

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 10th January 2021

Sunday Worship: Baptism of the Lord

with Revd Neil Coulson

Hello, I hope you are well. Today is the Sunday within the lectionary cycle when we look at the baptism of Jesus. This year, we will read the Gospel of Mark 1:4-11 and reflect upon of his baptism by John. Our Old Testament reading is Genesis 1:1-5 and so the theme of God's creation, and our calling to nurture it, will also feature within our worship today.

Let us worship God together:

Call to worship

This is the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

We are the family of God.

And are called by God's name.

We are heirs of Christ's kingdom.

And born of the Spirit.

Let us, therefore, come together in thanksgiving. **Amen.**

A prayer of approach

Lord God, giver of light and life,
by your word you bring everything into being –
the far-flung galaxies and the tiniest atomic particle.
You have given us a world to enjoy and to care for.
Give us compassion in the use of its resources,
wisdom in our stewardship of your gifts,
and reverence for all that you have made –
for Jesus' sake. **Amen.**

Hymn For the beauty of the earth (R&S 41)

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:

*Gracious God, to thee we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon, and stars of light:

For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight:

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above;
for all gentle thoughts and mild:

For each perfect gift of thine
to our race so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

For thy people, evermore
lifting holy hands above,
offering up on every shore
their pure sacrifice of love:

Folliot S. Pierpoint. (1835-1917)

A prayer of confession

Lord, when you came into the world, things changed. When we came into a relationship with you, things changed. Life became filled with a new sense of purpose and peace. But, Lord, sometimes we let you down by doing wrong things or failing to do right things.

We are sorry, Lord.

Sometimes, Lord, through pride, stubbornness or fear we build barriers and keep others at arm's length – even you, Lord.

We are sorry, Lord.

At times we give in to our weaknesses and temptations, failing to draw on your strength.
At times we are troubled by difficult situations and find it hard to trust you.

We are sorry, Lord.

Help us to turn such things around and turn to you.

Help us to learn from the past and, drawing on your strength and peace,
make a better future.

Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

O God, when Jesus was baptized, you spoke of your love for him. You showed your love for us through Jesus' death and resurrection. By the power of the cross, the darkness of our wrongdoing is banished by the light of your loving forgiveness.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

God, through your might and power the world was created,
and through it now the world is changed, and ever changing.

We read in the Scriptures of how you changed people's lives.

We hear it in the stories of saints old and new.

We know it through the experience and lives of our own communities.

We thank and praise you for all that you have done through the changes you have made,
and are still making, in our lives.

We thank and praise you for the gift of your Holy Spirit who gives us,
your people, grace, strength and the blessing of your peace.

Amen.

Old Testament Reading**Genesis 1:1-5 (NRSV)**

1 In the beginning when God created^[a] 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^[b] 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.

Gospel Reading**Mark 1:4-11 (NRSV)**

⁴ John the baptizer appeared^[a] 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^[b] water; but he will baptize you with^[c] the Holy Spirit.'

The Baptism of Jesus

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;^[d] with you I am well pleased.'

Reflection

As we read on the second Sunday of Advent, Mark launches into his Gospel with 'the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (1:1). He sets out the scene for transformation by sharing the story of John the Baptist who comes in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 40:3) and who prepares 'the way of the Lord' and 'makes his paths straight'. These are extraordinary events for sure! We read of 'people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem' going out to hear John and to be 'baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.' Wow! And this is just the prologue! As we know, there is much more to come and for John the Baptist, his own ministry will peak with his proclamation that 'one who is more powerful than I is coming after me...' 'I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' And what happens next? Jesus appears.

As one writer helpfully notes, 'the whole passage centres on new beginnings.' Mark announces in the very first sentence of his Gospel how the world is going to be totally transformed now that 'Jesus Christ, the Son of God', is here. He continues by communicating to his readers just how this new transformed life becomes a reality: they are offered the opportunity of a fresh start. The Greek word usually translated 'repentance' (1:4) holds the idea of 'a change of mind' or 'a change of heart', a sense of a 'turn around' and of starting off again in a new direction. It is much more forward looking, it is much more about the promise of a new start, a new future than it is about dwelling on past sins and failures. However, this is only the first step into the new life that God graciously invites us all to embrace.

Of course, the baptism of Jesus is also a wonderful 'new beginning'. Although there's no need for Jesus to repent, still, this is very much a new stage in his life, as he leaves behind his private life in Nazareth and openly embraces a life of public ministry, 'proclaiming the good news of God' (1:16). One commentator explains what an absolutely amazing thing God does at Jesus' Baptism: 'People of Jesus' time tended to imagine a rigid, unbreakable barrier dividing earth and heaven, one that made it impossible for humanity to reach God. Now this barrier is torn apart (1:10) and God's Spirit comes powering through, like a descending dove. The world is indeed changed and those who experience Jesus' baptism in the Spirit will begin to discover what that means.'

Not only might we have welcomed, embraced a new beginning in God in our own baptisms, whichever tradition we stand in, perhaps, as we stand so near to the beginning of this new year, we might also be open to a fresh start in our own walk with God. Perhaps in these very challenging and difficult times

within our lives, within our world, we would do well to look to God, to be open to his Spirit and his loving affirmation upon our lives, just as Jesus was in the moment of his baptism and at other key moments in his life. And as we look around at the moment and we see the suffering, the sickness, the loss because of the pandemic, the shocking scenes this week in Washington, D.C., the wars and the violence occurring all across the world, the climate crisis sadly unveiled right before us, perhaps we long for, we pray for, we work for transformative new beginnings right across the whole of God's creation: O God, 'thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.' Amen.

Hymn On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry (R&S 134)

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
come then and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings from the King of kings.

Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
make straight the way for God within;
and in each heart prepare a home
where such a mighty guest may come.

For thou art our salvation, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward;
without thy grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.

To heal the sick stretch out thy hand,
and bid the fallen sinner stand;
shine forth, and let thy light restore
earth's own true loveliness once more.

All praise, eternal Son, to thee
whose advent sets thy people free,
whom, with the Father, we adore,
and Spirit blest, for evermore.

Charles Coffin (1676-1749)

Our prayers of intercession

Eternal God, it feels as if the whole world has changed
and yet in you there is stability and the opportunity of a new beginning.
So, we pray now for those whose lives are in turmoil,
those whose lives have been turned upside down, those who feel lost.
May they feel supported, find fresh hope,
and use our prayers in Jesus' name to strengthen them.

We pray for those for whom the lockdown has come as a relief,
for those who now feel safer,
but we pray too for those who now feel desperate,
alone and worried about their jobs, their finances, their mental health.
May they feel supported, find fresh hope:
Lord, use our prayers in Jesus' name to strengthen them.

We pray for children and young adults as their schooling is disrupted,
we pray for those who enjoy learning from home,
but pray too for those who will lose confidence,
who miss their friends, who feel vulnerable.

We remember their parents
and the parents of children with special needs,
struggling to cope on their own.

We pray for teachers, administrative staff,
and all those who feel overwhelmed.

May they feel supported, find fresh hope:

Lord, use our prayers in Jesus' name to strengthen them.

We pray for the people of a divided America
at this time of political and racial tension and transition,
for outgoing President Donald Trump and President-elect Joe Biden.

We pray too for countries around the world
struggling with ethnic violence and militancy.

We remember the people of West Africa
and in particular the people of Niger, villagers who live in fear,
those who have been wounded in recent attacks
and those who have been bereaved.

May they feel supported, find fresh hope:

Lord, use our prayers in Jesus' name to strengthen them.

We pray for those who have been injured
or lost their homes and loved ones in the severe weather,
remembering particularly the people of Norway affected by landslides,
and those in Australia battered by cyclones.

We pray for those who work in health care, especially at this very demanding time,
for those in the emergency services,
and those whose work is dangerous and traumatic.

We pray for those in refugee camps
with little protection from the weather,
those who sleep rough,
those who can't afford to heat their homes.

We pray for the work of the Ipswich Night Shelter
as they care for those in our own town who are homeless.

May they feel supported, find fresh hope:

Lord, use our prayers in Jesus' name to strengthen them.

We pray for one another, our families,
our community, our church fellowship.

May we support those who are unwell or grieving.

We pray for all those among us who have sadly lost loved ones recently.

We think especially of Adrian and Stephanie and the family. Pearl's funeral was on Wednesday.

And also of Kathy and her family following the loss of her mother-in-law.

We pray for those who are unwell, thinking especially of
Joan, Chikondi, Phyllis D., Doreen, Brian, Irene,

Re-Anette's mother, and the whole family in South Africa.

May they all know your love, peace and healing presence in their time of need.

May we bring fresh hope to those who feel forgotten and are vulnerable,
and may we, both practically and prayerfully,
share our faith in Jesus,

in whose name we entrust these prayers to you.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy name;
 thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
 on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread,
 and forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.
 Lead us not into temptation;
 but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom,
 the power and the glory,
 for ever and ever.

Amen.

A sending out prayer

Lord, help us to be open to your prompting
 as we seek to discover what you would have us be and do.
 Remind us again and again that you have promised to be our
 guide and companion on our journey.
 Help us to look forward with renewed commitment,
 and bless our thinking and speaking and doing.
 In your name.

Amen.

The Blessing

May the blessing of almighty God,
 Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
 be upon you and those you love, this day and always.

Amen.

The Grace

Holding each other in our prayers, we say together:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 the love of God
 and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
 be with us all,
 for evermore. Amen.**

May God bless you all richly, with our love and best wishes to you and your families,

Neil

Resources taken and adapted from *ROOTS for Churches Limited*.

Christ Church's CCLI licence number is 181784.

The Bible reading is from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.