

SUNDAY 10TH JANUARY 2021
BAPTISM OF THE LORD

REVD ALAN F. MILLER

CALL TO WORSHIP

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.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of heaven and earth,
we gather in the name of Jesus
to hear your holy Word
and to be immersed in your Spirit.
Speak to us with grace and truth
and pour out your love upon us
so that this temple may resound
with joyful shouts of glory;
through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PSALM 29

A Psalm of David.

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy splendour.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over mighty waters.
The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,
and strips the forest bare;
and in his temple all say, 'Glory!'

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.
May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

HYMN On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry

CONFESSION

A prophet appeared in the wilderness,
calling the people to repent, be baptized,
and prepare the way of the Lord.
We return to the water to confess our sins,
giving thanks for the grace of Jesus Christ,
the one who has come to save us.

God of all glory, you look from heaven
and see us as we are—
not worthy to kneel at your feet,
not ready to welcome your way.
Forgive us, gracious God.
In Christ, stoop down to save us;
loosen the ties that bind us to sin
and set us free to love and serve you;
in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hear the good news of the gospel:
As a voice from heaven said to Jesus,
so God says to each of us:
You are my beloved child,
and with you I am well pleased.
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

READING MARK 1: 4-11

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

*Send down your Holy Spirit, O God—
tear open the veil of heaven
and speak to us as beloved children
so that we may hear and believe
the good news of your Word made flesh,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

For Mark, the story of Jesus, which is the story of God's unfolding salvation for all people and all time, begins not with the birth in Bethlehem, nor with a recitation of Jesus' line of descent, but with his baptism by John in the river Jordan, by which a new creation is brought into being, and a new relationship established between God and humankind.

John the Baptist proclaimed and practised baptism as a ritual cleansing for the people of his own day, a sign of public repentance and of renewal in their lives in preparation for the coming of God's promised Saviour and the kingdom of God, whose coming John proclaimed even as he summoned people to prepare the way.

John himself was born into the religious establishment of his day – his father Zechariah was a priest in the Temple. Although he came from such a privileged background, he was convinced that the time had drawn near when the Messiah would appear on earth and withdrew into the wilderness that lies between Jerusalem and the Jordan, to live an ascetic life: he moved from the centre of religious power to the margins of his society, abandoning privilege and power to seek and to find the truth of God far from the ritual and established patterns of worship and sacrifices in the Temple. Living off the land, John proclaimed his belief in the Messiah's coming and urged the people to follow his example,

Many responded, and were baptised by John, waiting in eager anticipation of the Messiah's coming. Yet John was clear that although he baptised with water, when the Messiah came they would be baptised again, and this time with the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was baptised by John as he came up out of the waters of the river, Mark tells us that the heavens were torn apart, and the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove and the voice of God was heard from heaven.

The baptism of Jesus is a moment of divine revelation: it is another epiphany, it is a new beginning, as Jesus of Nazareth in this powerful and dramatic scene is made known to us and to the world as the one sent by God to redeem all of creation. His baptism affirms his humanity even as it reveals his Divine nature, foreshadowing the means by which that redemption will be achieved, through descent into death and being raised up to eternal life.

It is also an echo of the moment of creation, in which in the beginning, the spirit of God moves over the face of the deep to stir up and bring forth light and life: in Christ's baptism, God's Spirit descends as Jesus rises from the water, and the life of the kingdom is opened wide to him as God makes all things new – the beginning of the Good News is the beginning of the new creation into which we are all invited.

As God's people, we do as he did, in obedience to his command that we should all be baptised as he was, and in baptism, whether as children or adults, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Baptism, in which we are buried with Christ so that we may be raised with him, receiving the assurance of eternal life beyond death's power. In baptism we set aside who we have been, so that we might have a new beginning as children of God. We are washed clean so that the image of God which we bear within us may be seen clearly.

Today, in these early days of a new year, we reflect on the meaning of baptism, what it meant for Jesus, what it means for us, and what it means for the world. If baptism is a sign of a new beginning, and of the fulfilment of God's promises of a new creation, and we have become by God's grace inheritors of the kingdom of peace and eternal life, then at the start of this new year we have more need of the good news of Jesus Christ than ever, and more need of remembering who we are as people claimed by God as his own in a world whose brokenness we know only too well.

By the grace of God, may we this year all seek to fulfil our baptismal calling to be servants of Christ in the world, bearing witness to the love of God revealed in his beloved Son Jesus, so that by our own example in our own communities we may establish peace and ensure justice, and so take one step closer to the kingdom of God.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray to the Lord, saying,
Give strength, O Lord, and bless us with peace.

All-glorious God,
maker of heaven and earth,
hear us as we pray:
Give strength, O Lord,
and bless us with peace.

We pray for the world you have made. . . .
Move again over these troubled waters,
steeped in chemicals and stained with blood.
Where carelessness and violence bring chaos
restore order, goodness, and life.
Give strength, O Lord,
and bless us with peace.

We pray for the church you have redeemed. . . .
Renew in us the gifts of your Spirit
and the call to Christian discipleship.
Where history and heresy have divided us,
make us one in the baptism we share.
Give strength, O Lord,
and bless us with peace.

We pray for the peoples you have created. . . .
Give to the leaders of all nations
the wisdom to know what is good.
Where people are poor and hungry
provide justice and daily bread.
Give strength, O Lord,
and bless us with peace.

We pray for the loved ones you have given us. . . .
Bless our families, friends and neighbours;
keep them safe from trouble and danger.
Where there is sorrow, sickness, or suffering
send your Spirit of comfort and healing.
Give strength, O Lord,
and bless us with peace.

All this we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus,
whose voice is our strength and salvation,
whose breath is the Spirit of peace. **Amen**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

HYMN Let all creation dance

BENEDICTION