



SUNDAY 11 JANUARY 2026

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

The Baptism of the Lord (A): - Matthew 3: 13-17

I recently came across a former classmate who I hadn't seen for fifty-odd years. For those who wonder if there is more behind what we think of as a coincidence, this meeting has led to pub lunches and catching up with what life has asked of us over the intervening years. It's enjoyable, fascinating, and many things seem simply providential.

We don't have the same opportunity to open up the hidden years of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. The birth and infancy narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke give no helpful detail to a quizzical mind. It's pretty safe to assume that Jesus had a conventional Jewish childhood and learnt a trade from Joseph, his foster father. Traditionally we've known him as a carpenter, or a construction worker who would be conversant with a range of building skills. We can speculate about the rest.

So when Jesus turns up for baptism by John, he carries no other public image as yet. His baptism is the occasion of a tremendous affirmation from God the Father and the Holy Spirit. We see it as the start of his public ministry – teaching and healing, welcoming people into a new understanding of a compassionate and merciful God of love – and challenging his hearers and followers to grow into the same qualities and to stand up for justice and the dignity of the poorest. It set many to unlearn inherited stuff and to surrender to a new life in his company. This journey continues for me and thee.

Jesus joined sinners in the queue for baptism. He has no need of forgiveness but shows solidarity with his sisters and brothers who he has come to set free, to enlighten and to restore. Later in his human frailty he would know misunderstanding, opposition, suffering and death. Our God came to us, the carpenter filled with the Spirit and sustained by the Father's pleasure, ever learning, being guided by the demands of love. The Word communicates in voice and action, building new images of the God from whom he has been sent, showing the face of the Father to people aching to be loved and understood.

The expected Messiah was not like this engaging man of tenderness and challenge. With those of his time who came to dare to believe and accept a newly-found Messiah who seeks relationship and brings pardon, we may wish to enter this story and get a thrill out of how he chose to enter ours.

Do you know the date of your own baptism? You may wish to find out and to celebrate it as the intriguing welcome into the life of God, who in the first place loved you into life and into the adventure of serving and loving in his name. Give it some thought.

A tip from some fellow readers of the Partnership Note. You'll get more from it if you read it out loud slowly to yourself, maybe twice, and by then maybe your mind is off on its own journey into Jesus' story. Just a thought! Thanks.



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ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus

The primary reason for evangelising is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence. Standing before him with open hearts, letting him look at us, we see that gaze of love which Nathaniel glimpsed on the day when Jesus said to him "I saw you under the fig tree" (John 1:48). How good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life! What then happens is that "we speak of what we have seen and heard" (1 John 1:3). The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realise ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others.

The Joy of the Gospel—para 264