

## An Open Letter to our Parishioners

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**And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to John, and were baptised in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Mark 1:5**

Quite a few years ago when I was a fairly newly ordained curate, and an even newer mother, we (Dave, myself and a coachload of other curates and spouses – the baby had to stay with Granny and Grandpa) were taken on the most amazing whistle-stop tour of Jordan. I loved the people, the weather, the food, the landscapes, and the chance to experience a little of the culture that was familiar up 'til then only via the pages of the Bible.

I had really been looking forward to a silent communion in the desert (the wilderness); however it was a little too wild that day and the Bedouin refused to take us out in a sandstorm! Instead it was the visit to the site of Jesus' baptism that became my most enduring experience. I had been brought up with the images of children's Bibles where the sky is blue and so is the water, the grass is green, and even the fish leap for joy. The reality of it all was that the River Jordan is a national boundary in a troubled place. There were armed soldiers patrolling and razor wire, and we were told that if we strayed from the footpaths we could end up triggering landmines. Once we had moved on through the archaeological sites, spied Israel across the river, marvelled at the golden church built alongside the current path of the Jordan, we finally reached the river bank.

The river was more of a stream. The water was brown, not blue. No fish could be seen.



It was made very clear to me that when Jesus was baptised he stepped into troubled waters: an occupied land where religion ran out of kilter with God's love. It was a dangerous time. Amidst the revelation from heaven that Jesus is God's Son, the epiphany of the Holy Trinity seen together for the first time, was a message of God's commitment to humanity. As Jesus stepped into the water he was stepping fully into the mess of humanity, he was walking alongside those who were troubled and scared and fed up and hopeful for a better, holier life. It sounds a lot like current times.

Back in the summer I had a dream of a wonderful celebration on the Glebe Field by St Peter's, which runs along the Wallop Brook. A 'vision' of people coming together to be baptised in the cool clear water either for the first time, or the first time as adults, or even as an affirmation of a baptism received many years before. This will have to go on hold, as has so much of our lives. NHS staff are overwhelmed and overworked: one of our Little Angels mums was sharing with me that she is working 16-hour shifts, junior nurses are suffering from PTSD ... 'hard to switch off, hard to leave

work...just an awful time right now'. Many of our churches have chosen to close their doors for public worship (although buildings remain open for private prayer) as we seek to stop the spread of infection. In the midst of all this, Jesus steps down into that water. Jesus is baptised with all the sinners, the broken-hearted, the anxious, the weary... Jesus walked with humanity back then and walks with us now. In our self-isolating, quarantined, locked down state of play, Jesus is with us.

With love and blessings,

*Vanessa*

A reminder that **Compline** is livestreamed each evening at 6pm here

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