

## Reflection for the First Sunday of Epiphany. Luke 3: 15 -17, 21-22

The Gospel reading takes a huge leap in chronology. We have spent time enjoying all the Nativity stories, the Shepherds, the Wise Men, with all the surrounding detail, but now we move on to the important things. The focus of the people is currently on John the Baptist. John is the one who is drawing the crowds. John is the one calling for repentance, preparing the way for one who is to follow. John knows that there is one who is to come, probably John does not even know who it is, who is the promised one. The crowds are asking the question; is this the promised Messiah? The one sent from God; the one promised for so long. John makes it clear that it is not him but one who will follow, one who is more powerful than John, one whose shoes he is not worthy to fasten. Pretty self-deprecating stuff, but a clear expectation given in faith that there will be a Messiah, one who is to follow him.

The crowds gather for baptism in the river Jordan. Then at the end of the queue Jesus steps forward, seemingly from nowhere, no announcement, no fanfare, no introduction, Jesus is just there. Jesus steps forward for His own baptism by John. It is at this moment that the affirmation of Jesus comes in a dramatic form. The heavens open, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove and the voice, the one that we will hear again later. The voice that proclaims, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The affirmation of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, the one that the world has been waiting for. The Holy Spirit gives Jesus the confirmation that He is indeed the beloved Son of God the Father. Another part of the confirmation of His identity given for us. It is not clear if the crowd are aware of this or not. We must assume that John the Baptist is aware, although later in the Gospel John is asking, 'Are you the one?'

Jesus begins His ministry on earth without a great fanfare or burst of publicity. He comes quietly just as he comes to us now, quietly even when we are not expecting His presence. We may not always be aware at the time, only later as we reflect, we realise we gained strength from an unknown source. Jesus comes quietly as unexpectedly as He did on that day beside the river Jordan. As we face the stress of an uncertain world, we can be confident that Jesus is with us - not waving a magic wand to make all things nasty go away but giving us the strength to cope with whatever we will encounter in the coming year.

*Dear God,  
please give us strength when we are weak,  
love when we feel forsaken,  
courage when we are afraid,  
wisdom when we feel foolish,  
comfort when we are alone,  
hope when we feel rejected,  
and peace when we are in turmoil.  
Amen.*