



*Baptism of the Lord Civ*  
*Excerpts From Isaiah 40, Titus 2-3 & Luke 3*

## A New Humanity

Baptism is all about coming to a New Life in Jesus, which is what all the scriptures point to.  
Fr David King – 9<sup>th</sup> January 2022

*You will benefit greatly from engaging with the **second reading** before looking at this (Titus 2.11-14, 3.4-7)*

### 1. South Sudan

I love reading about what's going on in the Church in different parts of the world. It's so inspiring to read about the faith of our brother and sister Catholics around the world, and so humbling to read about all that they are enduring and living through. So this is another story from the missions, and it is perfect for today.

- I read this recently, it was an article about a Catholic parish in South Sudan. Now I am ashamed to say that I didn't even know where South Sudan was, I had to get out google maps. If you don't know where it is either then just pretend you are looking at a map of Africa here...so you have Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia here, and South Sudan is here.
- But it really was amazing to read about this community. It's a very new community, some of the first generation of believers are still alive. Incredible to think about that. And this parish is enormous, the parish is five times the size of Greater London and they have one priest (!) and it often takes him four days to reach some of the little communities of the parish.
- There are no roads because these are the wetlands of the Nile and they often flood, so he and the few people he travels with have to do it all on foot, often wading through waters up to their necks for hours on end. Tropical disease is just a way of life out there, it seems. There were some great photos of this priest wading through waters up to his chest with some of the local people and he seemed very happy, he had a huge smile right across his face! He seemed delighted!
- Anyway, although there is evidently a lot of joy there, there is also lots of suffering. Very sadly, there's basically a kind of civil war happening in the country, and there is long standing hostility between the people of this area and the people of another area. It's all very complicated and has a long and difficult history. But most people in the parish have lost relatives due to all this fighting so this division is a very real thing, and not easy to overcome because of the strength of feeling.
- But I was so moved with how this article described life in the Church community. It said that the parish was like a little shelter where a 'new peaceful lifestyle is maintained'. The Catholic Church is apparently known for the fact that differences of opinion are settled without violence, weapons and alcohol are not allowed, and anyone interested in this alternative lifestyle can join them. 'We are changing' the article said, through the teachings of Jesus, and 'learning to love our enemies'.
- Wow! How wonderful that, that parish, that Jesus community, is providing *a different way* for people. A different way to live, a different life. Hold those thoughts and we'll come back to them.

### 2. Crete

- Before we talk about baptism, let's talk about Titus! We always get this same reading from Titus on Christmas Day and it always slightly makes me cringe as it's got that line in it about 'all we have to do is lead good and religious lives...' which just sounds so utterly awful in English, it sounds like no fun at all! But that doesn't capture what Paul is really saying here.
- But to understand what he *is* saying, we need, as ever, a bit of background. First we need to understand that this is a real letter that Paul sent to Titus who was on the island of Crete, it has a real context. Paul had sent him there because there were loads of Jesus communities on Crete but they were all going astray, and Paul sent Titus to get them back on the right track.
- Crete is a lovely place to visit now, I'm sure lots of you have been, it's such a beautiful island and when I was there I visited one of the places where Titus lived (utterly amazing!) but back then the Cretans were actually a notorious bunch, they were known for their treachery, greed and violence and their total lack of sexual morality, so it wasn't surprising that the churches were going astray.
- So Paul writes to Titus giving him all kinds of advice and instruction about how to deal with this situation (you can read the rest of it). But then he ends the letter by talking about the new life that we come to in Jesus, and this is the important bit. You see, Paul is convinced that *faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, will produce new kinds of people*. Paul knows this stuff has the power to transform people's lives, because that's exactly what happened to him!
  - And Paul is keen for this to happen because it's only then that the whole thing will become attractive to other people. Only when Christianity has proved its redemptive power in the lives of believers, will it then be compelling to others.
- But it's now that his words about baptism in the reading make sense. He talks of baptism being the 'cleansing water of re-birth, renewing us with the Holy Spirit'. What he's saying is that *baptism is how God washes us, and rebirths and renews us to live this new life*, gifting us with the Holy Spirit to empower it all, this is how God saves us he says! Through baptism we become these new humans, living a new kind of life, a life in Jesus' kingdom where everything is upside down (or rather, the right way up). This is what the whole Christian story is about, this was how God planned to bring his saving grace into the world, through us, through baptism!

### 3. Esher

- Right, ok, let's pause. That's a lot to take in, but the great thing is that we see this happening so much in the early church. All these communities of believers that Paul founded and visited and wrote to, were full of people living these new kinds of lives, as new people, coming to share in Jesus' life through their baptism. And no, of course they weren't perfect, that doesn't matter at all, God's forgiveness is always there, but they were choosing to live a new life in faithfulness to King Jesus.
- And clearly we see it still happening today in South Sudan, which is heartening. The question is, is it happening here? Well, in some sense, yes, we are a community doing our best to stay faithful to the teachings of Jesus, to live in the New Life he has opened for us through the Spirit, there is lots to celebrate! And yet we must be vigilant. The forces distracting us are far more subtle than those distracting the early church, but just as corrupting. And the truth is, to stay faithful to Jesus' teachings in our world, and to live the new life empowered by his Spirit that he makes possible, is a difficult thing. But that's what baptism is all about, being washed and cleansed and loved and born into a new life, a life in which we choose to follow Jesus and be faithful to his teachings.

*Jesus, in you I have been baptised / pour out your Holy Spirit upon me / that I may live this new life in you*