

As I was walking along the Fisherman's Pier in Howth the other day, I came across a large Christmas decoration outside one of the fish shops. It is in the form of a large sleigh pulled by white reindeer. At the back of the sleigh there is a sign post pointing vaguely north out beyond Ireland's Eye, indicating the North Pole is 4000 odd miles away.

Signposts are important to us. If you get to a crossroads it is good to see a clear sign pointing to the place you are looking for.

People are very important to us, people who show us the way in life, who act as signposts for us. I think of parents and teachers. I look back, grateful to the start my parents gave me in life. I think of my 'A' Level physics teacher; the Rector who first welcomed me when I started going to Church as a teenager; Professor Ernest Walton in the Physics Department in Trinity who taught me that there was no conflict between my love of physics and my new found faith.

All these were signposts in my life, people who showed me the way in various aspects of my life.

This morning in St Mary's, while this service is going on, we are baptising baby Olivia Ennis. In the course of that service her parents and godparents are going to make promises about the way they are going to bring her up.

By your own prayers and example, by your teaching and love, will you encourage her in the life and faith of the Christian community?

By your example, by your teaching and love will you encourage her? This is a wonderful expression of Christian parenthood as parents guide their children in all aspects of their development. They are, we are called to be signposts.

This is what lies at the heart of our Gospel reading. John was attracting a lot of attention; people were coming from all over the place to hear him. It must have been very tempting to enjoy all that, to bask in the glory of it all. But John deflects all the attention away from himself and points to one who is to come, one of whom he will say, ‘Behold the Lamb of God’, to Jesus.

He is saying, ‘Look all this is not about me.’ There is a lesson here for us. Sometimes in Churches we can get so wrapped up in ourselves, our own organisation, our own prestige, our own survival. When that happens, we lose sight of what we are really here for, as individuals, as a Church. We are here to be living signposts, pointing others to Jesus.

The signpost on that sleigh that I came across on the Fisherman’s pier the other day set me thinking about signposts in my own life, people who have showed me the way in life. Today we think particularly of Ross and Gillian as they embark upon the adventure of bringing up Olivia, to be signposts to this young child on her journey through life. As we think about John the Baptist, as one pointing to Jesus, so we are reminded of our job of being signposts, pointing to Jesus in all that we say and think and do.