

My dear fellow Anglicans, greetings! Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, greetings! Dear children of GOD of other traditions who may be here with us today, greetings! I bring greetings from the Diocese of St Albans, from the Parish of Elstree and Borehamwood, from the Church of England. Thank you Bishop Selee for your gracious welcome and Dean Williams for your generous invitation.

Today around the world, millions of worshippers celebrate the Baptism of Christ. We remember how Christ entered the water and was baptised by John.

The Baptism of Christ is the democracy of GOD's people.

GOD shows no partiality. GOD has no favourites.

Our New Testament reading in Acts 10 tells us,

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. (NIV)

GOD has no favourites. Or put another way, we are all GOD's favourites.

Young or old, student or teacher, woman or man, European or African, we are all GOD's favourites. In every age and every nation.

This is the season of GOD's favour. GOD's favour rests on all humanity.

The Baptism of Christ is the democracy of all GOD's people.

Our Gospel reading in Matthew 3 tells us,

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

Jesus came from Galilee to enter the River Jordan, to be immersed in the love and judgement of GOD, a sign of repentance, to come up from the waters a new person.

John hesitates. Why does Jesus, the Holy One, need to be Baptised?

Jesus himself gives the answer,

¹⁵ "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness."

No-one is Baptised by accident; it is an intentional act. Jesus chose Baptism in order to identify with our waywardness, to identify with our selfishness, our lack of love, our neglect of justice, our pride, our violence. He was baptised for us, to set us free.

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5.21)

²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2.24)

He was baptised for us, and we were baptised with him, to set us free and to commission us to do good.

Where were you baptised? Here at Trinity or elsewhere?

When were you baptised? I was baptised 65 years ago. Last year, on my anniversary, I made a Pilgrimage to the church where I was baptised and visited 40 churches along the way. I encourage everyone to make a Pilgrimage to their Baptismal church as often as they can, as a thanksgiving to GOD.

After Jesus was baptised, Luke tells us in our Acts 10 reading that Jesus went about doing good,

³⁸God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

The Baptism of Christ is our commission for mission. Our commission to go about doing good.

To '**Go thou and do likewise**'. (Luke 10.37)

²¹As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20.21)

The Baptism of Christ is our commission for mission.

Over the years, our understanding of mission has changed, evolved. Like all living things, it must adapt.

In the mid-20th century, as empires and colonial structures lost power and new technologies came in, so modes of mission and missionary understanding emerged. No longer is a missionary someone sent halfway round the world to a culture they do not know; now we are all missionaries. Mission is locally owned, locally organised, locally relevant.

Key to this changing understanding of mission was a meeting in 1984 of the Anglican Consultative Council, in Badagry, southwest Nigeria. The ACC, then a body of 70 lay and ordained representatives, posed these questions:

'To what extent is the church enabling the laity to realise that they should be the forefront missionaries?'

'To what extent has the church accepted our social responsibility as part of our mission to the world?'

They formulated the Five Marks of Anglican Mission.

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

TELL – TEACH – TEND – TRANSFORM – TREASURE

They were taken up to Anglican / Episcopalian national churches throughout the Communion.

As I come to close, let me offer some examples from my own Parish of how we seek to live out the Five Marks of Anglican Mission, of what they might look like in practice:

TELL – week by week in our 4 churches we proclaim the Good News of the love of GOD in Christ. Season by season in 7 schools. Day by day, members are empowered to share love and the Gospel. To communicate the love of GOD by all means. GOD has no favourites. GOD loves all people with an equal and inclusive love.

Mayor Collins plays a crucial role. Everywhere he goes, he champions the Gospel and shares the blessing of GOD.

TEACH – All our Bible groups, discipleship courses, Confirmation groups are open to allcomers. Enquirers, newcomers, established members, all. These days, it is no longer student or teacher, but student AND teacher. We must be both students and teachers in the faith! Lifelong learners for Jesus, sharing what we learn and growing together. Education is the lifeblood of our faith.

TEND – 5 years ago, after the Covid pandemic, we noticed there were needs in our community, and we opened a weekly 'Welcome Cafe' at one of our churches. In the winter months, we feed a free, hot meal to 70 residents a week in partnership with a local Housing Association and a locally based food security charity whose headquarters are in India.

TRANSFORM – We work together with civic and faith community leaders for peace and justice:

- o Annual Peace Walk with faith leaders, led by Mayor Collins
- o Thanksgiving Service for 70 years of UNHCR Human Rights

- Community meetings to support democracy at Elections
- Support for refugees as they navigate the complexities and inequalities of the UK asylum process
- Further afield, the wider Church of England has dedicated £100M to the work of reparation of communities affected by historic trans-Atlantic slavery

TREASURE – We plant trees! We tend municipal gardens, we celebrate the Festival of Trees with our Jewish neighbours, we celebrate Creationtide. We plant trees.

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The Baptism of Christ is the democracy of all GOD's people.

After he was Baptised, Jesus '**went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.**'

Today he calls, '**Go thou and do likewise**'

²¹As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

He invites us all to join the mission of GOD, to become missionaries.

Now we are all missionaries.

Not in our own strength, but in the strength that GOD supplies.

Today as millions of worshippers celebrate the Baptism of Christ, may we together re-affirm our Baptismal commitment to mission?

As I read out each of the Five Marks of Anglican Mission', I invite us all to respond 'WE WILL'

Will you,

1. Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom? WE WILL
2. Teach, baptise and nurture new believers? WE WILL
3. Respond to human need by loving service? WE WILL
4. Transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation? WE WILL
5. Strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth? WE WILL

Prayer