



Diocese of Ely
THREE RIVERS GROUP
Chippenham, Fordham, Isleham, Kennett, Snailwell

Sunday 10th January 2021

The Baptism of Christ

(‘Plough Sunday’)

Introit: Grayston Ives, ‘Listen Sweet Dove’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJnNAoa0Ypg>

Plough Sunday is traditionally held on the Sunday immediately following the Feast of the Epiphany, and marks the beginning of the agricultural year. We have become aware in new ways recently of the vital work of those who provide us with food and other essential supplies. As you prepare for this service you might like to use these prayers which ask for God’s blessing on the plough and the seed, both of which will help to nourish us all over the coming months:

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation: for in your abundant care you have given us fertile land, rich soil, the seasons in their courses. You provide seed for sowing, water, light and warmth to bring forth the miracle of growth. You give us skill to work the land, to prepare and nourish it, that it may be fruitful. By your blessing, let this plough be a sign of all that you promise to us. Prosper the work of our hands, and provide abundant crops for your people to share.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God for ever.

God speed the plough.

God speed the plough.

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation: in your goodness you have given us this seed to sow. In it we perceive the promise of life, the wonders of your creative love. By your blessing, let this seed be for us a sign of your creative power, that in sowing and watering, tending and watching, we may see the miracle of growth, and in due course reap a rich harvest. As this seed must die to give life, reveal to us the saving power of your Son, who died that we might live, and plant in us the good seed of your word.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God for ever.

By itself the earth produces:

first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain shall appear.

Hymn: Thou Whose Almighty Word

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGuUQjDkQA4>

Thou, whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight;
hear us, we humbly pray,
and, where the Gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving, holy Dove,
speed forth thy flight!
Move on the water's face
bearing the lamp of grace,
and, in earth's darkest place,
let there be light!

Holy and blessed Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might;
boundless as ocean's tide,
rolling in fullest pride,
through the earth far and wide,
let there be light!

Invitation to Confession

Because God was merciful, he saved us through the water of rebirth and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. But through sin we have fallen away from our baptism. Let us return to the Lord and renew our faith in his promises by confessing our sins in penitence.

Lord Jesus, illuminate the darkness in our hearts:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, open our eyes to your saving love:

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, unstop our ears to hear your living word:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

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.**

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.**

Readings

A reading from the book 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.

Psalm 29

1 Ascribe to the Lord, you powers of heaven, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

2 Ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

3 The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders; the Lord is upon the mighty waters.

4 The voice of the Lord is mighty in operation; the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice.

5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon;

6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf and Sirion like a young wild ox.

7 The voice of the Lord splits the flash of lightning; the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

8 The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe and strips the forests bare; in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'

9 The Lord sits enthroned above the water flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king for evermore.

10 The Lord shall give strength to his people; the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (19.1-7)

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, 'Did you receive the

Holy Spirit when you became believers?’ They replied, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ Then he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They answered, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—altogether there were about twelve of them.

A reading from St. Mark’s Gospel (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.’

Sermon (with thanks to Anna Jones) [<https://youtu.be/TzttX7bBiBw>]

How often do you think of your baptism?

For many of us, I guess, it’s not something we have clear first-hand memories of. If you were baptized or christened as a baby or a very small child it likely happened before you could remember very much at all. Perhaps there may be evidence from a photograph, or maybe more likely an artefact like a family christening gown, a candle, or a silver napkin ring. But how often do you look at these things and think about what happened that day? Would you know where to find your certificate?

For those of us baptized at a later age, especially as an adult, remembering our baptism may be more of a thing. The chances are you had more of a say in what was happening; in fact, you probably initiated it. What prompted you to do it, and what difference did it make? What memories do you have of what happened?

My baptism at age 4 was somewhere between those two positions. For a long time the event was shrouded in the sort of vagueness that makes a good family story but is of no lasting consequence. My brother and I were ‘done’ together, in a short ceremony separate from the main service attended by my parents, Gran and two godparents.

Until quite recently the photograph of us all gathered at the West Door of our church seemed the only record of it happening, since there was long since no trace of a certificate (if, indeed, one was ever issued), and so the date remained a mystery. How reliable my 'memories' of the day are is anybody's guess, since they're no doubt now shaped and reinforced by other factors, but for a good while holding on to the fragments them seemed especially important because there wasn't much else to make the whole thing real. I'm pretty confident I can remember reaching up to the font where all the action was evidently going to take place, desperate to prove I was older, bigger and undoubtedly wise than my baby brother; and I will swear to my dying day that my memories of fittings for that dark green velvet jacket and white and green plaid skirt my mother made in the box room part-way up the stairs of our house in St David's Avenue are the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But of what actually *happened* at my baptism, my memory is not much help.

Not having a certificate of baptism turns out to be a bit of a handicap when it comes to ordination training, but fortunately that was eventually sorted out, and a much later vicar of my original home church was able to provide a transcription from the registers well in advance of June 2019, so I'm legal, at least in that sense. That's obviously a relief, but it's good now too to be able to set aside a bit of time on 8 April each year to think about my baptism, to give thanks for those who put me up for it, and for all that has happened since.

There are, of course, many good reasons to remember our baptism beyond getting the chronology right and setting the record straight. It's something we're particularly encouraged to do during the season of Epiphany, and so, today, we find ourselves celebrating the Baptism of Jesus, by John, in the River Jordan. Mark's account in our gospel reading makes it clear that this baptism was no ordinary event.

“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.’ [Mark 1:10-11]

This must have been quite a sight, and quite a sound. What was it like to be there? What did John and all the other people around think had happened?

The start of Advent each year brings us into a new lectionary year, and for the next few months we're going to be journeying in our Gospel readings through Mark (with a few bits from John thrown in as well for good measure). Today's the first day we've really had chance to notice the change because we've had a run of Christmassy readings over recent weeks, and Mark, as it happens, has nothing to say about the birth of Jesus. Our very first introduction to Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is here in the passage we've read today, at his baptism.

Mark is the shortest of the four Gospel accounts in the New Testament, and compared to the others it's quite compressed. All the stories of Jesus' life and teaching are fitted into 10 chapters, leaving the remaining 6 to describe what for Mark are the central

events, namely those few days in Jerusalem leading up to the Crucifixion. It means that everything beforehand is narrated at a fast pace, and there's no space for things that aren't relevant. So hold on to your hats, folks, we're in for a quick ride over the next few weeks!

While Mark has a practical reason for keeping his Gospel well focussed, it's still significant that he chooses to introduce 'the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' with an account of his baptism. Baptism is in every sense a sign of a new beginning. Just as God breathes life into the waters of chaos at the opening of Genesis, so the Holy Spirit breathes new life into the newly baptized, and the seeds of God planted deep within each and every one of us are invited to flourish in new and life-giving ways.

It wasn't always like that, of course. Jesus' cousin John had been baptizing people for a while already, offering forgiveness of sins through a kind of ritual cleansing with water, and this had spread widely, including to Ephesus, where Paul encountered a number of his disciples, as we heard in our reading from Acts. But John himself knew this was but a step along the way; there was another, deeper, richer kind of baptism yet to come. John knew that with the arrival of the Messiah would come the opportunity to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, so that not only would our sins be forgiven (though that is, and remains, a wonderful thing in itself), but we would be claimed by and forever connected to the God who calls us by name and makes us his own.

And this is the moment. As Jesus emerges from the water, the heavens open, the Spirit descends and he is proclaimed the Son of God. Mark could not have chosen a better or more persuasive way to tell us who Jesus is, and to start the story of his ministry. Behold the Lamb of God indeed!

That's quite a lot happening in one baptism, for sure. For most of us I guess our baptisms were a lot less dramatic, at least outwardly so. So how does Jesus's baptism relate to ours, and how does remembering it help? For that matter, why was Jesus baptized at all?

The two processes of being washed clean of our sins, and being invited to new life in the Spirit that we celebrate in baptism are two essential functions of our humanity. They recognise that even as we come from God, we stray from God, and yet God seeks to restore us and make us whole again. In that sense, baptism is a fundamental affirmation of our humanity. So if Jesus is to be fully human, truly one of us, he too must be baptized. Through his baptism Jesus comes right down to our level, where, in the words of Rowan Williams, "things are shapeless and meaningless, and in a state of vulnerability and unprotectedness".¹ From there, in the middle of the mess and the chaos, he begins to transform us from within.

But that being with doesn't stop at the end of the baptism service. Through the Holy Spirit that presence remains with us. "[B]aptism means being with Jesus 'in the depths':

¹ Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer* (London, 2014), p. 4.

the depths of human need, including the depths of our own selves in their need – but also in the depths of God’s love; in the depths where the Spirit is re-creating and refreshing human life as God meant it to be.”²

It feels like we need to hear this wisdom of the Epiphany season more than ever this year. So why not look again at that photograph, polish that napkin ring, light a candle (any candle will do) and remember your baptism, when God called you out of the chaos and into the light, to new life in Him, where we are never alone. **Amen.**

Hymn: River, Wash Over Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0Am96tYuVo>

River, wash over me

Cleanse me and make me new

Bathe me, refresh me and fill me anew

River wash over me

Spirit, watch over me

Lead me to Jesus’ feet

Cause me to worship and fill me anew

Spirit, watch over me

Jesus, rule over me

Reign over all my heart

Teach me to praise you and fill me anew

Jesus, rule over me

Teach me to praise you and fill me anew

Jesus, rule over me

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,

² Williams, p. 5.

and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. **Amen.**

Intercessions (*with thanks to Sue Potts*)

Then God said, 'Let there be light! And there was light'

Awesome, Creator God; In this bright season of Epiphany, may we be drawn to look upward to the night skies and, with hearts full of awe and wonder, give thanks to the One who spoke light into darkness and created the heavens in all their glory. That we, as the psalmist, may be drawn to exclaim that 'The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork'.

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

Heavenly, gracious father; In this bright season of Epiphany, may we, with hearts full of reassurance, give thanks for the revealing of your Son through the waters of Baptism. May we be drawn to reflect upon the parting of the heavens that revealed the radiant presence of your Holy Spirit upon Jesus, and the voice from the heavens; 'You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased'. We thank you for Jesus' model of baptism. That through him, we are gifted with the ever-present opportunity to be cleansed and refreshed by and through your presence. For the assurance that, even though we stumble and fall and err and stray, we are still held as beloved; that, through your truly 'Amazing Grace', you are always ready to forgive and renew and restore.

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

God of new beginnings; In a New Year overshadowed by Covid-19, political and economic instability, injustice, strife and suffering, we pray for your radiance to pierce the gloom and bring renewed hope, resilience and fortitude.

We pray for all those in positions of great responsibility, that their strength and resolve may be daily renewed.

For the leaders of the nations who are faced with huge challenges at this time; that they may be imbued with your wisdom; that they may seek the common good; that they may be given strength to work tirelessly for unity, justice, equity and peace. We pray especially for those who represent the people of our nation, and for all those in Congress who represent the people of the United States, that the upcoming transition will be peaceful.

For the leaders of faith communities, that they may be given continued strength to bring comfort, relief and hope to the people they serve, live and work amongst.

For our Archbishops and Bishops, as they work to guide our church in the coming weeks and months.

For all those work in our schools, colleges and universities as they continue to make provision for the education and well-being of our children and young people.

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

God of compassion and love; We bring before you all those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit.

We give thanks for our NHS, and pray for all those who work tirelessly to relieve suffering and bring healing. We give thanks for all those who are called to care for others, that they be given the strength and compassion for each day.

We bring before you all those known to us who need your healing light, hope and comfort.....

May we, as followers of the way of Christ, continue to find creative ways of bringing the light of Christ to others, doing all we can to seek out those who are lonely and isolated, those in need of comfort, those who need reassurance, those who need a listening ear.

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

Timeless, eternal Lord of all; We bring into the light of your presence all who are mourning the loss of a loved one.....

We bring to remembrance those we love but see no longer....

We give thanks that through your Son, they are held in His perpetual light and love.

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

Reflection

At the point in our service where we would usually be remembering the Last Supper together, we pause to pray for those with whom we would usually be receiving bread and wine in church. Quietly think of each of those people now, those you know well and those you know less well; those for whom you know what to pray, and those for whom you're unsure or find it more difficult to pray. Perhaps as you do this you might like to eat some bread and drink something. We are reminded that although separated at this time we are still members together of the body of Christ.

Let us 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

Lord of all time and eternity, you opened the heavens and revealed yourself as Father in the baptism of Jesus your beloved Son: by the power of your Spirit complete the heavenly work of our rebirth through the waters of the new creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Hymn: O Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOBpygllt8U>

[Choir of Trinity College Cambridge, with interesting descants]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytBTMrOK_I

[more conventional choir & organ version]

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

2 Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,
high on his heart he will bear it for you,
comfort your sorrows and answer your prayerfulness,
guiding your steps in the way that is true.

3 Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth you would count as your own;
truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness

these are the offerings to bring to his throne.

4 These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
he will accept for the name that is dear;
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

5 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

May 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.**

Dismissal:

Tend the earth, care for God's good creation, and bring forth the fruits of righteousness.

Go in the peace of Christ. **Thanks be to God.**

Closing Organ Voluntary:

Johann Pachelbel, Chorale Prelude, 'Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADFntpJiZZc>

Notices

Services this coming week:

- **TONIGHT** (Sunday 10th Jan), **8pm** (with chat from 7.30pm) – Celtic Night Prayer on Zoom (meeting ID: 810 1509 1842)
- **Tuesday 12th Jan, 8.15am** – Morning Prayer via Zoom (meeting ID: 875 0897 9103)
- **Wednesday 13th Jan, 8pm** – Midweek Compline via Zoom (meeting ID: 839 7034 6065; Passcode: 003793)
- **Sunday 17th January** – morning services via Zoom. Details to follow by email.

Sunday Evening Service – 8pm

A quiet service to round off Sunday, open to all. Is there someone new you'd like to invite to this? The Zoom session will open from 7.30 to allow people to chat beforehand, and worship will start at 8pm (Meeting ID: 810 1509 1842).

The pattern for the remainder of January will be as follows:

2nd Sunday (10th Jan): Celtic Night Prayer;

3rd Sunday (17th Jan): Compline in contemporary language;

4th Sunday (24th Jan): Service to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity;

5th Sunday (31st): Contemplative service.

Beatitudes Course

The Pilgrim Course looking at 'Church and the Kingdom' is now under way, meeting on Zoom at the following times:

- Tuesdays, 7.30-9pm
- Fridays, 10.30am-12 noon

There is still space and time to join if you're interested. Please contact Rev'd Anna for details if so.

Mothers' Union Prayers by Phone

Another opportunity for MU branch members to pray together by phone on

Wednesday 20 January, at 11am. Dial **0203 901 7895**, then enter the meeting ID **817 4323 6690**.

Things to do

The Tuesday Coffee Morning in Isleham is still going via Zoom, offering an hour's social chat and a gallery of friendly faces from 10.30-11.30am each week.

Meeting ID: 891 3261 8797; Passcode: 006650.

Stuart Haggett's fiendish weekly lockdown quiz is now in its 3rd season.

Please contact Stuart directly (via a member of the Ministry Team if necessary) if you would like to be added to the mailing list.

Intercessions: Funerals (attendance by invitation only)

Mary Pullen (Chippenham) Monday 25th January, 1.30pm

Three Rivers Group Ministry Team

Rector: The Rev'd David Cleugh 723010 davidrcleugh@gmail.com

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Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_xNAa4zgNZrE8lmizNC_3g