

Baptism of Matthew Jonathan Eyre on 18 April 2024

ORNC Chapel

The baptism of Matthew Eyre has been much longed for, planned for and prepared for. It's not often these days that a baptism is an impromptu event unless something untoward is taking place. Our baptism this morning is quite a contrast to that described in our reading from the book of Acts.

We're told that a member of the Ethiopian royal household is returning from Jerusalem, where he has been worshipping and is reading aloud from the prophet Isaiah as he is driven along in his chariot. Philip, prompted by the Holy Spirit, comes alongside and offers to explain the passage that foretells the humiliation and death of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps Philip spoke about the baptism that Jesus himself had undergone. Perhaps the Ethiopian has spoken to others who had been baptised when he was in Jerusalem. We don't know but what we do know is that as they journey on they pass some water and the Ethiopian asks to be baptised. It's clearly the work of the Holy Spirit.

Once the baptism has taken place, Philip finds himself some miles away and continues his ministry of spreading the good news and the Ethiopian continues on his way home. We are left to ponder what does this baptism mean for the royal official.

Is the Ethiopian court a place where converts to the way of Christ are welcome? This must be a man of much courage and much hunger for the knowledge and word of God, as his status as an Ethiopian and a eunuch would have prevented him from entering the Temple in Jerusalem for worship.

It's a reminder that in Christ and through Christ all are welcome to come to God, to access God's limitless love and grace. No wonder the Ethiopian goes on his way rejoicing and, we trust, empowered to tell others the good news of all that God has done for us in Christ.

Jesus himself, in our passage from John's Gospel, reminds us that in him we can bear fruit, we can live lives faithfully in God's love.

The word used is "Abide". A sense of being with no matter what, of permanence, of remaining with. This "abiding" is to be mutual, God in us and we in God. For me "abide" also speaks of the inward, the filling of ourselves and allowing of ourselves to be filled by God so that we can do no other but bear fruit for God and in bearing fruit give glory to God.

Jonathan and Kate it's a nice coincidence (which means that it's not a coincidence at all!) that this great truth of God and ourselves abiding in God's love was in the reading

you chose for your wedding in the passage from John's gospel immediately following this passage with Jesus as the Vine.

And then we have the reading from the First letter of John. Again, the word "abide" is used. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us".

Our fruit is to return God's love by showing love because we know we are loved. Endlessly, tenderly, the breadth and extent of which we can never fully know.

It is this love that we want Matthew to know, to be a part of, to abide with. The love that endlessly forgives, that surrounds us in times of great joy and great sorrow, the love that will never leave us however far away it seems.

Like the work of the Holy Spirit which moved the Ethiopian to be baptised on the roadside by Philip, we ask the Holy Spirit to be present with all of us this morning, for we all will make promises to uphold Matthew in his Christian journey but particularly with Matthew's parents and godparents.

At the end of my sermon on your wedding day, Jonathan and Kate, I said this: Our prayer for you is that you will be blessed in your future life together and know God's love not just today, but every day.

Our prayer this day is that Matthew will know himself blessed and loved by God not just today but every day in all that life will bring.

Amen