

From the Chaplain...

Something that both of our New Testament readings this week (Luke 3. 15-17, 21-22 and Acts 8. 14-17) highlight is the distinction between being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit. So, in the Gospel narrative, we learn that it is only after Jesus has received water baptism from John that 'the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form' (v.22). Likewise, the Book of Acts reports that although the believers in Samaria have already been baptized 'in the name of the Lord Jesus', it is only after Peter and John lay hands upon them that 'they received the Holy Spirit' (v.17). Such accounts undoubtedly shaped the view within the early Church that baptism and what we now call confirmation (laying on of hands and calling down of the Holy Spirit) were two distinct rites. And because the earliest Christian communities were still relatively small, it was customary for the local bishop to preside over both baptism and confirmation and to do so in immediate succession. As the Western Church grew larger, however, bishops delegated the baptismal function to priests, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit evolved into a separate rite intended to 'confirm' the covenant made at baptism.

Among much else, this potted history reminds us that our inherited sacramental practices have always derived from a combination of principle and pragmatism. We may frame the invocation of the Holy Spirit as a specifically episcopal rite for maturing Christians, but notwithstanding Acts 8, few would claim the Spirit is absent until the bishop lays hands upon the confirmand. Rather, we recognise that these ritual acts reflect distinctive forms of divine action, and as such become external expressions of the continuous and mutually reinforcing work of the Triune God.

Although we remain blessed to have Jonathan Eyre playing at Sunday services during Lent Term, we are also fortunate that Alexander Knight has recently been appointed as our next Chapel Organist. Alex comes to the Chapel with extensive experience playing in cathedrals and promises to be a great addition to our musical life. He will take up his post formally after Easter, and we will look forward to welcoming him at that time. Meanwhile, some of you may encounter Alex at Choral Evensong on Mondays, as he will be playing at this service during the next few months.

Yours faithfully,
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