

## 2021 BAPTISM OF JESUS

A question we all ask of ourselves from time to time is, “What am I doing here?”

I think of Ken who I met for the first-time last week in a local Rest home. He can barely walk two steps safely and has to be strapped into his wheelchair to be safe. He is confused over the seriousness of his condition, angry at being restrained and wants to return home- which of course can't happen. And he repeats that question over and over, “Why am I here? What am I doing here?”

I think of a friend, Mark, who at enormous personal sacrifice went as a COVS missionary to PNG. He was asked to manage a Workshop on a remote Mission Station. One look at him and all the local Mission workers went out on Strike. Welcome to PNG, Mark! The thought certainly crossed Mark's mind: “What the heck am I doing here?”

I think of Doug who, just before coming out to American Samoa as a Volunteer teacher, at the High School I was part of, had run a close second to John Walker in a glamour mile race at Madison Square Gardens, New York. A month later he was out on our undulating School grounds with a shovel trying to fashion an Athletic Track. As the mossies bit and the relentless heat sapped his energy a wee niggles must have crossed his mind: “What am I doing here?”

As Jesus knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating blood, anticipating the horror of Good Friday, He too may well have asked Himself, “What am I doing here?”

To answer the dreaded question ‘What I am doing here?’ we always have to go back to bedrock.

For Jesus I am sure bedrock would have been the time of His Baptism.

As Jesus was plunged below the water by St. John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a Dove, came upon Jesus and a voice was heard from heaven saying: “You are my Son, the Beloved; My favour rests on You.”

At that moment Jesus was anointed as the Chosen Servant foretold in our 1<sup>st</sup> Reading by Isaiah. At that moment Jesus was appointed as the one destined to establish a new, eternal covenant between humanity and God. That is what He was called to do.

This year is Year B and St Mark will be our spiritual guide during the Sunday Readings of Ordinary Time. St. Mark begins his Gospel right here with the Baptism of the adult Jesus. From a past that can only be guessed at, Jesus is drawn by the Holy Spirit to come to the River Jordan where His unique mission

to effect the salvation of humankind and to usher in the Kingdom of God will begin.

As Jesus came up out of the waters of the River Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. The fact that the Holy Spirit chose to come in the form of a dove would have been hugely significant for Jesus. The only other reference to a dove in the Bible is in the Noah Story. The dove's return to the Ark carrying an olive branch was a sign that dry land was close by; that salvation was at hand.

Jesus would have understood the presence of a dove at His Baptism as a clear message from the Father that He was called to be the New Noah, the One called to save humanity from the flood of evil which was suffocating it.

This is what He was called to be and to do.

For those bewildered by the ups and downs of life, the answer to our "What am I doing here?" questions can always be answered by going back to our Baptisms and reflecting upon the significance of what happened for us on that all-important day.

Few of us can remember the moment of our Baptisms. On that day those who loved us most said our 'Yes' to God's call for us to be people of love and compassion, to be people willing to suffer in union with Christ. On that day we not only became sons and daughters of God but a commitment was made on our behalf that we would lead lives of faithful service to God. All of us spend our lives struggling to make good the promises made on our behalf on that wonderful day.

A dear friend, Sister Bernadette, wrote to me from Peru. Her words were, "Yesterday I spent all day queuing outside a Medical Clinic with a young mother who has terminal cancer. Here in Lima the poverty is gut retching. I ask myself why I am here because I have no power and can do so little. But what I do, I do with all the love of my heart."

Whatever we are doing; be it allowing nurses to strap us into our wheelchairs without being grumpy, be it managing a Workshop filled with surly workers, be it shovelling a bumpy Athletic Track in tropical heat for the amusement of giggling students, be it sitting in a Queue for endless hours with a distressed mother...we do with all the love our hearts can muster.

Because this is the stuff of holiness...a holiness we were first called to when water was poured over our heads and we were baptised in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

At that moment we were anointed to be the Hands of Christ, the Arms of Christ, the Heart of Christ.

What are we doing here?

We are striving to be Christ; Christ, the Chosen Servant; Christ the Suffering Servant.