

*May I speak and may we hear in the name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

Today we are still in the season of Epiphany: the season of revelation; of us discovering once again, through ancient and beautiful Gospel stories, who Jesus is. It's continually revealed to us that Jesus is God-with-us – God present with us in all our humanity.

This is what we reflect deeply on at Christmas time, when we enter into that holy story of the incarnation: God becoming a baby, a tiny human body. It's a still point in the turning of the world – a moment when all of creation is astounded at God coming close; so close as to be part of creation itself.

From that still point, we continue to discover what it means for God to be with us in this way, as part of creation. Last week, we journeyed with three wise kings to visit the baby Jesus, following the light of a hopeful star...

...and this week we jump forwards thirty years, and we find ourselves hearing the words of John the Baptist, telling us of the moment when he recognised who Jesus is. The moment of recognition came when John saw the 'Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Jesus.' This was a sign to John that Jesus is the Son of God – God incarnate, come close to us; so close as to be one of us; a human person; part of creation itself.

In this telling of the story, we don't read of Jesus' baptism directly: rather, the focus is on John's moment of recognition. Yet, when we read this alongside the other Gospel stories of Jesus' baptism, we see that it's all one – as Jesus is baptised, the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove, and this causes the moment of recognition.

To help us explore together what it means for God to be with us, so close as to be one of us, I'd love us to take a moment to imagine ourselves into that story – that story of Jesus' baptism. As I speak this next bit, you can close your eyes if you'd like – if that would help you to imagine.

I wonder, as you think about Jesus' baptism, what images come into your mind. What do you see; where are you? As you picture it, are you standing close to the river into which John and Jesus waded – so close that your toes are almost in the water? Or are you a little further away, perhaps glimpsing these events from a distance?

I wonder what you can hear and smell; what you can see. When Jesus walks past you towards John, what do you notice about him? Perhaps it's the roughness of his carpenter's hands, or sweat on his skin from walking. When he talks to John, what is his tone of voice – what is their conversation like? Is it serious, or humorous? Does he talk just with his words, or does he gesture with his hands? Do Jesus' eyes light up as he asks to be baptised; does his facial expression tell you how he's feeling?

I wonder what you see and feel when Jesus is baptised. Do you notice droplets of water catching sunlight as Jesus rises from the river? What does the dove, the Holy Spirit, sound like as it rests on Jesus and declares that this human man is the Son of God?

If you closed your eyes, you can open them now.

I wanted us to imagine ourselves into the story because it helps us to recognise that God is with us in the *human* Jesus. It is a human who is recognised as the Son of God: Jesus makes God present to us by being so close as to be one of us.

God became a human; a body. A body that feels the coolness of water. A body that aches sometimes, and sweats. A body that feels emotion – gut-wrenching grief; heart-beating love; bone-deep tiredness. A body that communicates in the same way that we communicate with each other – through speech, through touch, through a moment of eye contact.

This is important because, I think, sometimes when we read the stories of Jesus in the Gospels, it can be easy to forget that God came so close as to become one of us. It can be easy to relate more to the “spiritual” parts of these stories: the lessons we learn, or the parts that speak to our minds or understanding.

Yet I think that recognising and remembering that Jesus was a human person – that God comes so close as to be one of us – can be transformative. Through Jesus, we discover that God is a God who is invested in us as whole people, and that God relates to us in a way that includes our bodies – includes our whole human experience.

This can transform how we relate to God – and as I finish, I want to briefly suggest some ideas about what this transformation may look like.

First, knowing that God relates to us in a way that includes our bodies shows us that our bodies are loved. They are valuable and precious. God created us with bodies and, in Jesus, relates to us in a body; without them we wouldn't *be*. Knowing this, we can learn to relate to our bodies in ways that are loving, and gentle, and celebratory of each other's differences – learning to let go of the pressure we put on our bodies to be a certain way.

For me this often looks like listening to my body, recognising that my body can tell me things about how I'm doing and how I'm relating to other people, to my work, or even to God that my mind has not yet put into words. This listening helps me to name my emotions, and helps me to work out what I need to care for myself and relate well to those who are around me.

Second, this listening and attentiveness to our bodies can help us to pray. In a particularly busy season a couple of years ago, I had a phrase that really helped me to pray when I felt overwhelmed. I would say to myself: 'here, you can be honest and tired.' It was a phrase that reflected what I was feeling; reflected the stress and pressure that I could feel in my shoulders; and yet helped me to know that all of this is okay in the presence of God. I could

draw near to God with my honesty and tiredness, and God – who knows what it is to be human – would meet me there. Sometimes I substitute other words into that phrase: ‘here, you can be honest and joyful’. This kind of naming and listening is a part of a spirituality that includes our bodies – includes our whole human experience as something we can bring to God.

Third, we can use our imaginations to draw near to God in Scripture and stories – like we have this morning. When we recognise that Jesus is God-with-us as a human person, we can read stories about him in a way that notices how he relates to those around him as a person, as we might relate to each other. This can unlock new realisations about Jesus, and ways for us to know Jesus in our own lives: if you want to explore this more, start reading Gospel stories imaginatively, noticing how you’re interacting with Jesus in the story as you picture yourself within it.

There are so many ways we can relate to God in a way that recognises that our bodies are included. But I want to recognise **just one more** this morning. As we come to the Eucharist later in the service, we can recognise that this is a way that Jesus relates to us in our bodies. Our senses are engaged as we touch and taste bread and wine; our whole bodies are involved in drawing near to God. We taste and see that God is good and God is with us.

Amen.