

HOMILY, Ilkley, St Margaret, Advent II (Baptism)

Readings: Isaiah 11: 1-10; Matthew 3: 1-12

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

It is delightful and timely to welcome Louis into Holy Baptism today. The season of Advent is a profound time for us all to revise and recap this understanding, and to be reborn to it in our own Christian discipleship.

As indeed we see from St Matthew's gospel today, it is the primary task of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, to alert us in plain terms to the centrality of *metanoia*, that is, of turning around from where we have been with all it holds, and becoming more fully present to where we are now; to the future of hope, mercy and peace prophesied in Isaiah's great vision where we yet shall be. This morning, Louis is incorporated into that very ancient, very contemporary vision, as he becomes a member of God's church, an heir of God and a co-heir

with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Such is the worthy repentance articulated at the heart of John the Baptist's message. It requires a movement from one place to another; it means a change of state out of darkness toward light.

Baptismal life happens in the present moment; its practice occurs once, but its effects are life-long and life-giving. – They are generative for the life of all persons and all things because they sanctify everything that life is about, making ordinary things extraordinary with holiness. That is to say, “worthy fruit” as St John the Baptist calls it: fruit – not like the literal banana that Louis was munching away on when I first met him last week – but fruit of a deeper, metaphorical kind. Fruit that can be shared; fruit that lasts, changing how we think and behave and interact.

The ripples made in the waters of baptism diffuse nothing less than the life and power of the One who will come at length to receive the Father's Spirit upon himself at John's own hands, our Lord, Jesus Christ. This is the one whom John the Baptist is revealing in today's gospel. It is his fruitfulness into which we are grafted in the *metanoia* of baptism, as we are turned around from where we were before into Jesus's own risen life. The season of Advent calls us to start over, as we hear the Baptist's cry that brings us to God the Father and his beloved Son in the water of baptism, whereby the Holy Spirit may rest on us. It is to be a new life for Louis, and it will affect all with whom he has to do, enabling him with them to bear fruit worthy of repentance because of this onward movement into God's future that John is revealing to us.

But grace is no cheap thing. Baptism means dying and rising again in the power and passion of Christ crucified. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (Jn. 12: 23).

The Pharisees and Sadducees may be the most religious people of their time, but they utterly fail to recognise their need to turn away from themselves and the narrowness of self-righteousness, and toward the abundant life born not of water only, but of water and spirit: a life whose fruits may only grow from greater and greater awareness of repentance, when we turn evermore consciously from the self-focus which is the root of human sin, and grasp instead the branch of Jesse's stem upon whom the good spirit of the fear of the Lord rests and where the fruit worthy of repentance can grow to maturity in plenty.

Young Louis is cleansed in the waters of baptism today in order that he may be regenerate in the Kingdom of God's future here and now, and may duly regenerate others, offering light and hope to the world as a disciple of the one, says John, "more powerful than I."

We thank the Lord for Louis today, praying for him and his family that that power and glorious kingdom may break into their hearts and lives, making their actions and relationships evermore holy, and for ourselves that as co-heirs with them, acknowledging the same baptism for the forgiveness of sins, we may enter into the kingdom of God regenerate and born anew of water and the Holy Spirit in the power of these sacred mysteries, and so too may bear fruit worthy of repentance, this Advent and always. **AMEN**