

WORSHIP AT HOME FOR 10TH JANUARY 2021 – BAPTISM OF JESUS

Dear Friends,

This is my first Worship at Home to you in this new year. May I wish for you all that 2021 is as kind and happy a year as you would hope it to be. Today the lectionary leads us to Jesus' baptism when his ministry is affirmed by a voice from heaven saying: 'This is my Son, the Beloved.' – Jesus, already identified as the Son of God, is acclaimed as the Son of God. The story of his baptism shows that Jesus did not come for an exclusive group. We hear God saying that all can listen and hear him. St Peter wrote that 'God shows no partiality'. We are all to praise God for his works, and in and through all his people.

Margaret

Call to worship: comes from 'Let there be love' [Dave Bilbrough] Songs of Fellowship 329

Let there be love shared among us – let there be love in our eyes; may now your love sweep this nation, cause us, O Lord, to arise. Give us a fresh understanding of brotherly love that is real; let there be love shared among us. Let there be love.

The words to 'When Jesus came to Jordan' written by Fred Pratt Green [1903-2000] StF 233

1 When Jesus came to Jordan to be baptised by John,
He did not come for pardon, but as his Father's Son.
He came to share repentance with all who mourn their sins,
To speak the vital sentence with which good news begins.

2 He came to share temptation, our utmost woe and loss,
For us and our salvation to die upon the cross.
So when the Dove descended on him, the Son of Man,
The hidden years had ended, the age of grace began.

3 Come, Holy Spirit, aid us to keep the vows we make;
This very day invade us, and every bondage break.
Come, give our lives direction, the gifts we covet most:
To share the resurrection that leads to Pentecost.

Prayer:

Lord, we cannot fathom why you love us – but you do.
We cannot comprehend why you should call us to be your servants – but you have.
We find it nearly impossible to grasp why you should pour out your Spirit upon us – but you never hold back.
Thank you for your love. Thank you for calling us. Thank you for your Spirit's power.

Today, as we recall how Jesus deliberately went to the River Jordan to be baptised, let us thank God that Jesus really was one of us – that he was part of a human family – that he befriended people who had been excluded by their community. We thank God that Jesus played his part in the life of his community – and that Jesus demonstrated his solidarity with people by insisting that John should baptise him.

We thank God for the invitation to share in the life of the church – for the help we give and receive that enables us to live as members of the Christian family – for the security and benefits that come from our community life – for the family and friends with whom we belong – that Jesus longed to be what God wanted him to be, and that we are one with him – that baptism is a sign that each of us is known by God and that we too are called 'beloved'. May we find meaning in our lives as we link ourselves with other followers of Jesus. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Friend and Brother, **Amen**

And our confession: Forgive us, good Lord, for the times we push you away – for the times we just don't understand – for the times we don't feel good enough – and for those awful times when we just don't want to listen to you, even when we hear you.

Forgive us, good Lord.

Lord, in our weakness we aren't always sure who you are but we thank you through your word, through your Spirit and through your grace we are pardoned; that you are always with us guiding us onward; and helping us to grow in knowledge and love of you. Thank you, Lord, **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. 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

I have included two descriptions of Jesus' baptism – one from Matthew's Gospel and the other from Luke's Gospel as there are different elements in each, though the basic features are the same.

Matthew 3: 13-17 [from NRSV]: Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptised by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then John consented. And when Jesus had been baptised, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said: 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

Luke 3: 15-17 & 21,22 [from NRSV]: As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning within their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah. John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptise you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

Now when all the people were baptised, and when Jesus had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven. 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Comment: That tiny baby, born in the stable, visited by shepherds and wise men, looked after by Joseph and Mary all through his childhood, is now at the start of his important work on earth. His job is to show God's love.

The baptism of John was for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus did not need such forgiveness but he needed to express his 'oneness' with us. He had come as one of us to live as one of us – and so to forego such an important event in people's lives as baptism would have acted against that.

There are turning points in all of our lives. Luke, in his Gospel, showed us Jesus as a 12 year old boy becoming a man and deciding he wanted to do his Father God's work. His baptism is another turning point. Jesus would now have been 30. Throughout the country, due to John the Baptist, there was a movement towards God and so Jesus, through baptism, identified himself with the people.

Luke's distinctive voice can be heard as he described the ministry of John and the Baptism of Jesus. He paints the picture of people gathered in the wilderness, full of expectation and questions – wondering whether John is 'The One'. He, however, made it clear that the Messiah would baptise, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. John had no desire to take the Messiah's rightful place so he explained his own role

and then the context of the mission of Jesus, setting out the scene for the even more extraordinary, but even more comforting, message of the voice from heaven.

David Adam notes that one of the few images of the Trinity is to be found in the baptism. There is the voice of God from the heavens, Jesus coming up out of the water and the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove.

John the Baptist’s message had four great themes – repentance, confession with baptism, judgement and righteousness. The rallying calls of many a revival since – but something more is needed. After all that John had done – his preaching and all his preparing of the way, Jesus came, as he comes to us. Without knowing Jesus religion is stern and forbidding, but when Jesus comes and is accepted in our lives everything changes. There is a new life – a new hope; whenever Jesus comes all is changed. We need to know the Lord as he comes to each of us – we should meet him every day in our prayers and in our daily living.

What a difference knowing Jesus makes. ‘*Miracle on the River Kwai*’ by Ernest Gordon tells the story of prisoners of war building a bridge. They were overworked, often starving, exhausted and ill. The need to survive made them put themselves first and fail to see each other’s needs in the struggle to survive. Then two men – Dusty and Dinty – began helping others, putting themselves out to care for and respect others. Gradually a new spirit began to spread throughout the camp until the place was transformed – as were those surviving there. Dusty and Dinty were asked why they had begun this makeover in the camp, and Dusty read from 1 John 4:21: ‘The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.’

Dusty was a Methodist and Dinty was a Roman Catholic, and both felt that in the horrors of the camp environment, Jesus had come to them. The lives of both men had been hell but when Jesus came what a difference that made.

The words to ‘Who paints the skies into glorious day?’ written by Stuart Townend [b.1963]. Songs of Fellowship 1118

1 Who paints the skies into glorious day? Only the splendour of Jesus.
 Who breathes his life into fists of clay? Only the splendour of Jesus.
 Who shapes the valleys and brings the rain? Only the splendour of Jesus.
 Who makes the desert to live again? Only the splendour of Jesus.

Teach every nation His marvellous ways; each generation shall sing his praise.

*He is wonderful, he is glorious, clothed in righteousness.
 Full of tenderness, come and worship Him, He’s the Prince of life.
 He will change our hearts in His river of fire.*

2 Who hears the cry of the barren one? Only the mercy of Jesus.
 Who breaks the curse of the heart of stone? Only the mercy of Jesus.
 Who storms the prison and sets men free? Only the mercy of Jesus.
 Purchasing souls for eternity? Only the mercy of Jesus.

He is wonderful.....

Prayer: As we come to this time of prayer perhaps you might want to pause for a few moments to reflect on what this means to you, and to thank God that he says this to you:
 ‘This is my son/daughter with whom I am well pleased.’

Today we have seen God affirm Jesus in baptism. He wants everyone to know that this is his Son.

We are not always good at seeing people's true worth and praising them for it – neither is our society. In our prayers now, we remember those whom society does not affirm.

We pray for the unemployed – for people who can't remember when they last worked, for those who through circumstances have lost the will to work – and we pray for those whose livelihoods have crumbled this past year through the pandemic.

We pray for the homeless, that they might be kept safe and receive help, support and encouragement for them to begin full and happier lives.

We pray for asylum seekers that we will understand better what they have escaped from and that even if we don't understand we will listen. We pray for people who use alcohol or drugs to escape their problems, or at least to disguise them. We pray for the people who help either formally, in hostels and refuges, or informally.

We pray for those who are sick – both those who suffer from Covid19 and its aftermath, and for those who are sick and suffering from other diseases and illnesses. We pray for those who are terminally ill and for those who watch and wait with them. May they feel you very close to them, Lord, and we ask you to help us to help them.

We pray for the people we encounter in our daily lives, that we may see God in them, and act as we should. Lord, help us to help them and all whom we see in need.

In Jesus' precious and holy name we pray – **Amen**

Meditation of John the Baptist – written by Nick Fawcett.

I was speechless at first, my reaction a mix of horror and disbelief, for how could I, John, possibly baptise God's chosen one, the Lamb sent to redeem the world? It was preposterous, and I very nearly refused, desperate somehow to prevent him. Surely *I* should have been asking *him*, for I was unworthy even to loose the thongs of his sandals – to walk the same ground – let alone do more. But he insisted, refusing to take no for an answer, so eventually I relented and did what he asked.

I'm still puzzled though, for I baptised as a sign of repentance – of turning from sin – and what had that to do with Jesus – what faults had he to confess? It was *us* who needed cleansing, a fresh start, changed lives – us who time and again went astray. Yet here he was, entering the water, almost as if he could take *our* sin upon himself.

Could it be? I know he came to bring forgiveness – but to identify with us, to carry our load, to stand before God in our place – surely not even *he* could do that? Could he?

The words to 'Guide me, O thou great Jehovah' written by William Williams [1717-1791] and translated by Peter Williams [1727-1798] Singing the Faith 465

1 Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak but thou art mighty, hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore.
Feed me now and evermore.

2 Open thou the crystal fountain whence the healing stream shall flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through.
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer, be thou still my strength and shield.
Be Thou still my strength and shield.

3 When I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever give to thee.
I will ever give to thee.

At this time of year most of the churches would be holding their Covenant Services. This year the majority are unable to attend this important part of our church life. Therefore, I thought that I would add the Covenant words here so that we can still say them 'together' from our own homes.

The minister presiding would say:

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us again accept our place within this covenant which God has made with us and with all who are called to be Christ's disciples.

This means that, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we accept God's purpose for us, and the call to love and serve God in all our life and work.

Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both; in some we may please Christ and please ourselves; in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.

Therefore let us make this covenant of God our own. Let us give ourselves to him, trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.

Eternal God, in your faithful and enduring love you call us to share in your gracious covenant in Jesus Christ. In obedience we hear and accept your commands. In love we seek to do your perfect will; with joy we offer ourselves anew to you. We are no longer our own but yours.

I am no longer my own but yours.

Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and all that I may endure;

when there is work for me and when there is none;

when I am troubled and when I am at peace.

Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded;

when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking;

when I have all things and when I have nothing.

I willingly offer all that I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose.

Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours.

May it be so for ever.

Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

'This is my son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.'

We are your people whom you love.

Send us to live in a way that pleases you, and reflects your glory all around.

And may the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon us and all whom we love – and may it remain with us for ever as we go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**