

Sermon, The Naming and Circumcision of Jesus

St Faith's Church, Quairading & Holy Trinity Church, York, Sunday, 2nd January, 2020

Readings: Numbers 6:22-27, Psalm 8, Galatians 4:4-7, Luke 2:15-21

Hymns: Lord enthroned in heavenly splendour; Love divine, all loves excelling; The Church's One Foundation; Father in heaven.

You may have noticed that during the month of January, at any one or two of our Parish churches, we will celebrate not only the Naming and Circumcision of Jesus which we do today (albeit transferred from yesterday, the 1st January) but also, first, the Feast of the Epiphany, with its alternate name "The Feast of the Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles" this Thursday evening at 6.30 p.m. at Holy Trinity Church, York to which all of you are invited (Refreshments afterwards in the Rectory); secondly, the Baptism of our Lord; thirdly, the Confession of St Peter, fourthly, the Conversion of St Paul; and finally at our Combined Churches' Service at St Mark's Church, Brookton, we will celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, which seems to be no longer recalled as also the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Confession of St Peter, and the Conversion of St Paul, are deserving of our attention for these two commemorations recall critical experiences in the lives of Christianity's two greatest apostles. Further impetus to celebrate St Paul's conversion comes, because it affords us an opportunity to worship at St Paul's Church, Edward's Crossing, in honour of its patronal dedication. The other commemorations of the Circumcision and Naming of Jesus, along with the Feast of the Epiphany, and the Presentation, are significant highlights in the early life of Jesus, three of very few incidents in the life of Jesus for which there is any Biblical record. By contrast, the Baptism of Jesus, is a commemoration of an event in Jesus' adult life, as he begins his ministry.

The Circumcision and the Naming of Jesus are placed before us as important ritual moments in his life and are clearly recorded in the twenty-first verse of the second chapter of St Luke's Gospel – the verse that follows that which we read as the Gospel account on Christmas Eve/Day. The verse notes "After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb". Something of a trick question for a Trivia Quiz is to ask, "What religion was Jesus?" Perhaps unsurprisingly, many people say Christian, when of course he was Jewish. Therefore, growing up as he did in a Jewish household, it was by tradition and indeed an integral part of the Covenant agreement between God and Abraham, that the male children would be circumcised. It is a worthy demonstration that while Jesus was the Son of God, and

therefore fully divine, he was also fully human, and belonged to a human family obedient to Biblical Law.

Likewise, we note from the record of St Luke's Gospel that as well as the observance of circumcision, Jesus was also named. Clearly, these two acts are important examples of ritual commitment to God. Naming is an important and significant ritual in Holy Scripture, recall how Adam and Eve are given the responsibility to name all that is in creation, and how to the surprise of family and friends, Zachariah names his son John.

The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is a profound moment in the early life of Jesus for it is during this visit that the special nature and mission of Jesus is recognised by both Simeon and Anna, very holy and pious people of Temple life; they witness to the fact that in the baby Jesus the prophecies of God to them of the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, have been fulfilled.

The Baptism of Jesus which is not a childhood moment is also profound in its impact and its declaration. There should be no need, given whom he is, for Jesus, the Son of God, to be baptised. However, as with all who will become his followers, he is baptised as he commences his messianic ministry. This should be a sure reminder to each of us as how significant our own baptism should be as part of our identity, and as part of our Faith journey and ministry. You will recall that alongside the baptism by water in the River Jordan by John the Baptist, there is that special moment when God identifies Jesus as his own and speaks of his pleasure in Jesus.

There is a reality that our Christian Year/Liturgical Year reflects its Northern Hemisphere foundations, and thereby readily provides opportunities to joyously celebrate any number of these important January commemorations – Services of Readings and Carols for Epiphany, Candlemas at the Presentation. In our Southern Hemisphere world, our lives are dominated somewhat by trying to fit in Christmas celebrations, family summer holidays, as well as school completion, holidays, and return.

Therefore, let those of us here present, and not away enjoying well deserved breaks, take the opportunity to delve more thoughtfully into the early life, and later, special moments of Jesus' life, while praising and thanking God for the enduring witness and ministry of St Peter and St Paul. Might it be that we can attest by our life and witness, to be those who have taken St Paul's advice to the Galatians to heart, and thereby find ourselves children, and thereby heirs through God. Might the Spirit of God rest in our hearts crying "Abba".