

Morning Worship for the Baptism of Christ

Preparation

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you.

**Loving Lord,
fill us with your life-giving,
joy-giving, peace-giving presence,
that we may praise you now with our lips
and all the day long with our lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Cast your burden upon the Lord:

And he will sustain you.

Create in us clean hearts O God:

And renew a right spirit within us.

Cast us not away from your presence:

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Give us the joy of your saving help:

And sustain us with your life-giving Spirit.

Blessed be the Lord day by day:

The God of our salvation who bears our burdens.

We confess our sins.

The grace of God has dawned upon the world through
our Saviour Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for us to purify
a people as his own.

Let us confess our sins.

**Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse you from your sins,
and restore you in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Praise

O Lord, open our lips:

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Let us worship the Lord:

All praise to his name.

The Benedictus (The Song of Zechariah)

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel,

who has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,

born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets God promised of old

to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all that hate us,

To show mercy to our ancestors,

and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:

to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

Free to worship him without fear,

holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation

by the forgiveness of all their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God

the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

**To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of
death,**

and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it

was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen. (Luke

1.68–79)

The word of God

A reading from the book of Genesis.

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

This is the word of the Lord; **thanks be to God** (Genesis 1:1–5)

Mark 1:4–11

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord

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.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord; **Praise to you O Christ**

A reflection by Rev'd Joy Cousins

It's always fascinating to see the wonders of planet earth as displayed in David Attenborough's documentaries. The new series is called 'A perfect planet' referring to the way in which everything on earth is held in balance to provide the ideal conditions to sustain life in such glorious variety. The first episode was about volcanoes and their crucial part in maintaining a living and evolving landscape. The Bible begins with stories about the creation. These are not scientific texts, as science was unknown to the writers of Genesis. Rather they are stories of how God is there in the beginning bringing the creation into being.

It might seem a surprise that the Old Testament lesson for today is Genesis chapter 1. But Genesis 1 is all about water and the spirit. The writers of Genesis describe the earth in the beginning as being dark and covered with water; an 'ominous, threatening, rebellious and destructive' body of water. It is from this chaos that God begins to create. The Hebrew word, 'ruah' is often translated as 'spirit'. So the image is one of the spirit of God blowing over the waters and creating a life-space which is safe and dry. This space where life can flourish is created by God, a free gift to his creatures. God makes life possible by the working of his spirit. In these few short verses we read of God creator, Word and Spirit at work in the universe.

Jesus' baptism is another occasion when we witness the Trinitarian God at work through Father (often called the creator), Son (known also as the Word) and Spirit. Mark's gospel is generally held to be the first gospel to be written, probably within 30 years of Jesus' death and resurrection. It is thought that Mark used original eyewitness accounts from those who knew Jesus and spent time with him, including some of the disciples. Peter is often held to be one of the sources for Mark's writing. By contrast with the other gospel writers, Mark's account of Jesus' baptism is very brief, confined to a few verses. All four gospel writers make clear that John the Baptist sees Jesus as more powerful than he is. [John] proclaimed: 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' (Mark 1:7-8)

For Mark, the focal point of the baptism of Jesus is the revelation of his identity as Son of God in verse 11. As he is baptised in the water, Jesus sees the heavens torn apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him and hears a heavenly voice declaring that he is God's Son. In all three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, there is a voice from heaven, a voice of love and affirmation. 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' Mark 1:11) It is interesting that this affirmation of Jesus comes right at the beginning of his ministry. It is the first thing which is recorded about Jesus in Mark. There is no record that he has done anything of significance yet. God is publicly endorsing Jesus not for anything he has done but because of who he is- my Son, the beloved. Although Jesus' relationship with the Father was unique, we are also called to be children of God. Often as Christians we can become so caught up in doing things for God that we forget he called us not for what we do but for who we are. Especially for those of us who were baptised as infants, we entered

into his grace and were beloved before we were even able to respond for ourselves. To me that is a profound image of the love and care which God has for each one of us.

For Jesus, the revelation of his identity as Son of God prompts his journey into the wilderness and the beginning of his ministry. This declaration of who he is shows him to be much greater than the Prophets of old. At crucial points in the story, Mark reinforces this identification of Jesus as the Son of God. We see it at the Transfiguration when a voice from the clouds again declares Jesus to be 'my Son, the beloved'. It is there again at Jesus' trial when Jesus is asked by the High Priest 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One' and Jesus responds, 'I am.' (Mark 14:61-62) And when Jesus dies on the cross, the centurion who is watching him declares, 'Truly this man was God's son.' (Mark 15:39)

Yet Mark does not evade the questions of how Jesus can be the Messiah and also undergo suffering and crucifixion. Throughout Mark's story, characters struggle to understand what Jesus' words and actions mean. His gospel is a search for answers to this paradox.

As we begin a new year we face many challenges both individually and as a community. The Bible tells the story of God's love for his creation and for his people. Through his life, death and resurrection Jesus reveals the way to the Father and urges us to come and follow him.

I'd like to end with some words of Gregory of Nazianzus who was a fourth century Church Father.

Today let us honour Christ's baptism and celebrate this feast in holiness. Be cleansed entirely and continue to be cleansed. Nothing gives such pleasure to God as the conversion and salvation of human beings, for whom his every word and every revelation exists. He wants you to become a living force for all humanity, lights shining in the world. You are to be radiant lights as you stand beside Christ, the great light, bathed in the glory of him who is the light of heaven. You are to enjoy more and more the pure and dazzling light of the Trinity, as now you have received- though not in its fullness- a ray of splendour.

Our faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, who made all things?
We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in his Son Jesus Christ, who redeemed the world?
We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in his Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God?
We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the church.
This is our faith.
We believe and trust in one God:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers led by Diane Goodwin

Dear father, as we look back on the Christmas season and some of the lovely presents we have received, we may also be reflecting on the past year. A year where we may have faced disruption, disappointment and even loss... We may believe that all our hopes and expectations have been dashed. But God of love and life, help us to take time to look deeper within ourselves and discover the wonderful gifts you have already given us – nature's beauty, laughter, family and friends. As well as the gifts you want to grow within us ...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We know that these fruits are life's greatest blessing. May we use the blessings to help and encourage others to find faith in your Word and to show them the talents that they also have through you.

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

We pray for all our leaders, local, national and international. May they put the skills you have given them to good use. Gift them with the wisdom to make good decisions, to lead confidently and the strength and determination to stand up for what is right and just. To be the voice of those who have no voice and a helping hand to those who are bent low in the dust.

We thank you Lord for the creative and caring gifts you have given scientists and medics to help heal and minister to us. For teachers imparting knowledge to the next generation. May all of us recognise

our own potential and never underestimate all that we can achieve. And as the wise men laid their gifts at the feet of your Son may we also lay our gifts before you, a sacrifice for the benefit of our fellow men, doing this in loving service to one another as Jesus taught us. Lord in your mercy.....**hear our prayer**

We lift ourselves as a church community and ask that you would help us to walk humbly in a manner worthy of the calling You have given us. Help us in all our interactions with one another to have patient and gentle hearts, bearing with one another in love. Help us to serve others in the community, however we can, and in so doing build up your kingdom. Lord in your mercy.....**hear our prayer**

Lord, we pray for all those suffering illness, whether physically or mentally. Those who face pain and trouble alone with no-one to hold their hand. We pray they would find comfort in you and know that your eternal arms will always hold them. And may we take encouragement from your words that two are better than one - if either falls down, one can help the other up.

We think of all those who have been dear to us and have died in the faith of Christ and now rest with Him. And we especially remember those whose years mind falls at this time. Lord in your mercy.....**hear our prayer**

So as we begin our journey into 2021, let us fix our eyes firmly on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith and give thanks to the Alpha and the Omega, one who knows the end from the beginning and who goes before us and watches over us always. Merciful Father, **Accept our prayers for the sake of your son our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen**

A prayer for the coronavirus pandemic

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

We join together with Christians throughout the world in the prayer that Jesus taught us.

**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.**

Conclusion

Collect for the day

Eternal Father,
who at the baptism of Jesus
revealed him to be your Son,
anointing him with the Holy Spirit:
grant to us,
who are born again by water and the Spirit,
that we may be faithful to our calling
as your adopted children;
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

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe.

To you be glory and praise for ever.

From the rising of the sun to its setting
your name is proclaimed in all the world.

To you be glory and praise for ever.

When the time had fully come
you sent the Sun of Righteousness.

In him the fullness of your glory dwells.

To you be glory and praise for ever.

We end with the words of the Grace, an ancient Christian prayer of fellowship, remembering that although we are not together in person, nothing can separate us from the love of God found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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

If you would like us to pray for you during this time of stress and anxiety, please leave a prayer request on the website email address or contact Joy (vicar@stmaryseatonbray.org.uk)

Reverend Joy Cousans
Reverend Stephen Burge

