

**THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES: Telephone Service for Sunday 10th
January 2021 – The Baptism of Christ**

The service for today has been prepared by Liz Howlett, with intercessions by James Webster and can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley churches for the First Sunday of Epiphany – the Baptism of Christ.

Invitation to Confession

By the mercies of God, let us confess our sins and present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him, which is our spiritual worship.

Prayers of Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart:

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins, heal and strengthen us by his Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Collect

Heavenly Father, at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son: may we recognise him as our Lord and know ourselves to be your beloved children; through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Amen.

Old Testament Reading

Genesis 1: 1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 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. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 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

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 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. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." In

those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Reflection

'In the beginning 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.'

We find ourselves in lockdown once again – another clear reminder that as humans we are not in charge – that much of what we have ordered or structured in our lives as individuals, families, nations, is very vulnerable to the uncertainties wrought by an ever-changing virus. For some, maybe most of us, this is a very worrying time. Thankfully the vaccines hold out hope for the future but we are having to travel through tough times to reach that hopeful stage. Perhaps that picture of the primeval waters which begins the great poem of creation in Genesis – that time before life, light and order are spoken into being by God the creator – perhaps that resonates with some of our current experience.

The author of this passage invites us to imagine the vast expanses of unlit water, with the wind from God sweeping over them. The use of 'wind-swept' language may encourage an even stronger sense of the chaos before God brings order, but the author has a deeper, more positive meaning in mind, for in Hebrew, the word for wind 'ruah' is also the word for spirit. We are encouraged to see that even before anything is brought into being, there was God's Spirit. And moreover, the word translated here as 'swept' is used elsewhere in the Old Testament of an eagle fluttering over its young – an 'attentive, concerned and protective hovering'. Therefore, let us imagine God's spirit hovering protectively, attentively, over the waters, whilst waiting for God to speak the universe into being. As the Spirit was there as a positive presence in that time of emptiness and darkness, so too we can be reassured that the Spirit is with us in our times of uncertainty and worry.

This Old Testament passage is also a helpful lens through which to view the baptism of Jesus, the focus of our gospel reading for today. There are the waters, in this case the river Jordan, in which many, many people are being baptised in response to John's call to repent. Here is the Spirit of God, descending upon Jesus, immediately after his own baptism, like a dove, hovering, protectively, expectantly. And now we hear the voice of God, 'You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased'. This is the moment of new creation, a sign of a new world coming.

We are encouraged to reflect very carefully about this moment in Christ's life – because Jesus didn't **need** to be baptised. We can imagine that others were coming because they did have a deep sense of needing to repent, literally to turn around and start walking back to God. They were only too well aware of their shortcomings, their need of forgiveness, the things that were hurting them

and others that they wanted to walk away from and leave in the waters. Jesus was not in that position and yet chose to be baptised by John along with all the others. For him, his baptism can be seen as a sign of his solidarity with humanity, in all its vulnerabilities and weaknesses. Going down into those murky waters, where so many burdens had been left behind by others. And this solidarity with those who recognised their need of God's mercy continued right through his ministry – as he was found in the company of so many ostracised by their neighbours – tax collectors for example and those with skin diseases; those who were feared to be a risk to themselves and others; those who could never hope to reach an acceptable standard. And in his agony on the cross, he is found alongside criminals, welcoming the one who was willing, to join him after death in paradise. Jesus practised a generous ministry of welcome to those not welcomed in their own families and communities.

The author of this gospel wants us to understand the significance of Jesus's baptism - that it is at this very moment of solidarity with broken humanity, as Jesus comes up out of the waters, that this is when the Spirit hovers over him and he is proclaimed to be God's Son. This is the new creation, the new world into which we too have been baptised. It is a generous world, where forgiveness reigns, for everyone is in the same boat, or rather, has gone through the same waters of baptism. No one enters because of their own inherent goodness or rule keeping but through the mercy of God.

It can be helpful from time to time to renew our baptismal promises: to recommit ourselves to God the Father, to realign ourselves with Christ our brother and saviour, who entered our world in solidarity with humanity and to remember the protective, attentive and concerned Holy Spirit hovering above, around, between and within us. As we step out into the challenging next few weeks and months ahead of us, now seems a very appropriate time to do this and we will be invited to join in a renewal of baptismal promises towards the end of this service. Amen.

Prayers

And so we pray.

Heavenly Father, you sent down the Holy Spirit to embrace our Lord Jesus as he rose from the waters of the river Jordan in baptism. You spoke and confirmed him as your Son.

As we rise up to reach for you in prayer, send down your Holy Spirit on us, that we might be lifted into your presence; that we might be granted, as was Jesus, your approval and blessings, confirmed as your beloved children.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, let your presence be revealed in this time of trial and uncertainty throughout the world, this time of pandemic, global tensions and conflict. Help us as children of the family of God to which we are called, to hold in generosity of understanding and love our fellow humans with whom we share this world of your creation.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father. We pray for those who do not know you, those who do not believe in you. Those who are bowed down with fear, grief or sickness. Remembering in this moment before you, those we know to be in need of prayer ... and our own concerns. Let your power illuminate their lives and ours, bringing courage, comfort and healing, as is the need. Pour down your blessing on those who serve in the care of the distressed, the many essential workers and those who are the custodians of children and their futures. Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father. We give thanks for the gift of your son, who through his resurrection overcame the power of death. We remember those who have died ... May they rest in peace and rise in glory. Giving thanks for Him again, who opened the gates to your eternal promise.

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

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray
**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.
And 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**

Renewal of Baptismal Vows

In baptism, God calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light. To follow Christ means dying to sin and rising to new life with him. Therefore I ask:

Do you turn to Christ?

I turn to Christ.

Do you repent of your sins?

I repent of my sins.

Do you renounce evil?

I renounce evil.

Introduction to the Peace

We are the body of Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body. Let us then pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you. Amen.

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