

**BAPTISM OF JESUS
7/1/24
CAVES BEACH**

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come from the demands of everyday life, to experience peace.

We will experience peace as we worship the Holy One.

Come from the routine of everyday life, to experience community.

We will experience community as we support and encourage one another

Come from the predictability of everyday life, to experience a challenge.

We will experience a challenge as we respond to the minister of Jesus Christ.

Come from the uncertainty of everyday life, to experience security.

We will experience security as we put our trust in God, who loves us beyond limits.

OPENING PRAYER

Wonderful is your blessing of family, O God.

We rejoice in the joy we find among those we love.

Wonderful is your blessing of our daily activity, O God.

We rejoice in the achievement, friendship, and creativity of our day.

Wonderful is your blessing of our learning, O God.

We rejoice that there is still so much for us to find out and put into practice.

Wonderful is your blessing of faith, O God.

We rejoice that, with the Word, you inspire us and send us out to empower the oppressed and to listen to the downhearted.

Wonderful love is your mark, O God.

We thank you for its fullest expression in Jesus Christ. Amen.

HYMN TiS 179 Praise with Joy the World's Creator

<https://youtu.be/NsChSjp4tpE>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Jesus Christ, giver of life,
we give thanks for the gift of water;
for the waters of baptism,
and the waters of birth;
for the waters of everyday living that clean and refresh us,
and the water of fun filled days of swimming and recreation.

Above all, for the living water that you offer us, we give our thanks and praise,
for it is in these waters that we find ourselves re-created, loved and sustained,
full members of your community and beloved members of your family.

With gratitude and joyful hearts, we give thanks.

Generous and loving God,
you embrace us in our frailty and fullness of our humanity.
In baptism, by water and the Spirit you offer us new life,
and call us to live in the light, as members of your family.
And yet, so often we fail to live into the fullness of our calling.
We squabble amongst ourselves,
we make poor choices that impact the wellbeing of others,
we fail to see the big picture of your movement in the world.
Forgive us, loving God.
Send your Spirit amongst us, to call us to account,

and re-centre our living to align with your work in the world.

In baptism, you offer us unique gifts that contribute to the Body of Christ.
And yet, so often we hide our talents, or denigrate the gifts another brings.
We fail to be full participants in your movement in the world.
Forgive us, loving God.
Send your Spirit amongst us, to encourage and renew us.
Inspire us one more to contribute to your work in the world.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Hear these words from scripture: “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 1: 15) And so we know that nothing can change God’s love for each and everyone of us. We hear clearly then, Christ’s word of grace to us: Our sins are forgiven. And so we say together:

Thanks be to God. Amen

READINGS

* Genesis 1: 1 – 5

¹ In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² 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. ³ Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

* Mark 1: 4 – 11

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ 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. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ 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. ⁸ I have baptized you with^[b] water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’

HYMN TiS 250 Christ, When for Us You Were Baptised

<https://youtu.be/reJI0MUjOEc>

SERMON

You all know the carol: “On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love said to me.....” But did you realise that the twelfth day after Christmas Day was last Friday, the 5th January, so that was the last day of our Christmas season. So before I went to bed that night I took my Christmas cards down and put my nativity set away for another year. The next day, yesterday, a new church season called Epiphany began. This used to be a day when the Christian Church celebrated both

the visit of the magi (the wise men) and the baptism of Jesus, but at some stage the western church separated these, and now the visit of the magi is celebrated at Epiphany, always the 6th January, and the Baptism of Jesus is on the first Sunday after Epiphany, which this year is the very next day - today! Mind you, a lot of Christian churches will have Matthew's gospel passage today and so the emphasis will be on those Wise Men. Whereas the Gospel passage Mark sent me for this morning, that we have just heard, you will realise was about our Lord's baptism - so the gospel actually set for today.

So, we are now in the church season of Epiphany. I'll quote from the Uniting Church lectionary: "An Epiphany is an appearing, or manifesting of something or someone, and in this season the church reflects on the manifestation of Christ to all people. The length of this period varies depending on the date of Easter."

So that's just by way of saying where we are all at. The season of Christmas is now behind us, and we have moved into the season of Epiphany which lasts until Lent which begins on Ash Wednesday - this year the 14th of February.

There were three other set scripture passages this morning to choose from to go with the Gospel. I have chosen just one as Mark normally does - you heard that it was the first few verses of our Bible: right at the beginning of Genesis chapter one. And you might have noticed that the passage from Mark's gospel was very close to the beginning of his chapter one too. I've chosen to refer to these two passages together because I want to suggest to you that they are linked or interwoven - that the Genesis reading is one that really helps us to explore our Lord's baptism and why we can say his baptism is truly a "manifestation of Christ to all people." Christ meaning "anointed One".

Genesis as you'll know, starts off with these words: "In the beginning when God created....." Now it is not too much to say, that the baptism of Jesus is in itself too, a kind of new creation. Think about it. We have noted that our gospel passage began right near the beginning of Mark - so you'll realise that Mark does not begin his gospel with the nativity, the Christmas story, like Matthew and Luke do, but Mark begins with Jesus' baptism. For him, for Mark, the baptism *is* the birth narrative because by the Jordan River when Jesus is called to minister, it is at this moment when his divinity is affirmed by the Holy Spirit and God the Father. We see that for Mark, Jesus' baptism by the Holy Spirit, this proof of his divine nature - that is the moment of our Lord's birth - as Mark sees it. (You know when you read the start of John's gospel, he goes right back to creation - again, no mention of the Christmas story, the nativity.)

Genesis 1, verse 2, goes on to say, "a wind from God swept over the waters." Here the writer of Genesis points us to the presence of the Holy Spirit, the breath or wind of God. Ruah is the Hebrew word used, translated as God's Spirit. In the scriptures this word is also translated as breath, wind, air. We are told that at Jesus' baptism the heavens are torn apart as the Holy Spirit descends to confirm Jesus' divinity. Mark 1:10 "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." The Hebrew word for "torn apart" (schizw) is used only one other time in Mark's gospel, and that is when Mark describes the temple veil being torn apart at the very moment of Jesus' death. This phrase "torn apart" is Mark's symbolic way of declaring that the divide between heaven and earth has been broken and that in Jesus the power of God's love, mercy, compassion, freedom, and forgiveness has been let loose in the world. So we see from these two passages this morning, that we have the Holy Spirit both present at creation (Genesis) and with Jesus at his baptism (the Gospel). And let's remember that we ourselves are baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Now we'll turn back to Genesis 1, verse 3: "Then God said, "Let there be light". And isn't it true that our Lord's baptism brings into human experience a new source of light? "I am the light of the world," Jesus will declare once his ministry is underway. A new way of seeing, of understanding, of forgiving, of relating to all of God's creation; a new way of being; a transparent way of living life abundantly.

And you will recall that the writer of Genesis tells us how God saw that the light was good. "Then God said, "Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good". When Jesus comes from the waters of baptism we hear likewise God's voice expressing goodness, expressing approval: Mark 1: 11, "And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." It is with this affirmation, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus, the divine Son of God, is revealed, is manifested. And that, my friends, is the epiphany: Jesus emerges from the waters of baptism renewed, ready to fulfil his purpose, and transform the world.

You might be wondering why I have not yet mentioned John, who of course, was the one who baptised Jesus. I've done this deliberately because back on the Second Sunday of Advent the Gospel passage was Mark 1:1-8, so it covered some of the same ground as today, but had its emphasis on John, rather than the particularity of the baptism. And again John was the focus of attention in the Gospel set for Advent Three. And he also has a special day set for 24th June, though this year that will be a Monday. But he does get quite a lot of attention, doesn't he? So rather our focus today, is upon what is happening to Jesus at the *moment* of his baptism - the epiphany, the manifestation that occurs - that's our focus for this morning.

So I am wanting to move on now and ask how does all this connect with us? Does our Lord's baptism, for instance, enlighten us about our own baptism? This is our first day of Sunday worship for this New Year - so today is significant too, as we seek God for guidance for both our personal lives and our community of faith together into 2024. Are there words of encouragement, is there help regarding discernment, how to tap into God's guidance for our lives? Are we ourselves able to tap into the Holy Spirit so that we have motivation that will help our thinking and acting? Jesus' baptism brought about a new stage in his life - might we have to make significant changes this year ourselves? Change is continual - whether you are older, or just a youngster like me! Is our faith in Christ going to have any significant influence on our own decision making, both personally and corporately?

It's no doubt true, that all - most of us - will have had our own unique faith experiences. We shared something of this in our small groups last year if you remember. We were asked how did you come to faith? or something similar. If any of us were asked today what we remember of our baptism, I guess those of us who were baptised as babies, or as infants, would have no memory. I don't even recall my confirmation which I think was in my early teenage years. Too long ago to remember! I do remember that the minister required my date of birth and year - my mother suddenly deciding that I was born on a different day and year, to what I thought. For some reason my baptism certificate couldn't sort that out either. So I had to get a government certificate to find out who was right - or wrong! Sometimes I wonder, with all the regulations, how I ever got ordained!

Now I'd like to tell you my theory on baptism - and I do realise we've all had different experiences - so you don't have to have the same theory! But I think it is like gas and the old heaters that had a pilot light. I reckon that the Holy Spirit coming into our lives is like God giving us a pilot light and that is given at baptism. Now God's already created us and given us life and we are breathing His air in and out - so we are of course already His creation and are alive. But this pilot light is something extra and it is ready to get ignited from the time of our baptism on. So we've got the pilot light lit but it is just sitting there waiting! Waiting to be ignited to really get going

properly. Now, my pilot light got ignited when I myself said, "Yes" that I loved Jesus. I went forward at a church rally. Then I remember a woman reading to me from her Bible. I've often wondered what she thought of me, because I found I was unable to speak. At the same time I was feeling like a shock of electricity was going through me over and over. It was as if I was being shocked into something new, and I'd better not forget it! Although as I mentioned, I can't remember my confirmation, I do remember in detail the night I said yes to Jesus. I don't recall knowing anything about a Holy Spirit. But years later, when in prayer regarding a very unusual situation in PNG, I had an experience of that electric current type of feeling, and I realised that it was the Holy Spirit helping me. It was then that I suddenly recalled my conversion because I knew that I had had that same experience before. But I never told anyone for years - for more than 60 years in fact, I think because I had never understood it - till as I said, I had one other similar situation when only God could do anything and so I was relying on prayer completely.

When we are baptised, as I said before, and as we all know, we are baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In the service for Personal Reaffirmation of Baptism in the "Uniting in Worship" book, there are three alternate prayers that can be said by the minister:

Strengthen, Lord, your servant (name)
with your heavenly grace,
that he/she may continue yours for ever,
and daily increase in the Holy Spirit,
until he/she comes to your everlasting kingdom. Amen

(Name), you are a child of God,
a servant of Christ,
and a temple of the Holy Spirit.
May almighty God bless you
and keep you in eternal life. Amen

(Name), may the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
strengthen you through the Spirit in your inner being;
that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith,
and that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Amen

There in those prayers we have at least three things that we learn about the Holy Spirit: (1) the Holy Spirit increases in us; (2) we are temples of the Holy Spirit; and (3) it is through the Holy Spirit that God strengthens us. And that is indeed Good News for you and for me, isn't it!

Today I am not saying that your experience needs to be like mine. No, we are all different and God gives us his gifts in the way that is right for us at the time. Over the years I had a lot of opposition at home regarding my faith journey, and I think that maybe God had to do something really definite to me so that I would hold fast to Him. Your life experience will have been different and God knows what is needed for each of us. What I am saying today is, let's all learn from Jesus' baptism and ponder it in our hearts and pray on it, and ask God to teach us and learn from it.

I have a friend who is coping with a very significant life change at present and she has told me that her special needs are to be calm, to have courage, and to be brave. So when I pray for her, just whenever I think of her, I ask that the Holy Spirit will fill her with those attributes. She texted me the other day to say that she can see a garden from her window, and that the view is helping her feel calm. You see, that is God's Holy Spirit at work. God works in positive ways, in ways that help us, in ways that inspire us, in ways that enable us to discern right from wrong, in ways that

encourage us, in ways that enable us to become more like Christ. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not magic - it is God at work in us, in the world.

Today, as we share the sacrament of Holy Communion together, will you take some time during the quietness to ask God to enable you to be open to the Spirit working in your life? And just experience God's love for you as you give yourselves over to receive all He has to offer from his abundant store of goodness and love. Amen

HYMN TiS 447 Lord, Your Almighty Word

<https://youtu.be/0MD3yOyybGE>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Loving God, receive the gifts we bring and the dedication of our lives. Whatever it takes, may we be faithful in our service and may your mission of reconciliation in the world be realised in our discipleship. Amen

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Given the shocking escalating conflicts across our world at present, especially the Israeli/Palestinian war now very seriously affecting neighbouring countries; also the Ukraine/Russian war also of course affecting many others; and wars destabilising some African countries, I am going to lead us in a prayer this morning that was written for the Week of Prayer for World Peace. This prayer also acknowledges that peace is needed within ourselves. Then we will also have some time for quiet prayer for those we know and love, and then close with the Lord's Prayer said together. *Let us pray:*

Lord, we pray for the power to be gentle; the strength to be forgiving; the patience to be understanding; and the endurance to accept the consequences of holding to what we believe to be right.

May we put our trust in the power of good to overcome evil and the power of love to overcome hatred. We pray for the vision to see and the faith to believe in a world emancipated from violence, a new world where fear shall no longer lead people to commit injustice, nor selfishness make them bring suffering to others.

Help us to devote ourselves to the task of making peace, praying always for the inspiration and the power to fulfill the destiny for which we and all people were created.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

And a prayer now for our own personal family and friends: Loving God, we thank you that your Holy Spirit flows with love to all your creation. We thank you that you bring mercy and wholeness, and so we pray that you would comfort and heal all who are in sorrow, need, sickness, or any other trouble. (*We'll take some time in silence now, to bring before God those who are particularly on your mind at this time.*) And we pray too, that those who care for these our loved ones, would be granted your wisdom, patience, and gentleness. We pray your peace to be upon us all.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Let us gather our thoughts together now in the words of the prayer Jesus taught us:
Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

HYMN TiS 655 O Let the Son of God Enfold You

<https://youtu.be/6PYx0PXOyo8>

COMMUNION

Hear the words of institution of this sacrament as recorded by the apostle Paul:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said: This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, for the remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11: 23-26)

With this bread and this cup we do as our Saviour commands: we set them apart for the holy supper to which he calls us, and we come to God with our prayers of thanksgiving.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

The Spirit moved over the water in the beginning.
Through the Sea you led the children of Israel
to freedom and the Promised Land.
When Jesus was baptised in the Jordan
the Spirit came upon your Beloved,
in whom you were well pleased.

And so we praise you
with the faithful of every time and place,
joining with choirs of angels and the whole creation
in the eternal hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

We praise you, O God,
that in your mercy you gave your only Son, Jesus Christ,
that whoever believes in him
should not perish but have eternal life.

We give thanks for his humble birth,
for his life of ministry and love,
for his sufferings and death on the cross,
for his glorious resurrection and ascension,
and for the promise that he will come again.

O God, by your word and Spirit
bless and sanctify this bread and this wine,
that they may be for us
the communion of the body and blood of Christ,
and that he may ever live in us
and we in him.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

God, accept us,
as we offer and present ourselves, our souls and our bodies,
to be a holy and a living sacrifice;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit
be all honour and glory, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus, Lamb of God,
have mercy on us.

Jesus, bearer of our sins,
have mercy on us.

Jesus, redeemer of the world,
grant us your peace.

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.
The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.
The gifts of God for the people of God.

Receive this holy sacrament
of the body and blood of Christ,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

DISTRIBUTION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We thank you, God our Father,
that through word and sacrament
you have given us your Son
who is the true bread of heaven and food of eternal life.

So strengthen us in your service
that our daily living may show our thanks;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

HYMN TIS 666 We are Marching in the Light of God

https://youtu.be/gI24_27wW1E

BENEDICTION

You are the beloved of God,
showered in blessings, made new by the Spirit.
Go out into the world, with hearts full of joy,
for you belong to God.

Listen for the voice of the Spirit that renews and affirms;
pay attention for the grace that surrounds your living,
and live in response to the love that is poured out upon you.

May the love of God, the call of Christ, and the guidance of the Spirit be yours,
this day and always. Amen.