

Easter 3 **Those who welcomed his message were baptised.**

Acts 2v41: *'So those who welcomed his message were baptised, and that day about 3000 persons were added [to the church]'*.

This morning's reading from the Acts of the Apostles concludes Peter's great sermon to the crowds on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended in power on the disciples and on the crowds. You'll recall that Peter's response in the market place was to explain the significance of Jesus, his death and his resurrection. He preached with *unexpected* power.

Peter's sermon concludes with the opening words of our reading today. This Jesus whom you crucified, Peter told the crowds, is both God's Messiah and our Lord. You can be certain of that.

Now the reaction of the crowds who heard him was overwhelming. They were moved and highly emotional; they were *'cut to the heart'* **And**, they wanted to know how to respond properly; so Peter told them to be baptised.

There are two extraordinary things going on in this story. One is the radical empowerment of Peter; and the second is the radical response of those who heard Peter preach.

Luke, the author of Acts, explains them **both** as the powerful interventions of God the Holy Spirit.

Peter the fisherman, the opinionated and hot-headed mate of Jesus; Peter the one who denied he knew Jesus when cornered after Jesus' arrest; this same Peter turned into an eloquent and gifted preacher, and explained the significance of the historic events going on around him. I bet his friends and the other disciples were amazed by the speed and extent of his transformation.

Such is the powerful effect of realising the truth of Jesus' resurrection and of being open to receive God's Holy Spirit can have on a person.

At the stage of his preaching this sermon at Pentecost, Peter had not become the dominant leader of the church he was later to become. He hadn't even completely formed his thinking about God or about who could join the church. It was a while later, after his vision of unclean animals and the invitation to step out of his Jewish cultural background *'Rise Peter, kill and eat'*, that he stopped blocking the Church growing by agreeing to admitting Gentiles.

It was the Holy Spirit of God at work in Peter that turned him around and empowered him to become a force to be reckoned with in the Early Church. It was the power of the Holy Spirit which empowered his preaching. And the change was extraordinary.

The **effect** Peter's sermon had was also extraordinary. In fact, we'd say, Peter electrified the crowds!

Literally thousands of people believed him that day; and when he told them to be baptised as a sign of that new-found faith, 3000 of them did exactly that.

Peter told the 3000 to be baptised (i) so that their sins could be forgiven, and (ii) so that they would receive the Holy Spirit themselves. And he said that **that** promise was open to not just his hearers, but to their children down the ages.

So it remains true today, that the church makes the offer of baptism; and the elements of forgiveness of sin, and receiving the Holy Spirit remain vital parts of our baptismal liturgy today.

This morning we will be baptising not 3000, but only two people; little Annika and Tom.

Their parents have decided that they want to bring these children up in the Christian way of life, and have enlisted the help of godparents and the congregation of this church to help them do just that.

In the words of the baptismal liturgy, we **all** promise to do our bit to help Annika and Thomas to grow up as faithful Christians, members of the church of God.

Most importantly, we pray for their forgiveness and ask God to send the Holy Spirit upon them to live ***in them*** forever.

The Holy Spirit *will* have a marked effect on them. Perhaps not as dramatically as the Holy Spirit changed Peter, but the Holy Spirit will help them to grow up to be more like Jesus, more God-like in their day to day living in the years ahead.

So we turn to our baptismal service sheets...