**Iona Nixon’s baptism testimony 05/07/2015**

For those of you who don’t know me, I’m Iona and I moved here from Wales in November. I wanted to start by thanking you all for making me feel so welcome and at home here in Park Baptist. This is something I’ll come back to in my journey to standing before you today.

Although I never knew him, my grandfather (a Sheppard) became a Methodist Minister after receiving an epiphany from God. Church has been part of my life from a young age. I grew up attending Monmouth Baptist Church in my hometown. I have some great memories of Sunday school and Church days out from that time, although I think my primary focus of seeing my friends may have been a little off-point!

Since I was introduced to the idea of adult Baptism I have wanted to be baptised, but at the ‘right time’.

I remember one Sunday being told about God having ‘spoken’ to a church member in prayer. This is something which has shaped my journey greatly. Although I didn’t doubt in God’s existence, I wondered if there was something wrong with me because I had never heard God speak to me. This preoccupied me for many years. I desperately wanted to hear a physical voice or receive some sort of ‘sign’ assuring me that God knew me. Looking back I see had this completely backwards; the issue wasn’t whether God knew me but rather whether I knew God.

Around the age of 11 we stopped regularly attending church as a family due to other commitments; however I still held my faith. My teenage years were difficult and not particularly happy. I had a pretty turbulent relationship with God for most of this time. At the age of 16 a number of things happened. The ground floor of our house was destroyed by flooding and we were forced to move out for a year. My only grandparent, who lived some distance away, suffered a number of falls and was moved into a home. My younger brother was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa and OCD. At the same time I became very unwell and was bedbound for a significant length of time. There was no certainty around when or if I would return to health. I felt completely alone. As some of you might know, I’m a fairly active person, and to be in this situation was my version of hell. I truly believed that God had abandoned me and I was being punished. It was a complete surprise to me therefore when a presence of light crept into my days, long after I myself had given up hope. Something inside me knew that God was there with me in those moments, and that was enough.

Eventually I recovered and muddled my way through the remainder of my A levels, though I struggled to understand what I’d experienced. Had I felt God’s presence or did I just feel what I needed to feel? This question was answered while travelling in Tanzania in 2013. My boyfriend, Dave, and I were mugged inside a taxi by 3 men. I cannot fully recall this event, let alone describe it to you. However what I do recall is that in the scariest hour of my life I knew I was completely safe. I knew that no matter what happened, everything was ok and nothing could hurt me. I have never felt so utterly peaceful. This was the most profound experience of my life.

As a psychologist and someone who witnesses on a daily basis the incredible instruments of power our minds are, it might have been easy for me to tell myself that this was a defence mechanism of the mind. Yet that is what it would have been; me telling myself this and ignoring what I knew with certainty. God was with me in that taxi. He has never turned his back on me when I need him most.

Moving to Yarmouth was a complete surprise, yet I have met a number of incredible people here who in themselves are answers to prayer. It has even been said to me by a non-Christian that they feel I was supposed to come here. The support of this Church and in particular the house groups have guided the transformation of my relationship with God. It is now that I feel ready to move forward with my baptism. Though I might not be in my beloved Wales, this is God’s plan for me.