

Sunday 10th January – Epiphany I, The Baptism of Christ

Led by Sue Nelms, LLM

Opening words

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

Father, for your gift of water in creation

We give you thanks and praise.

For your Spirit, sweeping over the waters, bringing light and life

We give you thanks and praise.

For your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, baptized in the river Jordan

We give you thanks and praise.

For your new creation, brought to birth by water and the Spirit

We give you thanks and praise.

For your grace bestowed upon us your children, washing away our sins

We give you thanks and praise.

Hymn – Hail to the Lord's Anointed

1 Hail to the Lord's Anointed,
great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed,
his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
to set the captive free,
to take away transgression,
and rule in equity.

2 He comes, with succour
speedy,
to those who suffer wrong;
to help the poor and needy,
and bid the weak be strong;
to give them songs for sighing,
their darkness turn to light,
whose souls, condemned and
dying,
were precious in his sight.

3 He shall come down like
showers
upon the fruitful earth;
that love, joy, hope, like flowers,
spring in his path to birth;
before him, on the mountains,
shall peace the herald go;
and righteousness, in fountains,
from hill to valley flow.

4 Kings shall bow down before
him,
and gold and incense bring;
all nations shall adore him,
his praise all people sing;
to him shall prayer unceasing
and daily vows ascend,
his kingdom still increasing,
a kingdom without end.

5 O'er every foe victorious,
he on his throne shall rest;
from age to age more glorious,
all-blessing and all-blest.
The tide of time shall never
his covenant remove;
his name shall stand for ever,
his changeless name of Love.

James Montgomery (1771-1854)

Meditation on the baptism of Jesus

Take a moment to sit comfortably in your chair and when you are comfortable, close your eyes.

Focus on your breathing – allow it to settle into a comfortable routine as you breathe in and out, in and out.

This morning we will hear the account of John baptizing Jesus. Perhaps you can see the meeting in your mind's eye. John baptizing people and then Jesus approaching him. Perhaps John's heart leapt as it did when he was in his mother Elizabeth's womb and Mary, mother of Jesus approached. He recognized the Saviour of the world and prepared to stand aside for Him, but that was not what Jesus wanted. Jesus, the Messiah, was coming to be baptized by John, the messenger; but surely John should be the one being baptised by Jesus? Reflect for a moment on what might have been going through John's mind "How can I reach out with my hand and touch the head that controls the universe?"

Do we sometimes hold back when Jesus wants us to do something?
Are we sometimes frightened to reach out and touch the head that controls the universe?

So often we see things in terms of human values of privilege and authority; Jesus shows a way of humility and service. He humbled himself by submitting to John's baptism of repentance. Reflect on how humility in our own lives can help us to love and serve the Lord better? Is there a specific area in your life where you need to grow in humility? Psalm 29 verse 4 states "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty". Just as he said those words over his Son for the world to hear, we too can hear the Father say of us, "This is my beloved". Imagine yourself in the Jordan River being baptized with Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to manifest his power in you in a fresh way.

Baptized into his life and death, we can take on the character, and even the very heart, of Jesus. Ask the Lord to give you the faith to believe this truth. Then ask him to open your heart and transform you into his image.

When you are ready please open your eyes again.

Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ says,
'A new commandment I give you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.'
Let us confess to almighty God
our failure to accept his love
and to share it with others.

There is one Body and one Spirit,
and one hope of our calling.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

There is one God and Father of us all,
above all and through all and in all.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Heavenly Father,
you have called us in the Body of your Son Jesus Christ
to continue his work of reconciliation
and reveal you to the world.

Forgive us the sins which tear us apart;
give us the courage to overcome our fears
and to seek that unity which is your gift and your will;
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. **Amen.**

Readings - Read by Clare Crang

Genesis 1:1-5

1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Mark 1:4-11

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, 'The one

who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Acts 19:1-7

19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and 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."

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

"John's baptism," they replied.

⁴ Paul 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." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues[b] and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

Reflection: Rev Alison Myers

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.

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.ⁱ

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.

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.*"ⁱⁱ

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 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

Covenant Prayer:

I am no longer my own but yours.

Put me to what you will,

rank me with whom you will;

put me to doing,

put me to suffering;

let me be employed for you,

or laid aside for you,

exalted for you,

or brought low for you;

let me be full,

let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.'
Amen

Prayers of Intercession led by Barbara Preece

Before we begin our intercessions a short reflection by Dag Hammarskjöld. Today's two readings inspired this choice.

So rests the sky against the earth..... I feel an ache of longing to share in that embrace, to be united and absorbed; a longing like carnal desire, but directed towards earth, water, sky and returned by the whispers of the trees, the fragrance of the soft soil, the caresses of the wind, the embrace of water and light. Content? No, no, no. But refreshed, rested while waiting.

Creator God who brought light out of darkness, as the Earth, in its northern latitudes, tilts and turns towards the sun, winter nods to the possibility of spring and daylight hours slowly lengthen, help us to catch hold of the hope of the new life that growing light reveals and enable us to know that it is good.
May the Spirit of God: **Fill us with light.**

Faithful God your Spirit hovered over the deep when the first day dawned and as your Son emerged from the waters of the River Jordan carried to him your message that he was your beloved Son, strengthen in us the knowledge that we too are beloved by you and however far we wander we can never stray beyond your all encompassing care.
May the Spirit of God: **Fill us with trust.**

Loving God we pray for all who are distressed, those who can no longer care for themselves, those with physical and mental health conditions, those who are old, frail or confused and those who find that the tightening grip of the pandemic is wounding their relationships or their education and future prospects. From our wounded and fearful places show us all how to be generous and compassionate to those who come our way today and in the days to come.

May the Spirit of God: **Fill us with compassion.**

Attentive and caring God we give you thanks for all those who stand in the frontline of the campaign to defeat and disarm the corona virus.

We remember all key workers, shop workers, refuse collectors, health workers, scientists, teachers, local and national leaders, parents and carers, volunteers and those who simply gift small acts of kindness.

May the Spirit of God: **Fill us with gratitude.**

God of all creation give strength to those who fight for a fair share for all from the bounty of the Earth and help us resist behaviour that results in the degradation and destruction of the perfect planet we call home.

May the Spirit of God: **Fill us with hope.**

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Collect:

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.**

Believing the promises of God,
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,**

**your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

Blessing

May God, who in Christ gives us a spring of water
welling up to eternal life,
perfect in us the image of his glory;
and the blessing of God almighty
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen

ⁱ <http://www.thiscolossal.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 \(anglicancommunion.org\)](#)