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PASTORAL LETTER

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD 2023

In the Acts of the Apostles we hear St. Peter delivering a descriptive outline of the Lord's public ministry that began on the banks of the River Jordan. From Nazareth in Galilee, Jesus went down into Judaea and was there anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. The revelation unfolds and we begin to rejoice that the Lord has come into our midst to cure our ills, to liberate us from the power of evil.

Today's feast of The Lord's Baptism brings our Christmas Season to its completion and provides a transition into a new contemplation of the public ministry of Jesus. During these past weeks we have witnessed afresh the Nativity of Christ and contemplated anew the years of his nurturing. Within the fabric of our history, Mary and Joseph taught the art of human speech to the Divine Word, taught the Son of the Eternal Father how to walk upon the Earth that he had fashioned at the dawn of time. The Blessed Virgin and her beloved and honourable husband themselves then had to learn how to follow their child. We must accompany Mary and Joseph and learn the same lesson.

With Christ we must journey from infancy to maturity. On today's feast we must begin again the great pilgrimage of accompanying Jesus into the desert of isolation and temptation. Jesus is forever making his way into the midst of our desolation and speaks of the reassurance promised in the writings of the prophet Isaiah: "I come not to break the crushed reed, nor quench the wavering flame."

When Jesus emerged from his immersion in the River Jordan he beheld the Holy Spirit like a dove come down upon him and heard the voice of his Heavenly Father saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him." In the Beloved Son, all the baptised come to enjoy God's favour by adoption. By faith we are empowered to behold the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, privileged to hear the voice of the Father in the depth of our being. Heaven is revealed and the whole Earth is addressed. Power is entrusted to us and privilege bestowed upon us for a purpose. In our own baptism we



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are called, taken by the hand, formed as disciples, appointed to become a light for the nations.

It was providentially fortuitous that my appointment as Bishop of East Anglia was announced on the feast of St. John XXIII, the date last October which marked the sixtieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. As this year progresses, we will continue to pray and prepare in anticipation of the forthcoming Synod. All the baptised are being called to entrust themselves to the Light of the World. My chosen episcopal motto is 'Credite in lucem' (Believe in the Light). In John's Gospel we are told: 'Believe in the light and you will become children of the light.' Our own baptismal candles drew their light from the Paschal Candle, symbolising the Risen Christ. As we prepare for the challenges of the coming year, let us be refreshed in the full glory of faith, inspired through the wide vision of hope and empowered by the endurance of charity.

I am so looking forward to visiting the entire diocesan family over the coming months. Please pray that the Angels will accompany me as I make my way through the narrow highways and unlit byways! Let us pray for a blessing upon all our parishes and religious communities. Let us pray that the Prince of Peace will reign supreme across the face of the Earth.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+Peter

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