

LIFE CHOICES: THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD (A)

Brian Gleeson CP

Here is a fairly common family situation. Parents have their own ideas about a suitable career or occupation for their children. The children have different ideas, or no ideas, about what they want to do in the future. Or perhaps along the way they chop and change from one thing to another, until the day comes at long last when they start to settle down.

Jesus of Nazareth had lived with his mother in the little town of Nazareth for about 30 years. It seems that his foster-father died when Jesus was a teenager, and that the son took over the family business. No doubt this pleased his mother.

So we can only wonder what she felt that day he told her he was leaving home, and leaving Nazareth, and leaving the building trade they had relied upon for years and years, and going off on his own somewhere far away. Worse than that, that he was going to no new job, or at least to nothing that he seemed to have been trained for. We may presume that this news shattered Mary, left her feeling very sad and very worried.

But there was no holding him back. For he was sensing that God had something quite special for him to do. He didn't know yet exactly what it was. But it would be something to do with that amazing man John, who had been baptizing repentant sinners left, right, and centre, in the River Jordan.

And so our gospel today tells us: '*Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.*' (He was baptized, not because he himself needed baptism but in order to identify with those who did).

Then it happened. There and then, after he was baptized, the awareness hit him like a bolt from the blue. He had always known and felt that he was deeply loved by God. In his prayers, he had always called God '*My Father*' and '*Our Father*'. But on this occasion God speaks to him, speaks to him so loudly and clearly that there can be no mistake: '*You are my beloved Son and Servant*'. In other words God is asking him to be nothing less than the Messiah, the promised Saviour, and the one who would make God's kingdom happen

everywhere.

In effect the message Jesus was hearing from God at his baptism was this: *'Go to my people. Tell them that I love them. Show them that I love them. Gather them together and bring them back to me.'* There and then Jesus understood the future direction of his life.

Now that he knew what was expected of him there would be no holding back. As we hear today in a famous verse in the Acts of the Apostles: *'... because God was with him Jesus went about doing good and healing all who had fallen into the power of the devil'* (10:38)

We too, all of us, are dearly and deeply loved by God. He is our Father too. We are His sons and daughters. We have been made so by our baptism. We are also brothers and sisters of Jesus. By our baptism we are joined to his person, and share in his life and mission.

As we celebrate his baptism and ours in this Eucharist, can we re-open our hearts to his call? Can we hear him saying to us what in effect he said to Jesus: *'Go to my people. Tell them that I love them. Show them that I love them. Gather them together and bring them back to me'?*