Here we have arguably three of the most influential readings in the bible….and for me, each reading offers its own challenges and its own comforts.

The reading from Isaiah speaks directly to me!!!

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;   I have called you by name, you are mine.

That is speaking to me when I don’t feel worthy….when I don’t feel good enough.

Our second reading from the acts of the apostles tells us that at the baptism of the believers Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit…..The holy spirit came down for these believers….

This image speaks to what I feel baptism is all about…..I hope it comes across clear enough….we see Jesus rising from his own baptism….filled with the power of the holy spirit which is descending upon him in the form of a dove…..

This is what I had expected when I was baptised just 7 years ago….I had prepared myself since I was a child….preparing myself for that release….the exhilaration of receiving the holy spirit in that moment….I knelt before the bishop and the water washed over my head….I baptise you in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit……AMEN I shouted with all my energy….but nothing came out of my mouth….the bishop looked at me and said: you could acknowledge it by saying AMEN….I smiled and quietly said Amen.

Where was the holy spirit….where was the feeling of renewal that I was hoping for…..to say I was under whelmed was a gross understatement. NOTHING. I FELT NOTHING!!!

Was it just that the Bishop wasn’t really rocking the baptism power? Could it be that I was not worthy? I was angry that the bishop hadn’t wanted to get wet and refused me the full submersion baptism that I wanted….clearly if he had, then I would have felt the holy spirit in that moment.

I am forever envious…no jealous of those Christians that have an amazing revelation story…..I met Jesus in a night club and he spoke to me….or I had an outer body experience and Jesus led me home…..

My faith has never been like that, its always been a slow burn….so I should not have been surprised when my baptism was the same….

However, from that day the fire burned….slowly at first…within me and brought me to this place….a place where I am baptising in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit….That moment was the real start of my ministry.

In our gospel reading for today, Jesus and John the Baptist meet in the water. John is busy preaching and baptizing those that respond, and Jesus comes to him to be baptized. This is recorded in all the gospels, but different details are in each one.

Of the 4 gospel writers it is Luke who deals most directly with the role of John the Baptist. John, while a bit rough around the edges, is pretty charismatic. He brings some spiritual intensity to people eagerly awaiting the Messiah….he has a presence that can not be denied.

The crowds were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah and questioned him about that. Now this was a crucial moment in John’s ministry -- the test of his ability to be a voice which foretells the coming of Jesus, while resisting the temptation to elevate himself above his station. Too many, with an ego problem and that much power, might fall prey to that temptation…..we just have to look at the politics around our world today.

John has spoken with authority. He has been bold enough to address mixed crowds that contained people with social status far above his own. He didn’t back down from proclaiming his message, but when questioned about his identity, John the Baptist firmly separates himself from the long-expected Messiah whose coming he announces. He makes it clear that the Messiah will be superior to him in a number of ways.

John notes that the difference is so great that he is not even worthy to be his slave. The most menial job that a slave could do was to untie someone’s sandal before washing their feet. It was a nasty job because people’s feet would be dirty and their shoes would be caked with donkey and camel dung from the streets. John is saying that he is not even worthy to do this lowly job for Jesus.

I can relate to John the Baptist. The second baptism service I led I was passing out rubber ducks to the children….there were a lot of children and each one wanted to make sure they had a duck….and some of the parents were a little too eager too….I handed one duck to this lovely young lady and she smiled and whispered in my ear….ARE YOU JESUS?

Standing hear preaching….in my fancy frock and with my bold words….Just like John the Baptist said then and I say now, “Don’t confuse me with someone far greater than me….. I’m too am not worthy to untie his sandals.

Baptism is a beginning. Baptism is about beginning anew. Baptism is a fresh start, not a destination. Baptism and the decision to follow Christ is not a guarantee of an easy life, I life without challenges…without suffering even…but instead, it is a rite of initiation into a way of life in which Jesus promised there would be trials. Along with Jesus, our ministry begins with our baptism.

I know why I needed to be baptised….but have you ever wondered, why did Jesus need to be baptized?” Baptism means that we’re giving up our old ways, our old life, turning around and starting to live as God would have us live. So does Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God need to repent? Of course not!

This is why John is so surprised when Jesus comes to him asking for baptism. John is thinking, along with the rest of us, “What sin are you confessing?” And John, argues against this, saying, “No, I need to be baptized by you,” but Jesus responds, “It is proper for us in this way.”

Jesus had no need to repent of His sins by water baptism. He was sinless! He had nothing to repent of! Jesus Christ was… and is the Son of God and he lived a life without sin.

You may not be surprised that I do have some thoughts on why Jesus was baptized, though. Jesus’ baptism was a sign of his complete dedication to following the will of God. For those who came to John for baptism, this required a change in direction – a turning from their old ways and a turning to God’s way of life. Jesus’ baptism was simply a public declaration that He was following the will of God in His life.

Another reason that I think Jesus was baptized was that it announced the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Jesus’ baptism endorses John’s ministry and marks the succession that was taking place. John’s work has been completed, and Jesus’ is just beginning"

Finally, I think Jesus was baptized as an example to his disciples and to us. Jesus taught his followers to be baptized – and here he is showing them that He would not ask them to do anything He wouldn’t do himself.

But the water in the Jordan is not magic water. The water in our baptismal font is not magic water. The bishop, when he baptised me didn’t have magic fingers or a wand that he waived and I was saved…. The water in our font is just water from the tap.

However, when I stand at that font in a few months time and baptise two very special young people, I guarantee that I will feel that rush of pride…the exhilaration …as I pray over the water and baptise in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit….

In following Jesus’ example in baptism, our journey in faith is just beginning. In baptism we offer our lives to the Christ who joined us in the waters of the Jordan and in baptism….we are brought together through our faith as brothers and sisters in Christ…And we too can hear the same words from God the father, “You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”