

## **Beginnings!**

*Zephaniah 3<sup>14-end</sup>; Canticle – Isaiah 12<sup>2-end</sup>; Philippians 4<sup>4-7</sup>; Luke 3<sup>7-18</sup>*

*I baptise you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming.  
He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. [Luke 3<sup>16</sup>]*

I am not sure that I would get off with the response that John the Baptist issued to those who came for Baptism: **you brood of vipers!**

Any time I lead a tour of the Church I always start at the Font as it is the place of welcome and the means of entry into the Christian community and family.

What it does make clear to all of us is that Baptism is a beginning and needs to be followed up. Even John the Baptist looked forward to more – to the **Holy Spirit and fire** – that would be what Jesus, the Messiah, would add to what he was doing.

What does Baptism do:

- ✘ Baptism signs a contract between the parents, godparents, the Church and God on behalf of the Baptised. It isn't magic as it relies on both God and everyone else to do what they say.
- ✘ Theologically, the Church teaches that Baptism removes original sin. Anyone who has had a child who will not sleep and refuses to be comforted will not doubt that original sin is a reality! In Baptism the 'rest' button is pressed on the Baptised and they are, both outwardly and in fact, members of the Church of Christ.
- ✘ The symbols of the oil used in anointing, always a way to communicate joy and excess, as well as preparing for fulfilling God's purpose as a monarch is anointed at their Coronation; the

water that is always a reminder of cleansing and refreshing; and then the naked flame, the light of Christ carried into the world – these together remind us of the extravagance of God's love and the challenging call to follow him.

What comes next:

- ✘ Think about what our priorities look like through a child's eyes. What do they perceive with regard to God, to morality, to the Church and to faith? It is an absolute nonsense to say that a child decides for itself: no one is brought up in a vacuum! Just as the eating habits, or the drinking habits, or the use of words is caught rather than taught, the same is true for faith. Each child creates their own plausibility structures by what they see. If you say you believe in flying yet never leave the ground then you are less convincing than someone who flies off on foreign holidays.
- ✘ All of that leads up to the moment of Confirmation, when the Bishop (and it is only the Bishop that can do it) lays hands on the candidate as they publicly embrace the faith into which they are Baptised their own.

The season of Advent is about looking forward – to Christmas and the celebration of Jesus birth; to Jesus returning as judge of all; of the Kingdom of God being established fully. So we look forward to the beginning in Baptism being fulfilled as those who are Baptised embrace this faith as their own. This Sacrament is indelible – it cannot be undone. Christ claims you for his own!