

## The Baptism of Christ 10 January 2021

Dear friends

I am sure we are all continuing in prayer for our country and world in these very challenging times. As said last week, we have taken the decision to temporarily suspend church services in the buildings; that decision looks even more necessary now than it did last week. We'll be keeping the situation under review and I will let you know when a careful resumption of services in church can start again. But for now, keeping ourselves and our communities safe must be the priority. Online worship of course continues; I hope you have been finding the YouTube services helpful; if you have any thoughts or suggestions of other ways of enabling our worshipping life to continue while we are unable to meet in person, do let me know.

I am very grateful to Revd Carole for leading compline on youtube and via zoom each week. It is a lovely and gentle way to round off the day; if you have not yet ventured onto Zoom, can I encourage you to give it a go. It is much less scary and difficult than most of us first imagined, and many churches have been finding it a very useful means of worshipping together in lockdown. As well as compline on Tuesdays at 8pm, starting this week I will be using Zoom to hold an informal time of Bible study. My thoughts are to have 40 minutes each Wednesday evening, starting at 7pm, when we can read the Gospel reading for the coming Sunday (in this case, John 1.43 -end) and just share any thoughts we have. Everybody will be welcome, and it will be quite okay just to listen to what others have to share if you don't feel like saying anything yourself - but we hope you will soon feel confident enough to chip in!

The log in details for those are on the attached newsletter, but I will repeat them here as well:

Tuesday Compline 8pm - log in ID 999 516 9418 password Twigster3

Wednesday Bible Study 7pm - ID 319 891 1457 password Kings1

So here is the link to today's worship, and I am also attaching the text of both the worship and my reflection. With the theme of baptism, I am suggesting that you may wish to pour out a bowl of cold clean water to have with you as you watch and worship - all will become clear! A prize (well, maybe not!) for anyone who spots my deliberate mistake, that I only noticed after uploading the video to YouTube!

<https://youtu.be/RGOWSSG5iFE>



### [A Service for the First Sunday after Epiphany \(Baptism of Christ\)](https://youtu.be/RGOWSSG5iFE)

A Service filmed in Kingsbury Church celebrating the Feast of the Baptism of Christ (First Sunday after Epiphany), including a reflection on the readings Gen...  
[youtu.be](https://youtu.be/RGOWSSG5iFE)

As ever, do please get in touch with any news or questions or if there is any way in which I may be able to help.

Blessings

John

Revd Dr John White

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### **The Baptism of Christ 10 January 2021 – Worship**

#### ***Introduction***

#### ***Greeting***

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe.

**From the rising of the sun to its setting  
your name is proclaimed in all the world.**

The Lord of glory be with you  
**and also with you.**

Grant us, Lord, who behold your glory,  
to drink from the waters of the new creation  
flowing from the river of life at your baptism.  
Give us the wings of the Spirit,  
that we may hasten to meet you at your coming,  
and praise you with the Father and Holy Spirit,  
now and for ever.

**Amen.**

***Bible Reading:*** Genesis 1.1-5

#### ***Hymn***

***Gospel Reading:*** Mark 1.4-11

#### ***Reflection***

“Just as Jesus 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.’” (Mark 1: 10,11)

The image of the dove is a widely recognised symbol of peace way beyond the circles of the Christian Church. I am not an ornithologist, and I have no idea whether in real life doves are a particularly peaceful bird; but that is certainly how they are understood in popular culture. Within the Bible, the dove is also an evocative picture, and in describing the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism as being “like a dove”, Mark invites us as readers and hearers of the Gospel to recall other key moments in the pages of Scripture where similar imagery is used.

We may think of the dove on Noah's ark, released when the flood waters are subsiding, returning firstly with an olive branch (another symbol of hope and peace), before making its new home on the restored and recreated land. And before that, at the very beginning of the Book of Genesis, we are told that a wind (or Spirit) from God sweeps over the face of the waters, a description that connects with the image of a bird hovering over the deep, bringing peace to the forces of chaos.

The dove is pictured as a gentle, harmless creature. Doves, like lambs, were routinely used as a sacrificial offering in the temple, their innocence in some way making up for human sins. Jesus instructs his followers to be "as wise as serpents and innocent as doves".

So for the Holy Spirit to descend upon Jesus like a dove is a rich and evocative picture, calling to mind these and other associations that the image of the dove would have had. But it is also in some ways a surprising image, and one that goes against some very prevalent expectations and assumptions.

The baptism of Christ comes at the very beginning of Mark's Gospel, and marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. This is where he is first marked out as the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who will bring redemption to the people of Israel, salvation to the world. In that context, we might expect an account of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Chosen One to emphasise themes of power and strength. In announcing and bringing in God's Kingdom, surely the Messiah will be moving in the power of the Spirit, equipped with the strength of God to do the works that he has been called to do. But the baptism of Christ is not depicted in that way, as if it were akin to one of those moments in superhero movies, where an unassuming teenager is given superhuman powers after being bitten by a radioactive spider or something.

Instead, the key moment at the baptism of Jesus comes after the Spirit's descent, with the words that come from heaven: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased". This is not the moment when Jesus became God's Son – that has always been true, from before the beginning of time – but it is the point when that truth is spoken and heard. The promise, the assurance is given, of Christ's fundamental identity, as God's beloved Son.

And that Jesus' ministry begins in this way tells us something important, not only about Jesus but about ourselves. What matters most is not what power or powers we may have, not what strength or abilities we may exercise, but who we are, in the depths of our being and in relation to God our Creator. It is there that we find our security, and the resources that we need to walk the road that God has set before us.

In the news this week, we have seen the alarming scenes that result from a powerful person being unable or unwilling to relinquish that power. What has been revealed (if we didn't already see it) has been the deep insecurity of someone who fears that, without power, he is nothing and no one, and so, like Herod before him, is ready to unleash the forces of violence in a desperate attempt to cling to that power.

There is a better way. It is the way, not of the serpent but of the dove. The Kingdom of God will not be marked by signs of destructive power but by gentleness and peace. In our baptism, we are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit, the dove who descends not so much to empower us as to renew us and transform us and, above all, to assure us of who we really are, beloved children of God.

***Hymn***

### ***Thanksgiving for Holy Baptism***

God in Christ gives us water welling up for eternal life.  
With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

*(The minister pours water into the font)*

Praise God who made heaven and earth,  
**who keeps his promise for ever.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**It is right to give thanks and praise.**

Father, we give you thanks and praise  
for your gift of water in creation;  
for your Spirit, sweeping over the waters,  
bringing light and life;  
for your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,  
baptized in the river Jordan.  
We bless you for your new creation,  
brought to birth by water and the Spirit,  
and for your grace bestowed upon us your children,  
washing away our sins.  
May your holy and life-giving Spirit  
move upon these waters.  
Restore through them the beauty of your creation,  
and bring those who are baptized  
to new birth in the family of your Church.  
Drown sin in the waters of judgement,  
anoint your children with power from on high,  
and make them one with Christ  
in the freedom of your kingdom.  
For all might, majesty, dominion and power are yours,  
now and for ever.

**Alleluia. Amen.**

God of truth,  
you are faithful to the covenant you have made with us;  
look in mercy upon your people.  
From all our sins, O Lord:  
**wash us and we shall be clean.**

Today we rejoice and give thanks  
because your Son humbled himself to be baptized in the Jordan.  
Through the waters you have given us the mystery of baptism  
for the remission of our sins.  
From all our sins, O Lord:  
**wash us and we shall be clean.**

Through water and Spirit  
you give us new life as the people of God,  
and pour out upon us the gifts of your new covenant.  
From all our sins, O Lord:  
**wash us and we shall be clean.**

***You may at this point wish to make the sign of the cross on your forehead with the water in the bowl beside you.***

Almighty God,  
in our baptism you have consecrated us  
to be temples of your Holy Spirit.  
May we, whom you have counted worthy,  
nurture your indwelling Spirit with a lively faith,  
and worship you with upright lives;  
through Jesus Christ.  
**Amen.**

May God the Father,  
who led the wise men by the shining of a star  
to find the Christ, the Light from Light,  
lead you also in your pilgrimage to find the Lord.

May God the Son,  
who turned water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana,  
transform your lives and make glad your hearts.

May God the Holy Spirit,  
who came upon the beloved Son  
at his baptism in the river Jordan,  
pour out his gifts on you  
who have come to the waters of new birth.

And the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.  
**Amen.**