

**St Mary, Maldon**  
**10<sup>th</sup> January 2021.**  
**Baptism of Christ**

I don't like tunnels very much.

They are dark and you can't see where you are going.

In fact when I was small I had a bit of a phobia about railway tunnels.

In July every year we used to travel by train from Northampton to Newcastle to see my mothers' relatives, my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

The first part of the journey was on a branch line from Northampton to Peterborough.

The carriages on the train were elderly and shabby.

There was a small light which was switched on when the train entered a tunnel.

But it didn't always work.

When I was about 5 the train went into a tunnel near Peterborough without the light on and we were plunged into complete darkness for what seemed an eternity.

I was really scared.

I discovered I didn't like the dark.

After that every year we went on this train I anxiously looked to see if the light would come on.

And I was always relieved when the train emerged from the tunnel.

When there was light at the end of the tunnel.

We are in a dark situation aren't we?

You might say we are in a tunnel.

That's what it feels like.

People sick and dying.

The rest of us afraid to mix or go out.

Children deprived of education.

Businesses deprived of customers.

And we are looking for the light.

Politicians are telling us there is light at the end of the tunnel.

When we are vaccinated life can return to normal.

And it is probably true to say that we are always looking for light of some sort.

We try to find the light.

People who fail to see any light at the end of the tunnel find themselves in all sorts of trouble.

As we read in our Genesis passage right at the start of the Bible light is seen as something that is good.

A sign indeed from God.

God said, "Let there be light and there was light.

And God saw that the light was good."

In our Gospel passage from Mark, the Jewish people were in a tunnel.

They were in the dark.

But they were expecting light at the end of the tunnel.

They were expecting a Messiah, an anointed one of God.

One who would free them from sin, and of course from the hated Roman Empire.

And in our passage today it looked as if they might have found the light.

This strange man clothed in camel's hair and eating locusts was baptising people in the Jordan and proclaiming forgiveness of sins.

Many thought this was the light they were waiting for.

But John told them this light was yet to come.

"The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals."

He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.

You may remember John's Gospel puts it more poetically.

"There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light. He himself was not that light but he came to testify to that light."

We may wonder what those people were expecting.

Were they expecting a warrior or someone surrounded by crowds of angels.

We don't really know.

Mark's Gospel makes it seem like a huge anticlimax.

It simply says, "Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan"

An ordinary looking man came walking down to the river.

Mark in his gospel stresses his lack of worldly importance by telling us he was from Nazareth.

Where is Nazareth?

It is not mentioned once in the Old Testament.

It was not shown on any maps of the time.

It was a place of no importance.

So a man from an unknown place walks down to the muddy waters of the Jordan.

We are not sure from Mark's account whether at this stage John even recognises him.

But Jesus from Nazareth asks to be baptised by John.

A symbolic act at the start of his ministry.

And this ministry is affirmed by the Father.

The spirit like a dove descends on him.

The dove was the symbol of peace, purity and divine creativity.

Thus giving us some idea at the early stage of the Gospel what this new life, this new light would be like.

And then the words of God the Father.

You are my Son, the beloved.

With you I am well pleased.

So at last the light at the end of the tunnel had come for the Jews.

And the journey starts.

Jesus' journey from the River Jordan to Golgotha.

And on this journey those who respond to him are shown this new life of the spirit.

They receive the light.

The new light that came from responding to his teaching and healing ministry.

He showed the people a way of life based on love, peace and forgiveness.

And pointed them to God, the source of that love and strength.

What about the tunnel we are in?

It may seem bleak and dark at times but for us as for those people 2000 years ago, in Jesus, God's power has broken through.

The light penetrates the darkness.

The man who is God stands with us in our broken humanity.

The spirit of God will descend on us with the gentleness of a dove as it did on Our Lord if we allow it to.

I have said and written recently that even in these dark times we can see that light through the love shown by many people to those who are disadvantaged in the community.

I don't like singling people out but just yesterday morning someone came to church and gave me a computer tablet and asked me to pass it on to a child who may need it and gave me some money for the food bank.

And we see this light through the work of all those saints in the hospitals we see on our TV screens every day.

And we too must be symbols of light, showing love, peace and forgiveness to the world.

We must declare that we stand alongside that humble man who seemed to come from nowhere and ask John to baptise him.

That man who was a symbol of light.

That man who changed the world then, and does now.

Heavenly Father at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son.

May we recognise him as our Lord

And know ourselves to be your beloved children:

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.