

Baptism is a curious affair:

*a deeply religious event of course in its essence,  
**in the Western world at least it has become surrounded**  
**and perhaps engulfed in a myriad of social conventions.***

***Its dramatic significance is so often lost:***

it can become a formality that must be observed,  
or even just a preamble to a party.

*The early Church though was under no such misapprehension:*

it certainly didn't lose sight of dramatic significance of what was happening here:

**even the language of the early Church said so much:**

**baptism was called 'the enlightenment', 'the regeneration',**  
**it was likened to being saved from the fury of the ocean following a shipwreck,**

*it was seen as a consecration of a life to Jesus*

*and the gift of the Spirit of Jesus to the person so that they could live that life;*

it was recognised as the entry of a person into the life of the community of the Church and the acceptance of the call to live the life of that community.

**All of this we think of, and we celebrate today,**

**as we bring the Christmas Season to an end**

**and prepare to move into a new year.**

And so it's a day which asks us how seriously we take our own baptism,

*how much we actually think of ourselves as a baptised person,*

*and what difference that makes for our self-understanding.*

If we affirm our own baptism, if we accept that,

*then we accept that our life is consecrated to Jesus,*

**we accept that the Gospel, with all its powerful demands,**

**is not only the charter of the kingdom, but the charter of our own life.**

*We accept that the source of our life is not any ‘thing’, or any ambition,*

*but rather the Spirit of God.*

We accept that we’re a different person because of that baptism,

*as the early Church said – it has re-created us.*

We’re – each of us - a Christian.

And to be a Christian is to be a ‘Christ-one’,

*and this Christ is the one who lived his life for others,  
who died for others,  
who didn't run from the Cross . . . for others, for the sake of others*

*And so, we have to ask ourselves as baptised people: 'is that our likeness?',  
'are we servants, as Jesus was servant?';  
'is our life lived with an orientation for love and justice for others?'*

**Does baptism make that difference? Has it re-created us?**

*The alternative of course is that baptism can merely be a fact about us,  
an entry in a baptismal register,  
a long distant pouring of water over our heads.*

Life can remain terribly comfortable and undisturbed.

It can make all the difference whether we speak of our baptism  
in the present tense, or the past tense:

*'I was once baptised',*

or

*'I **am** a baptised person':*

If we can really express it that second way

*then my life is no longer my own:*

as St Paul said: 'I no longer live, it is Christ who lives within me'.

**I won't seek to find life in trivialities**

**but in service and sacrifice.**

Justice, equity, compassion,

rather than gain, self-comfort, petty judgements,

will be the defining marks of my life.

The Lord's baptism

marked the changing of the course of his human life:

*he was set upon a path of the Father's choosing, not his own;*

life was not to be about what it could bring him:

the road led to the Cross.

**And because of that, to Resurrection.**

**But only because of that.**

Today's feast asks whether our baptism is to be merely a fading entry in an old book

**or the gift of grace, *and our response to it***

**which defines who we are.**

*Fr Colin Blayney*