

Baptism Basics!

Isaiah 43¹⁻⁷; Psalm 29; Acts 8¹⁴⁻¹⁷; Luke 3^{15-17,21-22}

*He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
[Luke 3¹⁶]*

A date for your diaries as we get back to increasing normality: the Handsworth Group Confirmation Service will be here at St Mary's on Sunday 5th June this year. I thought that it may be useful to remind ourselves about why Baptism and Confirmation are important spiritual steps for those who own the faith of Christ.

Anyone who has endured one of my Baptism sermons (when children are baptised) knows the form – that Baptism is a covenant in which parents and godparents make promises that they will do their bit and that we can depend on God to do his and in the end the Baptised will embrace that faith as their own.

Having been a Baptist Minister, I have come to be convinced that it is right to Baptise children and infants and that a simple service of Thanksgiving or Dedication doesn't quite 'do it'!

The argument is often put forward that parents want their children to 'make up their own mind' but that doesn't make sense as our children aren't brought up in a vacuum. We don't starve our children until they make up their mind about what they will eat – that would be cruel: they eat what we do.

So too, in faith, our children experience what we think is important – they learn to see God through our eyes.

To anyone who comes to faith as an adult without having been baptised as a child it is vital that they are baptised – if it was good enough for Jesus, the sinless Son of God, then we can have no excuse.

The very physicality of the baptism of adults is the playing out of faith – of being submerged in water as a symbol of having died and being buried and the rising from the water as a new birth is the symbol of resurrection. The fact that you have to surrender control to someone else (often, me) is also a

metaphor of the trust in God – that you realise that you cannot save yourself, but trust in God entirely.

Christians have always followed Jesus through the waters of baptism: the first sermon invites all who heard to repent and be baptised and the message hasn't changed.

Confirmation is the natural extension of Baptism – a celebration of the baptised making a statement that this faith is their own.

John-the-Baptist promised that the Messiah would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. From the earliest times (as we read in Acts) that prayer has been made with the laying on of hands so that Christians will know the gift of the Holy Spirit to 'set them on fire' in their faith.

In our tradition it is the Bishop and the Bishop alone who can confirm and that is an important part of the theology of the Church. We cannot be Christians in isolation from the local congregation and the local congregation cannot exist in isolation from the Church as a whole, of which the Bishop is the representative.

For some of us, this is part of our history, but something rekindles our own experience of it every time we witness it: and we all need that re-energising with the Holy Spirit and Fire.