

**Parish of the Assumption of Our Lady
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**BULLETIN C 7 – 9TH JANUARY 2022
THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD**

My dear brothers and sisters,

Today as we bring to an end the Festival of Christmas, we turn to the beginning of the earthly ministry of Our Lord. We have accelerated from the infancy of Jesus to a thirty year old man who takes up “his father’s business” not carpentry but the salvation of the world. This beginning was mark by his submitting to Baptism by John, who testified that he saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove and the voice of the Father was heard.

As we continue with our New Year mother church asks us to recall our own baptism when we too were given a ministry to be witnesses to the salvation of our world by Our Lord Jesus Christ, we witness by our worship, by our love and service of our brothers and sisters.

A reminder that the crib remains in church until the feast of Candlemas, February 2nd. The offerings at the rib are given to the work of BCCS, The Brentwood Catholic Childrens’ Society. This work supports work to disadvantaged children in our diocese, please be generous.

Deacon Michael continues to isolate after a positive Covid test and hopes to be back with us during this week.

Mgr Keith Newton, the Ordinariates Ordinary, will be visiting our parish next Sunday and will celebrate and Preach at the 10.00am Mass.

God bless,
Fr. John

TIMES OF MASS DURING THIS WEEK

Sun	9	Baptism of the Lord	1000 Mass 1800 Mass	the recently Baptised People of the Parish
Tue	11	feria	1900 Mass	Birchall Family (RIP)
Wed	12	feria	1000 Mass 1020 Adoration	Teresa White (INT)
Sun	16	2 nd in Ordinary Time	1000 Mass 1800 Mass	People of the Parish

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Fr. John is available to hear confession on Tuesday at 6.30pm and Wednesday at 10.30am

GOSPEL REFLECTION

On the east coast of Scotland, in the River Forth, they do it on New Year's Day: it's typically bitterly cold. At Varanasi, on the River Ganges in India, the climate is much kinder to participants; people do it all year round. In some exotic holiday places, people do it from cliffs. The common theme is diving into water. It's not to everyone's taste, but in each of the places where it happens, those who take part find the experience invigorating. Not everyone agrees, however – in fact, it's probably safe to say that most people think the practice is utter madness.

There is clearly a feeling of comfort and satisfaction in being immersed in something, especially if we are feeling insecure. To be wrapped in warmth, or the company of those close to us, is reassuring. The same can be true in water – as long as you can swim, of course.

Immersion as part of rituals is commonplace and plays a part in many religious practices – Christian immersion practices in particular, when they usually go under the name of baptism. In fact the word “baptism” comes from the Greek word for immersion.

We often associate baptism with John the Baptist. And it's true that baptism only appears in the Gospels at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, although there are also references to people being baptised in the Acts of the Apostles.

Baptism as a ritual was used by various communities, the best known being the Essenes who lived in the mountain caves near the Dead Sea. This community produced a large number of scrolls, known to us today as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Essenes were a Jewish sect and they adopted the practice of baptism – the immersion in water was a symbol for immersing themselves in a new way of living. John the Baptist may have belonged to the Essenes at one point, which might help explain his appearance, although that is usually attributed to him emulating the prophet Elijah. John famously encouraged people to immerse themselves in water. This is often described as a spiritual cleansing, but there is much more to it than that. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.

Today we think of “repentance” as feeling sorrowful – a change of heart. This is because we in the West think of the heart as the seat of emotions in humans; therefore a change of heart means a change of the way we feel – sorrow, the need to change our ways. This, however, would not have occurred to the people of the Middle East in Jesus' time. For them a change of heart meant a change of thinking. John's repentance, then, was about inviting people not to be sorrowful, but to announce a change in their own lives. It is at this point that Jesus begins his ministry and the kingdom of heaven is inaugurated. It is because of these two events that Jesus can announce the Good News: the kingdom of God is at hand.

So far, so good, but we are not finished yet. When Jesus comes out of the water, a voice proclaims, “You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.” And the Spirit descends in the form of a dove. If we think about this for a moment, we can see how remarkable the event is: in the Gospels we seldom hear the Father's voice; it's Jesus who is the voice of God – and we *never* see the Holy Spirit. This, therefore, is the only time when we have perception through human senses of the Trinity: the voice of God the Father; the taking of visible form by the Holy Spirit – usually spirits are invisible – and, of course, the Son of God, the Word of God in human form, is Jesus himself.

What a commitment this is: God – Father, Son and Spirit – entering the world of humans in a way that humans can perceive. The River Jordan is, therefore, the interface between the two worlds, and Jesus immersed in the Jordan is the point of contact between heaven and earth, divinity and humanity. This action of the Trinity is a commitment to humanity. Jesus' immersion in water is symbolic of God's immersion in humanity. Jesus' immersion in water is also symbolic of our immersion in God. It's a truly unique moment in human history.