remains constant – our baptism, the fact that we were baptized at a point in time.

Martin Luther said that “*there is no greater comfort on earth than baptism. Not faith, or family, or church. Not the Bible. Not prayer. Baptism.*” Recalling our baptism at confirmation, or any other occasion is something that can always bring us great comfort and joy, and it is something we are doing today on the day that we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord. But we might wonder why Jesus was baptized. Why did God's only son, who was without sin, even *need* to be baptized? John the Baptist certainly wondered that. He said to Jesus, “*I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?*”

The answer is that Jesus was not baptized for himself - he was baptized *for us*. Just as Jesus was born for us, and was crucified and died for us, he also chose to be baptized for us. In our baptism, we are cleansed of our sin and made one with Christ. When Jesus was baptized, had a confirmation too, unique to him, he confirmed what had happened at his birth, that he became one with us.

There were three significant things that happened when Jesus was baptized, and each of these things teach us something important about our own baptisms and confirmations.

The first thing we learn is that when Jesus was baptized, the heavens were opened to him. This event teaches us that in our baptisms into Jesus, heaven is also opened *to us* reminding us that we are now united to Christ, and nothing in all creation can separate us from Jesus or his love and then at Confirmation, we stand on our own and confirm that has taken place.

Secondly, when the heavens were opened to Jesus, the Spirit of God descended upon him. When we are baptized, and again when we are confirmed, and on other occasions, we are anointed, demonstrating the giving of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who unites the Father and the Son, who also unites all of us with the Father and the Son. We are then no longer alone, ever, God is with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit and we are connected to every atom in the universe, everything that exists; past, present and future. Jesus promised us that he would give us the Holy Spirit, and in our baptism and confirmation, he fulfills that promise and God sees us and says, "*This is my daughter, this is my son, a baptized child of mine; this is my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.*" So, when God looks at us, he sees an image of his beloved son.

Baptism followed by confirmation is a gift that is received through faith. Today, as we remember the baptism of Jesus, we remember that through our baptisms, we, too:

have become beloved children of God; have had the gates of heaven thrown wide open to us; and have had the Holy Spirit given to us. The Church of England has adopted the practise of baptizing babies for generations, followed by Confirmation in the early teens. Most of us here will have been baptized but won't recall anything as the responsibility was passed to parents and Godparents. But we also offer Confirmation, which has trailed off over the years causing people to miss the opportunity to confirm those wonderful promises; to experience Heaven being opened and through the words of the Bishop at the moment of anointing, receive the Holy Spirit, and in a new and transforming way "become who you are". So, if you have not been confirmed, you are never too old. Speak to me afterwards!

Thanks be to God. Amen.