

The Collared Dove was calling in our courtyard yesterday -the first in this winter period, a sign of spring and there have been snatches of song from Robins, Wrens, Great Tits and Dunnocks and even a wild strawberry in flower also yesterday in the week where frost has remained all day and it's a struggle for us all to stay warm. Surely they should all be saving their energy for later for who knows what winter still has to bring. It's all about reproduction of course and just letting others know that I'm available, this is my territory and I'm a better singer than the other guy over there- why I even sing when it gets down to -8, and the early flower is hoping to catch the early fly. None of that a product of their reasoning but of ours. Water, fire and a dove in a desert setting also have deeply symbolic meanings for us which go beyond reason but then call reason back into play. I'm thinking of that moment in baptism when the priest pours water on the child's head and everyone pays attention even if a little bored with all the words and actions that have gone before. It's a moment of truth, will the baby, innocent of all the fuss around it, cry or not cry, struggle or stay at peace? Who's benefit is this for anyway- as reason kicks in again? But it's that moment that speaks most clearly, and the benefit of course is for all. For the innocence of the child- we'll leave the doctrine of original sin to one side for the moment – evokes the lost innocence in us : the innocence of song or flower for its own sake, but this innocence can only be preserved or regained by us by the responsibility we now have to keep that child's faith for it as it grows and reason again kicks in. I would like to suggest that something of this sacrificial reasoning pertains to what Jesus is doing for us in being baptized by John, for it's not his sins which are being taken away by this action but our own, or potentially so- for like the child we too have to buy into this later, that is make his action our own. So the child Jesus stands for a very deep need in us for regaining our innocence as children of God, something of course impossible for us to do- to regain lost innocence. But Jesus holds that possibility for us; will take it with him to the Cross, and will visit us with his spirit to make it so. And we don't have to try too hard to reap the reward of faith for it's not ours to hold or give away even but held for us by the risen Christ, and Christ is forever visiting his people, that is all of us, only some know it and some don't. The gentiles of Cornelius' household know it even before Peter has spoken or baptised them. The Spirit blows where it wills. Our job is to be receptive to this wind when it comes. A sure sign of course is song and not necessarily for reproductive reasons.

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