

Heavenly Father, speak to us as you spoke to your Son, and by the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to accept the difference you make to our lives today. Amen

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- Is it still Christmas? If you remember at school we said that it still was, and it went on till February 2nd, when we celebrate Candlemass, another special day all about Jesus, the Light of the world.
- I asked you when Christmas ended. One or two wise people said Epiphany, when the Kings arrived at the stable, which we celebrated last week. Lots of people thought it ended on Christmas Day. And one person thought it ended on Christmas Eve which is probably when most of the population of Britain thinks it ends having been celebrating it for a good couple of months.
 - I think that may be because, for most people, they don't see Jesus as very much to do with Christmas. They think he's a harmless baby in a manger, but he doesn't make any difference to daily life today.
 - They couldn't be more wrong!
- So now we're in the second part of Christmas called Epiphany. And actually it's all do with stories about Jesus once he'd grown up.
 - So why do we tell these stories when it's still part of Christmastime, and as we know Christmas is all about babies?
- The answer is that Christmas passionately believe that Jesus does make a huge difference to everyday life, and that these stories, which are all from the beginning of Jesus' adult ministry all make some important point about Jesus that makes a difference to life today.
- So you could say, the season of Epiphany, the second half of Christmas, could be the time when we are answering the question, "Who is Jesus?"

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- "Who is Jesus, and why is he important?"
- Today we're thinking about his baptism.
 - He's grown up remember. He's thirty years old. And he's come out to see his cousin, John the Baptist, at the River Jordan where John is busy calling people to repent of their sins and wash themselves clean by being baptized.
- What does this tell us about who Jesus is, and why he's important?
 - Cut to the chase, and listen to the very final words of today's Gospel reading, read right in the middle of the Church, about Jesus, the Light of the world. *'a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'*
- We discover that Jesus is not just a human being. He is the Son of God. The closest link we can possibly have between us and heaven. Fully human and fully divine.
- And he's come to the river Jordan to share in a very human ceremony. The ceremony of baptism.
 - But wait a minute. John's baptism is all about repenting of your sins. Saying sorry for your sins and being washed clean.
 - And if Jesus is really God's Son, surely he hasn't done anything wrong.
- And this is the clever bit. Christians believe, 'no, he hasn't'. Christians believe Jesus is perfect. That's what the bible says. But he wants to come and share everything with us. In fact he wants to give us a renewed meaning to life, because we so often forget that life is for living and loving and sharing and including.
 - If you don't believe me, just look at what society does to Christmas. It turns it into a season where we are encouraged to go overboard and spend and enjoy ourselves and forget about all the sad bad stuff like sin and loneliness and worry. To blot it out and hope it goes away.
 - But it doesn't. Just ask anyone who is on their own for Christmas, or who hasn't got enough money to celebrate Christmas Day. They'll tell you what a sad time Christmas can be.
- So Jesus gives meaning to Christmas, a new meaning for so many people. And he gives a new meaning to baptism when he shares it with all the people queueing up at the River Jordan to be baptized by John.

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- Because what happens when Jesus is baptized? Listen again to the reading. *‘when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.’*
 - It’s the Holy Spirit who comes into the picture!
 - Have you noticed this is one of the occasions in the bible where Father, Son and Holy Spirit are there in the same reading? One God. Three in one
- So Jesus is taking baptism which was all about being washed clean after saying sorry, and giving it a new meaning which is receiving God’s Holy Spirit to guide us in our daily lives. The Spirit of Jesus helping us to become the people God created us to be.
 - Who did God create you to be? Have you discovered yet?
- As we’re standing by the font in a few minutes time, as you are splashed with water, or signing yourself with the sign of the cross in it, ask yourself that question. Who did God create you to be? And have you discovered yet? You might be surprised to discover that the answer is not what you are expecting!
- Because Jesus is surprising in what he calls us to do.
 - He may be challenging the way you live your life and calling you to live more ethically, with more effort to conserve the world’s resources and to combat climate change.
 - He may be calling you to consider you can support the Church, with your time, with your talents, or with your finance so that we can continue to do our best to transform the world of which we are part.
 - He may be calling you to share your burdens or worries with him, or he may be saying a thousand other things.
 - Jesus is always surprising in what he calls us to do or be?
- He surprised John the Baptist. John thought that he had got it all sorted out. He knew that Jesus was the Messiah. After all he grown up in the family. Mary had been to see his mum Elizabeth when they were both pregnant and they’d talked about the angels and sung songs together. John the Baptist was expecting the Messiah. But he wasn’t expecting to need to baptize him. John said to Jesus, *‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’*
 - But as we said, Jesus did it to show he shares in the whole of life with us. He replies, *‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.’*
 - And *‘all righteousness’* is surely talking about God’s plan to save the world and bring it back to the Kingdom of God it was created to be.
- Baptism is one of those points where we are very close to the Kingdom of God, being filled with his Spirit, as Jesus was and as people all over the world are from poor African villages to rich suburbs of the Home Counties.
- Another is when we stand around the altar and share a meal of bread and wine with Jesus.
 - Both of which we are doing today.
- So I encourage you to allow yourself to be surprised by Jesus. Talk to him at the font. Listen to him at the altar and feel his presence through the Holy Spirit who is just as active today as he was 2 000 years ago.
 - If you’re feeling in need of direction, ask him to guide you. And listen to what he says.
 - If you’re feeling anxious or upset, think of the story of Jesus wanting to share the whole of life with us, and thank him for sharing your worry or your pain.
 - If you’re feeling excited, allow Jesus to share the excitement, tell him about it and ask for the grace to remember that he’s sharing it with you for the rest of the day.
 - And if you’re feeling daunted, remember that the Holy Spirit is inside you, and ask Jesus to help you to be guided, and protected, and strengthened by his presence.
- That’s all possible because of the effect of the stories we tell about Jesus. True stories about life.
- Who is Jesus? He’s the Son of God, come to share the whole of life with us.
- And that’s the difference that Christmas and Epiphany make today. Amen.

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