

Baptism of our Lord, 8/1/2012

Mark 1:4-11

During the last weeks we have embarked on Jesus' journey that consists of the circle of life: birth, life, death, resurrection.

It started with the events of his birth then his naming and circumcision last Sunday.

It continued with the coming of the magi from the east presenting their gifts to the young child.

This was celebrated on Friday.

To-day we come to Mark's account of Jesus' journey, his life and teaching.

Mark's account begins with Jesus as an adult man.

John the Baptizer had been working hard on the banks of the river, calling people to repentance and proclaiming that someone else was coming who would complete his own ministry.

John had made it quite clear that the One who was coming after him was more powerful than he. "I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandal."

In his time John was a celebrity as a fiery preacher of repentance who had a huge following in the "whole Judean countryside".

Had he lived in our time he would have been given his own television programme and be known as a fiery television evangelist.

John, however, was not doing this for himself or for any monetary gain.

He was preparing the people for a great event that God was doing in human history.

He was exhorting the people to repent, to turn to God in every area of their lives in order that they may be ready to receive the gift of God's breath within every area of their lives.

Into this situation comes Jesus walking from Nazareth, probably a two days' journey.

There is no fanfare, no procession, just another person coming to "check out" John and his message.

Mark, unlike the other Gospel narratives, offers no conversation between John and Jesus.

Jesus is immersed in the River Jordan by John the Baptizer.

It was during this event that Jesus had a religious experience in the form of a vision and in which he heard a voice calling him to his vocation.

Mark records “He saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descended like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, my beloved with whom I am well pleased.’”

In the weeks and months to come we shall continue to look at Mark’s account of Jesus’ journey and his response to God’s vocation for him.

Now what of us, our journey and our response to God’s vocation for us?

This applies to us as individuals and corporately as the community of faith in this parish.

Our quest, then, as individuals and as the community of faith who meet in this building, is to grow in our journey to God, to become like Christ and to fulfil God’s vocation for us.

First, we need to realise that we need assistance on the journey and in fulfilling God’s vocation for us.

We may think that we live a ‘pretty fair sort of life’ but when we place that life alongside of the majesty, grace, goodness, love and forgiveness of God we are nothing and yet we receive all those things from God.

I use the Jesus Prayer of the Eastern Orthodox Church regularly: it goes like this, “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

I hope that this prayer helps me to keep my feet firmly on the ground and at the same time allows the Holy Spirit to breathe the Spirit of God into my life that I may be a “little Christ”.

Our quest for this New Year is that we may live our lives as a “little Christ” so that, through us, the Holy Spirit may breathe the Spirit of God into the lives of the people whom we meet whether they are family, friends, neighbours or complete strangers: speak to them about the church you attend and the Christian faith and life and allow the breath of the Holy Spirit to come into the lives of other people.

Affirm at this Eucharist this morning that you will do these things in the coming year.