

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Church's prayer for this Sunday

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 10th January 2021

A reading from the Gospel of Mark 1: 4-11

Mark 1:4-11

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism and Testing of Jesus

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



Today's New Testament reading from the book of Acts:

Paul in Ephesus

19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ²and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when^[a] you believed?”

They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

³So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?”

“John’s baptism,” they replied.

⁴Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues^[a] and prophesied. ⁷There were about twelve men in all.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A reflection from Canon Alison Myers, Team Rector of the Lordsbridge Team Epiphany – being a community of the baptised, under lockdown The baptism of Christ Mark 1:4-11 (with Acts 19:1-7)

Today is one of the further festivals that follow Christmas in the extended Epiphany season – the festival of the Baptism of Christ. The story of Jesus’ baptism, like the story of the wisemen, and other gospel stories that we will encounter this month, are all about people the realising the uniqueness of Jesus. Hence epiphany of course.

The story of the baptism of Christ, at the start of a new year, is a prompt for each of us to realise again how each of our baptisms, or christenings if you like, link us to the uniqueness of Jesus, and to each other. When we are baptised, we are baptised into a community.

And that community of the baptised continues to exist whether we are in lockdown or not.

Now I am aware that some listening to or reading this, may not yet have been baptised but in heart and mind you are already part of the community or perhaps would like to be. What I am about to say includes you too.

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



And what I am about to say is in two quite different parts. Either one of them may resonate with you. Take what resonates and run with it – and may it be the work of God’s Spirit in you. If neither resonate, then my apologies and my prayers that next week’s reflection will be one for you.

What does being part of the community of the baptised mean? Here are two of the things that I think it means.

The community of the baptised – mending with gold



Being part of the community of the baptised means being gradually mended, and re-created.

You may not have heard of the Japanese art of kintsugi. It is the mending of broken things using veins of gold or platinum to make them beautiful and purposeful again. The philosophy behind the technique is to recognise the history of the object and visibly to

incorporate the repair into the new piece instead of disguising it. The process usually results in something more beautiful than the original. It is a lovely picture of how God’s Spirit works with and within us.¹

We recognise that like a piece of pottery there are bits of us that are broken or cracked, damaged by our own actions or those of other people, battered by life, and this year bruised by the effects of the pandemic and repeated lockdowns. But, if we let him, the creativity of God’s Spirit mends us, gradually, like a kintsugi pot. The same Spirit that was present at Jesus’ baptism was present at ours. As a member of the community of the baptised, now in lockdown, perhaps this is a moment to let some more of that mending with gold quietly take place.

John the Baptist links baptism with repentance. Some of us (perhaps all of us) may need to think a little about repentance alongside baptism - about the things we might want or need to say sorry to God for so that we can receive his freely offered forgiveness, the habits and attitudes that we need to shed because they are getting in the way of an open relationship with God. Repentance means turning back to God, something that sometimes we need to be deliberate about doing. But even when repentance is given importance, baptism is still incomplete without the power of God’s Spirit, renewing and recreating each of us.

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



I have found the words of John Bell's hymn '*Take this moment*' particularly poignant: "*Take the time to call my name, take the time to mend, who I am and what I've been, all I've failed to tend... Take my talents take my skills, take what's yet to be; let my life be yours, and yet, let me still be me.*"^{vi}

Being baptised is a symbol of our willingness to be mended with gold: '*Let my life be yours, and yet, let me still be me?*'

You could pause and listen to a version of this song [here](#).

The community of the baptised - a pattern for everyday living

Secondly, being part of the community of the baptised gives us a pattern for living every day that includes, but goes far beyond, gathering in church on Sundays.

A week or so ago, I was having a Zoom coffee with a group of congregation members and for some reason, I can't remember why now, the conversation turned to communities such as the Bruderhoff, the Amish, and the Mennonites - groups of people who choose a particular way to live and become distinct from the surrounding culture and its patterns because of it. And we thought, that although we don't choose to live in semi-closed communities, where shared principles require us to reject modern technology or dress in historical styles, nevertheless, as members of the community baptised into Jesus Christ, we should be following a pattern of living that is also distinct from the way of life of others around us.

What does this pattern of living look like? There are different ways it cashes out in practice reflecting the diversity of human beings, but I think it includes these principlesⁱⁱⁱ.

We pray, as important to the Christian life as breathing; the prayers of history as well as those from your heart now; of openness and stillness as well as speech and expression.

We read Scripture, to learn and be shaped, by the stories and poetry of the foundations of our faith and by the teaching of Jesus and the early church; confronting the difficult parts, and letting other parts challenge us.

We belong to a church or a congregation, in care, generosity and hospitality, notwithstanding our diversity, because being a Christian is not a solitary activity, and we need each other.

We gather for worship and we share communion. OK, these may be harder just at the moment when gatherings are more often online than in person, and communion may not be available for a while. But in fact this is only aspect of this pattern of living that has been greatly affected by being in lockdown. And reminding ourselves that God's presence is not limited to places with pews, lecterns and altars is not a bad thing.

If those are more inward aspects of a pattern of living then these next are more outward:

We show and tell the good news of Jesus.

In the way we live and what we say or write, we demonstrate hope, we stand for redemption, we remind people implicitly or explicitly that they are loved by God and that God is present amongst us. And sometimes, we may have the chance to speak about why our faith is important

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



to us, why we follow Jesus, what his death and resurrection means personally, and how God's Spirit is changing us, mending us with gold.

We nurture the faith of others, by creating conversations, activities, and rituals in which the pilgrims and seekers we know can hear and experience the narratives of our faith, and by teaching our children and grandchildren.

We serve those in need, particularly now, both locally and in places that have it tougher than we do here. Some of us offer care in paid jobs and as volunteers.

We work for justice. We are a community of prophets and activists, those who want to make a difference to the marginalised and vulnerable, those who believe that how we live in God's world matters.

We care for creation. Being baptised is being part of God's new creation – being it, praying for it, taking responsibility for it, enabling God to work through us as we are inspired and empowered by his creative Spirit.

These things are all marks of the pattern by which we live as the community of the baptised. Only one is difficult, even impossible, at the moment. All the others we can still lean in to and draw on. And perhaps now is a good time to be considering whether God's Spirit is prompting you to up your game in one of them as a focus for Lent.

Summing up

So, being part of the community of the baptised means being mended with gold by the Spirit's work in you. And being part of the community of the baptised means taking on a distinct pattern of living. I wonder which of these reflections resonates most with you.

And, if at the start of this new year, here and now or later, you would like to remind yourself that you are part of the community of the baptised, lockdown or not, then take a moment prayerfully to dip the tip of your finger in water and make the sign of the cross on your own forehead. As you do so, use your own words to pray to the God whose beloved child you are.

If you would like to consider taking part in the ritual of being baptised as a Christian, or confirming your childhood christening now as an adult, or re-affirming your baptismal vows if your faith has been reawakened recently, or if you just want to find out more about what I've been going on about, then do speak to one of the ministers in your church or in the Lordsbridge Team. We'd be happy to help.

Let us pray –

Heavenly Father,

at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son:

may we recognize him as our Lord

and know ourselves to be your beloved children;

through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



ⁱ <http://www.thisiscolossal.com/2014/05/kintsugi-the-art-of-broken-pieces/> (5 Jan 2018)

ⁱⁱ [Take This Moment - Bing video](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Drawn from these two pieces of thinking: [Rites on the Way: Approaching Baptism | The Church of England](#) and [Marks of Mission \(anglicancommunion.org\)](http://anglicancommunion.org)