**The Ven Sam Rushton, Archdeacon of York, reflects on Luke 3.15-17, 21-22 for the First Sunday of Epiphany, 12th January.**

One of my favourite films over Christmas - well, at any time really - is My Fair Lady. Like many musicals of its day, it begins with an overture, taking each of the songs which will appear later, and picking out the main musical themes. It is a foretaste of what is to come. It sets out the shape of the story and its tone so that as the film unwinds, we know where we are and where we're going.

Each of the gospel writers has a different kind of overture for their story. Mark leaps straight to the adult Jesus, keen to get on with the action. Matthew is all about how Jesus is the fulfilment of God's plan for his people, Israel. So, he begins with the genealogy and with prophecy. And John paints a glorious cosmic picture of Jesus’s divinity in the wonderful poem which begins, ‘In the beginning was the Word.’

But Luke is all about being a faithful witness, so he tells us the story of Jesus’s birth through the eyes of other first-hand witnesses; through Mary, and the shepherds, and the wise men, through Simeon and Anna, and we've heard their stories over the past few weeks. Today, the story of Jesus’s miraculous birth, that overture, according to Luke, has finished, and the film begins in earnest.

A man strides out from the edge of the local town, heading for the crowds assembled at the river Jordan, or waiting their turn for baptism at the hands of John the Baptist. As he passes, the camera pans the crowd as the whispers start among the people. Isn't that Jesus, John's cousin, the son of Joseph the carpenter, and his young wife Mary? Jesus arrives at the riverbank, and we see him having a heated debate with John. Eventually, John throws his hands in the air in defeat and leads Jesus into the water. And as Jesus surfaces from the dirty water, the silence which has fallen on the crowd is broken by a great thunderclap from a bright blue sky, and a voice speaks. “You are my son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased.”

John looks stunned as Jesus goes back to the bank, picks up his clothes, and heads off, not back to town as everyone is expecting, but out into the desert, moving quickly as though blown by a powerful wind. End of scene one.

This is what the beginning of the working out of God's redeeming work of love looks like: an ordinary man from an ordinary family, undergoing a transforming experience of the Holy Spirit which will change the world. The Messiah waited for by the Jewish people for over a thousand years has arrived. He will bring in the new age of justice, but this will be justice for the whole world, and not just for Israel. And he hasn't arrived at the head of an army or dressed for battle, he's just an apparently ordinary person from an ordinary town. And the way he will bring in justice will not be big and showy, but faithfully, compassionately, lovingly trusting in the slow work of God to bring near those who are far away so that everyone might know the joy of being in relationship with God.

As the Father speaks his word of love over the Son, the Holy Spirit falls like a dove and anoints the Messiah. And filled with that Holy Spirit, and in the absolute knowledge of his Father's love for him, Jesus sets out on his mission to save the world, not with a sword or an army, but with only the clothes that he stands up in. No food, no purse, just that deep and irresistible knowledge that he is loved absolutely and completely by his Father in heaven and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What could you do, armed only with love and the Holy Spirit this week? In what ways might you transform the world around you out of love, out of compassion and kindness, through your weakness, and not in your own strength? Because you too are a beloved child of God, saved by the Son, filled with the Holy Spirit, born a child of God through the same baptism as Jesus.

So how will your film play out this week? The overture is finished. It's time to start the big story of the rest of this year. Go, save the world. In the name of Christ, Amen.