

## THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD - C

With this feast the Christmas season comes to an end. In the gospel reading we listen to Luke's account of the baptism of Jesus. Luke doesn't actually speak of Jesus' baptism but concentrates on the revelation of who this person is now baptised and standing in the river Jordan, the Spirit descends on Jesus and a voice from heaven declares that Jesus is God's Son. In the first reading from the second part of Isaiah we listen to the opening verses from the Book of the Consolation of Israel; the people are comforted with the hope of a return from exile. In the second reading from Paul's letter to Titus we are reminded of the purpose of Christ's coming and how we should respond with the kind of lives we lead.

The **First Reading** comes from the prophet Isaiah. He was one of the major prophets in Israel but the book which bears his name is not all his work. The reading today comes from the second part of the book, chs.40-55 (Second Isaiah), the work of an unnamed writer, a disciple of Isaiah. This part of the book covers a period of Jewish history 200 years after Isaiah's day when Jerusalem has fallen and the nation is in exile in Babylon. Cyrus, the instrument of God, is about to come and overpower the Babylonian Empire and be the means by which the Israelites are able to return, a new Exodus. Embedded in the book are four passages called the 'Songs of the Servant of Yahweh.' They depict a perfect servant of God who is the light of the nations and gathers in God's people. He is one who preaches the true faith, who expiates people's sins by his own death and is glorified by God. This part of the book, in contrast with the first which is for the most part threatening, is far more consoling as the opening words announce, "Console my people, console them, says your God."

The reading, 40.1-5,9-11, starts with those opening words 'Console my people.' The words of the prophet were a wonderful message of hope to the exiles as they wept by the rivers of Babylon unable to sing any of the songs of Zion, (psalm 137). Their time of service completed, their sins atoned for a way was being prepared for their return to their homeland and Jerusalem. The prophet tells them to have no fear the Lord is coming with power to subdue their enemies, he will feed his flock and gather them in to his arms. We can see a parallel with Jesus at his baptism soon to begin his ministry, he will prepare a path for us, his power and authority will defeat our enemy, death, and lead us to our homeland the heavenly Jerusalem. We, too, should find consolation and hope in celebrating this feast.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 103.1-4,24-25,27-30, is a prayer of thanksgiving for the glories of God's creation. The response starts by extolling the greatness and majesty of God, a fitting response to the first reading. The second stanza speaks of God's dwelling above the rain-bearing clouds and how creation serves God's will. The next two stanzas tell of the wisdom of God's creation including the sea and God sees to it that all are duly fed. The final stanza makes clear that it is the spirit of God which is source of all being and life.

The **Second Reading** comes from the letter to Titus. This letter is closely associated with the two letters to Timothy, they are known collectively as the Pastoral Epistles and they have the form of letters from Paul to his loyal followers giving them instruction and advice about the organisation and governing of the communities which he had entrusted to their care.. Paul had left Titus looking after the church in Crete. The author attributed the letters to Paul's pen and they are thought most likely to have been written by a disciple of Paul before the eighties as the office of bishop as we now know it began to evolve with the death of the apostles. The instruction deals with fighting dangerous new ideas which in the letter to Titus are associated with Jewish myths and disputes about the Law which emanated from new ideas which influenced Jewish thinking and belief in areas of Greek influence.

The reading, 2.11-14 & 3.4-7, deals with instruction on the basis of the Christian moral life and general instruction for believers respectively. In the first section the revealing of God's grace, that is his goodness and love for mankind, should lead us to lead 'upright and religious lives' as we wait for the final coming of Christ. The divinity of Christ is clearly stated here. In the second section the instruction states that the revelation from God in the person of Jesus Christ made clear that it was God's faithful love that saved us through rebirth in baptism and the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is 'so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our Saviour' that we can have hope of eternal salvation. This teaching written nearly two thousand years ago is still relevant for us today.