

**PASTORAL LETTER FROM BISHOP ALAN HOPES  
THE SOLEMNITY OF THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD  
JANUARY 12TH 2014**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Dear Friends,**

**I hope that you have had a truly blessed celebration of Christmas! I take this opportunity of wishing you a Happy New Year, praying that it will be filled with grace and hope and peace for you all.**

**Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. With this Feast we come to the end of our Christmas celebrations. We have pondered on and wondered at the God who makes himself the Son of Man and shares in our human life, in order that we might become children of God and sharers in his divine life.**

**In the Gospel reading we have just heard, Jesus is baptised by John the Baptist in the river Jordan. He goes down into the same waters where sinners have been baptised by John. God in Christ identifies himself with sinful and wounded humanity. He shows us how He stands in solidarity with us, entering into the messiness of our lives in order to raise them to their fullest dignity and glory.**

**The Baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of his public ministry of preaching the Kingdom of God, of teaching us to love God and one another, of healing the sick. It is a ministry which culminates in his death and resurrection through which he brings to the world forgiveness and the hope of eternal life.**

**I hope that the moment of our own Baptism has not become simply a past memory but is something that we thank God for every day of our lives. For it was at the moment of our Baptism, that we began to share in God's divine life. It was at the moment of our Baptism that our lives began to be revitalised each day with his immense love and mercy.**

**It was also at the moment of our Baptism that God promised to be in our lives. However messy they might have become, however many wrong directions we may take, however many times we spend avoiding him – in every one of our unique and precious lives, God is with us, one of us, on the journey with us.**

**It was also at the moment of our Baptism that God gave each one of us a special vocation – to be a witness to his Son Jesus Christ. How do we witness to Him in our world?**

**First, we must keep our eyes trained on Him. Only then we will be able to live out in our lives what we believe in our hearts. We must live our lives with generosity and love both in what we do and in what we say each day. Let it be possible for others to say of us Christians: *See how they love one another* and to see how we can make a difference to our world.**

**Second, through Baptism we are all made members of God's family, the universal Church. The local parish communities to which we belong, must be families of unity and of love. Only then will we be able to attract and welcome all those who cross our thresholds. But it must not stop there. Our love must overflow into our local communities and make a real difference to them - and especially to the lives of those who are neglected by today's society – those in trouble, those in need, the lonely, the sick, the poor, the hungry and the homeless.**

**Third, our Baptismal vocation means that we must not become so cocooned in our parish families, that we fail to witness and reach out to those who have lost their faith, to those who feel that they are unworthy to follow Jesus Christ, to those who have not even heard of Him. For the love and mercy of God that renews and revitalises our lives each day is the same love and mercy that God has for the whole of humanity. We are called to share with them our own experience of and encounter with Jesus Christ.**

**We have entered the era of the New Evangelisation. As the Church, we are being challenged to put into place new ways in which we can hand on the faith to the next generation. This challenge is for each one of us, for each of our parish communities and for our Diocese.**

**Let us entrust this challenge and our response to the prayers of Mary, Our Lady of Walsingham, to our patrons Felix, Etheldreda and Edmund. Let us ask them to pray that we be faithful to our Baptismal Vocation so as to become true witnesses to Jesus Christ and to bring his Gospel to all people.**

**May God abundantly bless you all!**

**Yours devotedly,**

**Bishop of East Anglia**