

twelvebaskets



BAPTISM OF JESUS A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Baptism of Jesus - Year A
8th January 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

570 STF – As we gather, Father, seal us OR

330 STF – Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy OR

362 STF – Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

Hymn:

251 STF – Jesus Christ is waiting

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

662 STF – Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred? OR

678 STF – Come, all who look to Christ today

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

350 STF – I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship OR

353 STF – Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it

Blessing

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Call to worship

Here we are to worship,
Here we are to kneel in prayer,
Here we are to say that you are God.

Come amongst us by your Spirit Lord,
That this time of worship may be a time of encounter with you,
And we may leave equipped to follow you more nearly,
To love you more dearly, in the days ahead

Amen.¹

Hymn:

570 STF – As we gather, Father, seal us OR

330 STF – Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Opening Prayers

Let us pray,

The tree is away. Decorations in their boxes. The last of the tinsel has been vacuumed up. The likes of Wizzard, Slade, Band Aid, and Mariah Carey will not be heard on repeat again for another year. No longer will we sing of that Bleak Mid-Winter, we are silent to the Herald Angels sing. The season of Christmas is done. The world carries on.

As we pray, as we come to God in worship, how can we be like Scrooge and resolve to keep Christmas in our hearts all year round?

A year that is filled, right now, with potential. The potential for excitement, joy and love. The potential for worry, fear, the nervous apprehension. The concerns of last year are still here. We just hid them behind the Christmas Tree.

Jesus. Be with us.

Be with us as we face this world in pain. Aid us, as a community, to challenge injustice in our community. To stand up for our neighbours. To support our brothers and sisters and non-binary siblings when they face hardships. To care for a hurting environment.

On this, the day of Jesus' Baptism, may we remember our own baptismal promises;

To proclaim the good news. To surround those, we know with a community of love and forgiveness. To be good and faithful in service to others. To pray for them.

May we go from this place today with a thankful heart, and endless joy. May we bring love, hope, and peace with us. And may each day start and night end with a grateful prayer and a thankful heart.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.²

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Annan-Hood

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

In life, it is very easy for us to have a favourite something. Let's test this theory out. With the person next to you maybe you can share: what is your favourite meal to eat for dinner?

[Give a moment to allow sharing]

Now maybe you want to share your favourite place to visit?

[Give a moment to allow sharing]

You see it is really easy for us to have a favourite, in lots of different parts of life. There are loads of these questions we could ask, couldn't we? Perhaps you might like to do that over coffee later – find out what each other's favourite things are.

In our Bible reading, Peter explains to those who would listen that God isn't like us. God doesn't have favourites. In fact, it gets even better because not only does God not have favourites, but God in fact loves us all the same.

Though we have only just celebrated the birth of Jesus, the reading in Acts explains how Jesus's death on the cross wasn't just for a select few but for every single person then and forever. Though the story doesn't end there. In fact, Peter challenges those who were listening to them to make sure that everyone who knows of this amazing truth – that God forgives us for all our mistakes and loves us, and that we should go and tell others about that love.

So, there's the challenge for us, will we go and tell of God's forgiveness and love?

Let us pray.

Loving God, we thank you that you see us all as equal. There are no favourites in your kingdom, and your love is for all. May we be transformed by this love daily.

Amen.³

Hymn:

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy OR
362 STF – Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

Hymn:

251 STF – Jesus Christ is waiting
(This hymn is referenced in the talk so if you choose to have a different hymn at this point, please be aware of that when you come to the reflections).

³ All Age Talk written by Matt Forsyth

Reflections on the readings

*Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies above,
Don't fence me in. (Robert Fletcher, Cole Porter)*

What is God?

Where do we even start with a question like this?

For generations we've studied, analysed, cogitated, preached, pondered on this question and the more we do, it seems the more questions we come up with... and I hope we never stop asking ourselves the question, and searching our way through the constantly evolving potential answers. So, as we go through today's service... please explore and ponder for yourself... What does God mean to you?

Three of our readings today contain passionate, guttural, expositions of how each of the writers in turn see God, "know" God, and feel about God, and they clearly want to tell anyone else who will listen what it feels like to know God in their way.

First, we have Isaiah.

Who knows exactly how Isaiah felt as he was communicating to others his interpretation of the prophecy God had communicated to him... but whatever the truth of that he passionately wants to tell us about God's burning desire for justice, how he is sure of the fact God will never rest until we do his work and bring about peace and unity in the world, and also the hints about the Messiah and the ways in which this will be brought into physical, living and breathing reality in our midst...

Wow.

Secondly, David talks to us through the Psalms.

As we read Psalm 29 it feels like – try as he might – David just cannot find *enough* words to attempt to describe the scope of God in his own mind... glory, splendour, majesty, power, fire, earthquake... he then also ventures into metaphor to try to describe God, and then into the supernatural as if to underline how nothing is beyond his God...and so on, and so on, and so on... It feels as if he never quite truly reaches what feels like a satisfactorily BIG enough collection of words to convey the mind-blowing nature of what he sees and feels when he knows God in his soul...

Phew.

Thirdly, we have Peter's preaching in the Acts of the Apostles.

Peter's preaching is relentless. He just keeps on reminding those listening – because he can see they seem to have forgotten - that these were the amazing things that Jesus did, and that he did them for everyone. The powerful, concise and undeniable summary of Jesus' work from baptism through to death and resurrection, followed by the unquestioning embracing of ALL people in the goodness of the good news that they have on their side... and so on, and so on, and so on.

Utterly compelling.

Our fourth reading from Matthew's gospel is an entirely different concern.

In what could not be more of a contrast in many ways, we have the quiet, calm, submission of Jesus as he comes in complete humility to John to be baptised. This same Jesus that was being referred to in the earlier readings in such earth-shattering terms, comes in simple, humble submission.

The other aspect of this gospel reading today is that in a matter of two very short verses we experience something that doesn't happen anywhere else in the Bible – the three elements of the Trinity are referenced in the one encounter. We have Jesus the

man being baptised in the presence of the Holy Spirit and God himself expressing his satisfaction at the perfect beauty of the occasion and the act that is taking place.

Father, Son and Spirit. Delicious sponge, rich chocolate, AND the smashing orangey bit – all in one place at one time. And we hear that God is “well pleased” with this coming together.

The individual elements of the Trinity are detailed, described, hinted at, and reflected throughout the Bible, and we hear about many, many aspects to each of those entities described to us in a variety of ways to wrestle with – and long may the wrestling continue...

I am comfortable with the concept of Trinitarian thinking and the description of God as three “persons” (although I’m sometimes not sure about the choice of the word “person”) but then sometimes I find myself wondering, and think...

Three.

Is that all...?

I wonder if God, when considering our defining him in only three ways, is tempted to put on his recording of Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters and lament the fact we’ve tied him down to a mere three manifestations and wonders to himself: “*don’t fence me in*”?

With all that we know about God, how is it that we dare to limit God to merely three definitions and manifestations?

God is omnipresent, and therefore surely we should see no limitations in the definition of God, the capability of God, the presence of God, the love, will, and grace of God... and so on, and so on, and so on...

God is in all of our activities, connections, interactions, thoughts, actions... surely that is the God who calls us forward through grace to work with him as we live our lives? And to that end we surely must know he can be way more than merely the attempts we make to define Father, Son and Spirit?

The John Bell hymn “Jesus Christ is Waiting” is so beautiful, and for me captures the real essence of the fact that Jesus is alive and well among us, is around us, is within all of us as we go about our daily lives. That doesn’t need definition, it simply needs humble submission, acceptance and openness. As we make our way through the song we make some sense of the kind of encounters we may have in our lives:

- As we interact with our neighbours struggling in poverty, as we choose to be either friend or stranger in those situations... God is there with us
- As we feel ourselves getting angry at the latest news headline about oppression and injustice, as we feel angry about the distance we feel from the sense of Kingdom values in the world... God is there with us
- As we reach out to connect with those we know - and those we don’t - and our reaching out brings calm.... and also when WE receive a friendly loving touch or word from another... God is there with us
- As we feel part of movements that bring about change, and when WE dance – both in anger and in joy... God is there with us
- As every hint within us reminds us we are part of something bigger, something good, something that is drawing us forward into a better world... and as we say “yes”, God is there with us.

We may not feel we match up to the passion of Isaiah, but God is with us just the same.

We many not feel able to find the superlatives to describe God like David does, but God is with us just the same.

We may not feel the same driving ambition to preach to the world like Peter does, but God is with us just the same.

So may we continue to wrestle with our understanding and appreciation of the many answers to the question “What is God?”, and may we know that we are enough as we are, and with that God is “well pleased”.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

662 STF – Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred? OR

678 STF – Come, all who look to Christ today

Prayers of intercession

For our intercessions, we will hold three short periods of quiet, in which each of us is invited to bring our own prayers to God.

Firstly, we pray for those close to home, calling to mind the name or the face of somebody in our own family, amongst our church congregation or a close friend. In the quiet, we hold them and their situation up to God.

[Silence]

Living God, you know our hearts and our hurts. We commit them to you now, and invite you to come close to those we have prayed for, bringing them your healing, your comfort, your hope.

Secondly, we pray for situations further afield – taking a moment to pray for something we have heard in the news that troubles us, or for someone we have never met but whose story has affected us. In the quiet, we hold these people and situations up to God.

[Silence]

Living God, you know the pains of your world. It can feel like a dark world when we switch on the news, or read our newspapers. In the darkness, bring your light. In the conflict, bring your peace. In the brokenness, bring your healing.

[Silence]

Finally, we spend a moment praying for the church: perhaps this church congregation, the wider Christian church, or all people of faith. In the quiet, we pray for all who are gathering in worship today.

[Silence]

Living God, help us – your people – to be your hands and feet in the world. May we find ways to be an answer to prayer, to bring transformation in our own lives, communities and our world.

We pray these, and all our prayers, through Jesus Christ our Lord.Amen.⁵

⁴ Reflection written by Kev Dobson

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

We will now take up the offering.

Heavenly Father,
Thank you for all that we have received.
Thank you for these gifts here in my hands.
We take a moment now to return them to you, to the work of your kingdom of justice
and joy,
In Jesus' name,
Amen.⁶

Hymn:

350 STF – I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship OR
353 STF – Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it

Blessing

You have been blessed, we have been blessed,
You are loved, we are loved together.

As you go from this place, go with the Spirit of God in your hearts,
Go inspired to share those blessings and that love with the world and with the people
you meet,

In Jesus' name

Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker