

## Psalm 29

God is powerful over all things, our Psalm reminds us. He is the creator of the world, and everything in it. God merely has to speak, and it happens: the voice of the Lord is majestic, the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars. Even the vast waters of the deep, which the Jewish people looked upon with great fear and trepidation, as the realm of chaos and death – even here, God is in charge. The Lord sits enthroned over the flood, the Psalmist tells us, and he is enthroned as King for ever. As Jesus came to the waters of baptism, he identified with sinful men and women – with you and with me. He submitted himself to the waters and the flood, that he might triumph over them – bringing restoration from chaos, and life from death. As we look back to our own baptism, we can take heart that Christ has already won the victory for us, and brought us anew into his kingdom.

## Elements of the Mass

### Holy Water

The use of water for religious purposes other than Baptism can be traced back to the fourth century in the East and the fifth century in the West. In the Western usage, holy water (to which may be added a small amount of salt) may be blessed by a priest, acting in the name of the church, on any occasion; but particularly at the Easter Vigil when the font is blessed and water from it then used for a variety of purposes, including sprinkling for the annual renewal of baptismal vows. In the Eastern tradition, water is blessed at the 'Great Blessing of the Waters' on the Feast of the Epiphany, and then at a 'Lesser Blessing of the Water' on the first of each month. Some of the uses to which Holy Water is put are directly linked to Baptism: sprinkling at the 'Asperges' at the beginning of mass as a sign of forgiveness of sin; holy water stoups at the entrance of churches (in England since at least the 11th century) as a reminder of baptismal vows; sprinkling of coffins as a reminder of eternal salvation through Baptism. Other uses of Holy Water, such as to bless objects, homes and people are perhaps more dependent on other natural symbolism: rain is after all a source of God's blessings to his living creation. An interesting variation on the tradition is the presence of Holy Wells at many places of pilgrimage, most obviously to us at Walsingham, interpreted as a sign of God's blessing and healing.

administered to the peoples that come after. Christ therefore takes the lead in baptism, so that Christian peoples may follow after him with confidence.

From 'A Sermon' by St Maximus of Turin (329-390, bishop, theologian)



13th January 2019      Baptism of Christ  
(First Sunday of Epiphany)

## My Son, the Beloved



It is in today's Gospel that the voice of the Father breaks into our consciousness: 'This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased.' On so few occasions does the Father reveal himself, and so his voice signals an event of great significance. The Father's pleasure is found as Jesus immerses himself in the waters of Baptism thereby accepting in total humility all that needs to be renounced and repented in our lives. He chooses the hard way, the narrow path. As he lies down in the water he lies down all the power and authority of his Divinity. His Baptism prefigures the temptations in the wilderness, the agony in the garden of Gethsemane and the final day and hours of his passion. Such obedience to the Father's will, the Father who is well pleased with his beloved Son.

### From the Fathers

Therefore the Lord Jesus came to baptism, and willed to have his body washed with water. Perhaps some one will say: 'He who is holy, why did he wish to be baptized?' Pay attention therefore! Christ is baptized, not that he may be sanctified in the waters, but that he himself may sanctify the waters, and by his own purification may purify those streams which he touches. For the consecration of Christ is the greater consecration of another element. For when the Saviour is washed, then already for our baptism all water is cleansed and the fount purified, that the grace of the laver may be