

You are my Child, my beloved; I delight in you

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Pentecost + 21 – Baptism in Holy Communion – Chizara Obi

You are my Child, my beloved; I delight in you – Mark 1.11

On my silent retreat last week, providentially, one of the Bible readings we were given to spend time with was the story of the baptism of Jesus as it's described in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel. Here's how it goes. *Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'*

After I'd spent a long time with this reading, I talked about it with my retreat director who surprised me by suggesting that I should try out hearing those words from heaven as if they were spoken to me. *You are my Child, my beloved; I delight in you.* I spent the next day wrestling with it. I wonder if you'd like to try it for a few moments – listen to those words from heaven, and hear them addressing you personally. *You are my Child, my beloved; I delight in you.*

Please hear it again: *You are my Child, my beloved; I delight in you.*

I don't know about you, but I found it very difficult to hear these words as being addressed personally to me. It's something important for me to work through. But for the moment, it's enough for you and me to know that even if we struggle with it, it *is* true. Our faith doesn't depend on how we feel. Those words are true for me; true for each of you,

and in a very special way today, true for Chizara Chloe. When Chizara emerges from the waters of baptism today, several things will happen and they will be her first, special taste of those words from heaven; *Chizara, you are my Child, my beloved; I delight in you.*

The lighting of her baptismal candle from the Easter candle will proclaim that the new life which raised Jesus from the dead lives in Chizara from the moment of her baptism. That's one way she'll hear the voice say *You are my Child, my beloved; I delight in you.*

The joyful procession of thanks will be a way we can share in that delight with Chizara. *You are my Child, my beloved; I delight in you.*

And then at the altar she'll be anointed with Chrism Oil, and we'll all say the prayers of commissioning and welcome which affirm the truth of those words from heaven for Chizara. She'll be marked as Christ's own for ever, and she'll be received and welcomed as a member of the universal body of Christ, as a child of the one heavenly Father, and as an inheritor of the Kingdom of God, together with all the baptised. All this will speak of the meaning of those words from heaven for Chizara – *You are my Child, my beloved; I delight in you.*

I can see why my retreat director thinks we should each hear those words from heaven for ourselves; *you are my Child, my beloved; I delight in you.* Nothing can block the truth of that gentle love; nothing can quench that delight. The Spirit who descended on Jesus has, over the millennia since, descended on all the baptised. And this morning, that same Spirit will descend on Chizara.

Let's begin that part of her journey with her now. I invite her sponsors and parents to bring her forward now.