

# EPIPHANY

6/1/22

## CAVES BEACH

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Sign of wonder,

**God's love graced to humanity in Jesus.**

Sign of celebration,

**The joy of Jesus, alive in persons  
who have nothing of their own.**

Sign of community,

**Christians together, baptizing, sharing communion,  
learning and worshipping, giving and serving.**

Sign of the times,

**Getting and spending does not satisfy,  
but the Way of Jesus: way of leads to the true life.**

### Opening Prayer

Creator God, God of the falling snow, rain  
God of the awesome summer evenings, Northern Lights,

**We praise you!**

Creator God; God of the smiling, searching baby,  
God of all our years,

**We thank you!**

Creator God; God of the Word: of God,  
God of inspiring Hebrew and Christian scripture,

**We listen to you!**

Creator God; God of inspiration and example to humanity in Jesus:  
example to humanity,

**We respond to you, in time and beyond time. Amen.**

**HYMN 107** Sing praise and thanksgiving

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_VXaVtBnmKU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VXaVtBnmKU)

## **PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

Praise be to you, God who calls each of us by name,

you who speak words of assurance to us when we feel our strength  
faltering,

who reaches out to us in times of distress,

and holds out a hand when troubles threaten to sweep us away.

With gratitude we grasp onto the knowledge that wherever we travel

and whatever circumstances we find ourselves in,

we are never deserted,

your loving spirit seeks us out

reaching into the far corners of the world

to find us and comfort us and bring us home.

We stand steady in your promises to us

and are glad to be your agents of peace and justice.

Gracious God,

we pray for your presence with us as we navigate the rivers of our lives.

When we're heading upstream when it would be wiser to go downstream,

Alert us to our predicament.

When we are bashing into rocks when the better path would be to flow  
around them.

Challenge our thinking.

When we cascade into a crevasse and are pummeled by the fall,

Be with us.

When we build dams and divert the water way from where it is most needed.

Forgive us.

When we take more than our share.

Realign our attitude.

When floods inundate us and chaos threatens,

Grant us courage and safety.

When we run dry,

Lead us to the wellspring from which we can draw hope and compassion.

Open our consciousness to know that you are the source of our being, and journey with us wherever we go.

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

God promises to stand with us no matter what cares and concerns are running through our lives, or how well, or how poorly, we have negotiated the course we are on. We are known by name and loved beyond measure; we can be assured of this.

## **READINGS**

- **Acts 8:14-17**

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. <sup>15</sup> The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit <sup>16</sup> (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). <sup>17</sup> Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

- **Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize 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 baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his 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 baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup> 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."

**HYMN 156** Morning has broken

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5D3LEjGF8A>

## **SERMON**

One of the most enjoyable yet at the same time fraught things about human communication is the way we use language to emphasise what would otherwise remain unsaid. We do this all the time, sometimes we can speak and not realise the impact that we are having on another person. Just like in poetry a few words can evoke a whole range of emotions in our listeners. A poet is particularly skilled in evoking emotions out of just a few carefully crafted phrases which emotionally move us beyond simple dictionary descriptions of those words.

Only sticking with dictionary definitions without looking at the full depth of the phrases carries with it a whole new set of problems. The person who says the words or writes the passage has no control over the associations and emotions felt by the recipient. I am sure that we have all experienced the mystifying reaction to an apparently innocent comment that you make to another person as they suddenly look overwhelmed and back away from you in a reaction which is out of all proportion from what you thought you had said.

This is a conundrum that anyone preaching can face, as it is a difficulty when we communicate with others. You never know what memories your comments might trigger. Perhaps you are musing after showing a new friend one of your photo albums and comment on how much poorer your life would be without these visual memories, especially those of your children. There is no way that you would be expected to know that this

person had their house destroyed by a fire along with all their precious photo memories. That fire also killed their only child.....

Communication is always open to such a situation and there is no way that you can avoid it if you are meeting new and interesting people. You don't always know everything about them.

The reality is that language does evoke associations and that is why it is important to fully understand the context in which something is said. A lecturer at the Baptist College in Melbourne, Athol Gill, used to start the first class of the year for new students by holding up a newspaper banner headline: "Demons devour Saints!" To any Aussie Rules follower of course this meant that one football club soundly beat another. However the class is then challenged to imagine what the banner might convey in another country or another culture where spiritual warfare was part of daily conversation.

A few weeks ago if someone said to you that it looks like it is going to rain tomorrow you might reply something along the lines that the rain will soon let up and the sun will shine again. However if you were in Western Australia at the moment with their drought and bushfires your response might be more along the lines that you hope that there is plenty of rain and that would be good if it lasted for a few days.

In winter someone up in the mountains looks for a nice warm fire to sit beside at the end of a cold winter's day of being outside. This would equally be the last thing that a person would want at the end of a long hot day in summer.

Fire and water as well as heat and cold have different emotions associated with them during different seasons and this can be exacerbated by droughts and flooding rains. Each of the elements of fire and water are essential parts of our life and environment.

Can you see where I am going with this?

Fire and water and what they mean in different situations!

In the passage today from Luke's Gospel we have John the Baptist responding to questions of the crowds about whether he was the Messiah by saying: "I baptise you with *water*; but one who is more powerful than I is coming. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and *fire*. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with *unquenchable fire*."

The audience to whom John is speaking clearly understood his message. The images he evokes for them were well known to those listening to that speech. However after 2,000 years we cannot just assume that the message is understood by us in the same way today.

The image of a bushfire in the middle of summer in Australia is not the same image of a small fire burning off some stubble left from the harvest in the mind of a person standing on the banks of the Jordan River. John had one set of images in his mind but in the light of Jesus' teaching and Luke's interpretation, those words have a twist that may even surprise John the Baptist.

So often in the past John the Baptist was characterised as a 'hellfire and brimstone' preacher. He spoke of 'baptising with fire,' then using a 'winnowing fork,' followed by 'the chaff being burned,' with 'unquenchable fire.' Most people hearing this today would immediately think of the fires of hell. The image enhanced by those graphic images of raging bushfires in the Australian bush.

All too often as younger people we were introduced to images of God which were frightening. It was thoughts of a God who was all too ready to cast us into eternal fires at the drop of a hat. This led to thoughts of Jesus as some sort of fire breathing judge deciding what is right and wrong.

Now as we consider the words of Jesus in the Gospels we can clarify a far clearer image thanks to Jesus' teachings. We learn that Jesus came to live among us to share the fires of love and living out the suffering love on the cross. There are no fires of hell but rather the blazing passion of God's love for the whole of humanity and the world.

This is not some soft option trying to avoid consequences referred to by John the Baptist. The fire of love is not without some threat. No matter how carefully we have installed the fire-breaks in our lives the passionate fire of God's love jumps those containment lines to consume all that is false and corrupt.

This action is not trying to judge or condemn us as it is in fact a purifying and liberating process so that we can become all that God created us to be.

Now we can move to the images of water in the passage. Those who heard John the Baptist speaking would have a similar fear of water that we have with fire. Even at this time of year there are many deaths from drowning and mishaps on our waterways. The Hebrews that John was talking to did not like the water. For them it was associated with dangers like storms and monsters and a constant threat of death.

If we look at the stories of their times there was the one about Noah's flood wiping out people. Water here represented both the destruction of the known world and the hope for humanity through the saving actions of the Arc.

Then there are the people fleeing from Egypt being trapped by a hostile army against the waters of the Red Sea. Their salvation coming from God parting the waters to let them through to search for the promised land.

Later the Jordan was the last barrier between those wandering in the wilderness and the promised land. Once again God's action allowed them to overcome the barriers imposed by water.

So we can see that images of fire and water are both a threat and a blessing to both the Hebrews and us here in Australia today.

Looking at this we can see that Jesus is not the bringer of hellfire and damnation but instead He is constantly giving gift of the fire of love which frees us from that hellfire and damnation which we keep constructing to stop our communion with God.

We are here at the start of a New Year wary of fire and thirsty for water. Today we heard of these elements as markers of a new age as Jesus began His ministry. This passage is the next step in the amazing self-revelation of God in Luke's Gospel. This story shows us a God who is a loving Father, and Suffering Son so that we are left with the ongoing actions of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' Baptism was the forerunner to His public ministry as He defiantly moved through the fires of hostility and hatred removing those powers and unleashing His own Spirit of love in the world.

Through this we are equally empowered to move out into the world with the fire of love and hearing those words ringing from heaven: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

We are not alone and vulnerable to the fire and water. It empowers us in our everyday ministry.

**HYMN O breath of life, come sweeping through us**

**TiS.409**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnDnclPgt-M>

**PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

God of all, we give these gifts with the desire for them to flow into the world as a sign of your realm of hope and compassion. Let it be so. Amen.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

There is a beautiful hymn about prayer, found in many hymn books, it says:

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.*

*The motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast.*

Let us Pray.

Our loving heavenly Father, there are times when we would like to say many things, praise you in many ways but sometimes the words come out wrong. It is often when that trembling in our breast happens, we really get down to tin tacks with you our Lord and Saviour and then we start to express the things that are really on our heart.

I, Lord have been given the task of trying to offer prayers on behalf of the people gathered here today and those who will be listening or reading this prayer. In some ways it's an onerous task Lord, but also it is a privilege to try to represent the prayers of the people.

We are really concerned about the health of our nation, dear Lord as this new strain of the Corona virus takes hold on lots and lots of people in this country. We know that the holiday time seems to find folk more relaxed and sometimes they forget to follow the rules that have been laid down for interaction between people. Make us aware of our responsibilities. Especially with members of the public, our family and friends and those who are the nearest and dearest to us.

Some of the members of this church are getting to the point where they are unable many times to gather with us for worship, we specially ask your blessings on Jack and Myra, George and Doreen and Keith Greentree, faithful members over many years.

Some of our members have had difficulties with family illnesses and traumas. This requires them to travel, sometimes long distances to support the needs of their loved ones. Continue to bless and support them with your presence in these times of need.

We ask you to guide the members of both Federal, State and Local Governments. May they have the ability to care for the people they are responsible for and to and may they govern with integrity.

Lord, there also some folk who are saddened by the loss of a loved ones, a brother a friend, a mate or a close acquaintance, we ask your close r presence with these special people. May they feel you close to them in this time of their loss.

As this church moves into the New Year with its continuing challenges, we ask your guidance for the church Council, our Elders and especially our minister Mark.

Keep him healthy and free to serve you and this community with enthusiasm and the strength of the Lord.

Dear Lord there may be some issues that we would personally like to speak to you about in the silence of these next few moments. We pause now and ask that you hear the unexpressed prayers of your people.( pause for a moment) Amen.

The second verse of that Hymn about prayer says:

*Prayer is the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try,*

*Prayer, the sublimest strains that reach the Majesty on high.*

***Finally: O Thou who camest from above, the Life the Truth the Way.  
The path of prayer Thyself has trod, Lord teach us how to pray.***

We say together the Lord's Prayer.

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 for ever. Amen.

**HYMN 569** Guide me, O thou great redeemer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5j48TLIRb4Q>

## **BENEDICTION**

We have delved into worship today and now emerge ready to step out into our world in the knowledge that we are loved. Go with confidence and the reassurance that the Spirit goes with you.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH\\_HdkWs74](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74)