The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord 2025

The name, John McVicker, is unlikely to mean anything to you – but his is the first name recorded in the parish baptismal register of St. Brigid's Church. He was baptised on 11th December 1891, and, coincidently, was baptised by a Fr. O'Donnell - Fr Thomas O'Donnell, was the first parish priest of St Brigid’s Parish – however, the present incumbent is not related to him!

The Church records the names of all those baptised; for example, your name is recorded in the baptismal register of the Church in which you were baptised. However, this is more than a record of church membership. It is a sign that we are part of God's family, and that our names are treasured by God, who never forgets anyone *(cf Radcliffe, T., Take the Plunge, p30).* The name, John McVicker, has slipped from parish memory, but we can be sure that God remembers him, and holds him close.God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, declares, *“Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the child of her womb? Yet even if these forget, I will never forget you” (Is.49:15).*

On the occasion of a baptism, parents are first asked, “What name do you give your child?” This is a significant moment, because a name, a Christian name, is not just a convenient a label; naming a child is a solemn undertaking - to name someone is to give that person an identity, to say who he or she is, and will forever be! That explains why parents give careful consideration before they lovingly name their child, and for that reason, everyone’s name has a story attached to it. A child is not only known in the world by the name given, but also before God. *“Look”*, says the Lord, *“I have engraved (your name) on the palms of my hands”. (Searle, M., Christening, p31)*

After the parents have named their child, the priest inquires, “What do you ask of God’s Church for your child?” And they respond, “Baptism”. Perhaps not all parents appreciate the full significance of their request, but all recognise instinctively that it is important, and they earnestly desire it for their child. Some may think that it merely makes a child a member of the organisation we refer to as the Church, but baptism is not so much about membership as about a deep-down identity, similar to the identity that a family bestows upon a child.

Today's Gospel passage gives us an insight as to what this means. As Jesus emerges from the Jordan his Father's spoke from heaven, *“This is my son, the beloved, my favour rests on him.”* Baptism is our birth into that family that lives and breathes with God's life – we are God's sons and daughters, his beloved, his favour rests on us. We dare call ourselves Christians because we live with the same Spirit as Christ. We live with the life of God! Hear a father's love expressed in that beautiful line from the first reading, *“He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast”.*

At the Jordan, an awesome mystery was revealed, which opens up for us the wonder of our baptism. The whole episode lets us see that it was not the water of the River Jordan which was poured over Jesus – that water was a powerful sign of the never-ending outpouring of the Father’s love; *“the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him”*. Yet there is something even more extraordinary – Jesus reveals to us that the same abundant love is constantly poured out over you and me. The waters of baptism are a symbol of the Father’s love endlessly pour upon his beloved children.

On Christmas Eve, Pope Francis declared a Jubilee Year, and as he did so he opened the Holy Door in St Peter’s Basilica. But again, that Holy Door is merely a symbol of that which is much more significant – Jesus himself declares, *“I am the door” (John 10:9)*. He is the only doorway into that divine mystery we call “God”.A disciple would later ask Jesus, *“Let us see* *the Father and then we shall be satisfied”*. Like that disciple, we too yearn to see God, or at least to experience his presence. As he responded to the disciple, so he responds to us, *“To have seen me is to have seen the Father” (John14:8-9).* At the Jordan, and for evermore, the doorway into the heart of God was flung wide open, and Jesus revealed the love that is within that heart. Through that door, God looks out upon us, and sees in us, and loves in us, what he sees and loves in his Son, Jesus Christ, whom he calls *“The Beloved”.*

What an extraordinary mystery you and I are caught up in because of our baptism, an event that “profoundly touches our existence” *(Pope Francis, 8/01/14).* Our failures, or our inadequacies, can never quench the love that burns in the heart of God for us.

*“Lord God,*

*renew us in the fire of your love,*

*that we may truly live as*

*your beloved sons and daughters”.* **Amen.**