

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 12 January 2025 - Baptism of Christ (The First Sunday of Epiphany)

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Isaiah 43. 1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8. 14-17; Luke 3. 15-17 and 21-22

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Phil Marsh, Priest in Charge, Ely Benefice

On this first Sunday of Epiphany, we are invited into a story of identity, transformation, and calling. Through today's gospel, we encounter Christ's baptism, revealing not only who He is but who we are too!

Until now, Jesus has lived in relative obscurity, but here, at the beginning of His public ministry, the heavens open, and God declares His delight in His Son. As we are baptised into Christ, so this declaration of God's delight is also spoken over us. Through our baptism, because of our inclusion in God's family through Christ, so we too are declared God's beloved. In Isaiah 43, God says to His people:

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine."

These words, spoken to a people in exile, remind us of God's steadfast promise. In Jesus' baptism, as the heavens open and the Spirit descends, the Father's voice proclaims: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you, I am well pleased." Jesus' identity is affirmed not by His achievements, but by His relationship with the Father. Similarly, our identity is rooted in God's love, not in what we do. Through baptism, we are claimed and redeemed as God's beloved.

Baptism is a moment when we are named, claimed, and commissioned. It assures us of God's love and challenges us to live in light of that truth. Moreover, it is also more than just affirmation but is also empowerment. The Spirit that descended on Jesus at His baptism equipped Him for His mission: to proclaim good news, bring healing, and reveal God's kingdom. Likewise, our baptism commissions us into God's mission. We are joined to Christ—not only in His identity but also in His purpose.

When an individual is baptized, they are marked with the sign of the cross, and we say to the baptised:

"Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified. Fight valiantly as a disciple of Christ against sin, the world, and the devil, and remain faithful to Christ to the end of your life."

Later, as a candle is given, we speak these words to them:

"You have received the light of Christ; walk in this light all the days of your life. Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father."

To be baptized into Christ is to receive a calling to live for Him and serve Him in the world. The Spirit that descended upon Jesus is at work in us today, shaping, guiding, and empowering us to live out our baptismal calling. We might well then consider: How are we living as God's beloved? How is the Spirit working through us to reflect Christ's glory in our daily lives?

Fortunately, the living out of our baptismal calling is not something we need to under our own steam. Isaiah 43:2 provides reassurance: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you." Jesus affirms this, saying, "Surely I am with you to the very end of the age." Empowered by the Spirit, we can step into our calling to live for Christ with confidence, knowing we are never alone. Each moment we are able to draw on the strength of God's presence, which just might enable us to find the courage to walk paths we might otherwise fear.

Epiphany being a season of revelation then is not just a time to marvel at Christ's glory, but also to consider how we might reflect His glory in our own lives. Just as Jesus' baptism was a commissioning, our baptism calls us to participate in God's mission. Whether through acts of service, words of encouragement, or living with integrity and love, we are called to witness His transformative power.

Living as God's beloved requires embracing our identity in Christ, even when the world tells us otherwise. It means facing daily challenges with the confidence that we are deeply loved, empowered, and called to serve. It means reflecting His glory in our words, actions, and relationships. I wonder what might it mean for us to share His love and grace with others? Baptism invites us to reflect Christ's glory in every aspect of our lives—and so is both a gift and a responsibility.

To live this way is not passive. It requires intentionality and courage. It means showing kindness, standing up for justice, and sharing the hope we have in Christ. To live as God's beloved offers both comfort and challenge: comfort in knowing our worth is based on **whose** we are, and challenge in reflecting His love and glory in our communities.

This calling is both personal and communal. It is not just a solo endeavour. In baptism, we are joined not only to Christ but also to His body, the Church. Together, we live out our baptismal identity, supporting and encouraging one another. The congregation affirms its role in the baptismal liturgy, pledging to support the newly baptized. We are called to reflect Christ's glory together as a community. This shared mission binds us as the body of Christ and offers a unique opportunity to embody His love and light collectively. So how might our actions, as a church, reflect Christ's grace and truth? How might our collective witness reveal His love to the world? These are questions to consider prayerfully, as we live and grow together in faith. We might even want to discuss them over coffee!

Reflecting Christ's glory in daily life means stepping more fully into our calling. I am pretty convinced that God invites us into His mission in really simple and practical ways—offering a listening ear, standing up for justice, or showing kindness in daily interactions. Each act, however small, reflects the glory of Christ.

Just as Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of His mission, ours invites us to participate in His ongoing work of redemption and restoration, called to continual transformation, shaped by the Spirit and grounded in God's love, called to reflect his love in every aspect of life —

in our relationships, in our communities, and in the ways we choose to engage with the world. Baptism is not a one-time event, but an ongoing daily reality that shapes who we are and how we live. From the smallest gestures of kindness to the boldest acts of faith, we carry the light of Christ into a world longing for hope and renewal.

May we carry the assurance of our identity as God's beloved children and embrace the challenge of reflecting His glory.

Let us be attentive to where God is calling us to share His love and grace, and let us seek to be deliberate in living out that calling more fully this week.

In every interaction, we have the opportunity to embody Christ's love and to remind others of His redemptive power. Every moment an opportunity to plant seeds of faith, kindness, and renewal that reflect Christ's ongoing mission in the world.

This Epiphany, may we not only marvel at Christ's revealed glory but also reflect it. Empowered by the Spirit, may we carry His light into the world, proclaiming the good news of His kingdom so others may encounter the transforming power of His love through us. And as we move through this season, let us keep our eyes fixed on Him who calls us beloved and sends us into the world with His blessing.

Together, let us shine as beacons of His grace and truth, that others may be drawn closer to His love.

Suggested intergenerational / All age version

Service Title: Reflecting Christ's Glory

Theme: Exploring baptism as God's affirmation of our identity and a call to reflect His glory.

Welcome and Introduction

Leader:

"Good morning, everyone! Today, we are celebrating a very special moment in Jesus' life - His baptism. This is the first Sunday of Epiphany, a time to discover who Jesus is and what it means for us. We'll think about how baptism tells us we are loved by God and how we can share that love with others.

There will be lots of chances to join in today - so whether you're 3, 33, or 93, we need your help to reflect on what baptism means for us all!"

Opening Worship

Song: Come People of the Risen King (or a similar uplifting all-age worship song)

Interactive Opening Question

Leader:

“Has anyone ever been to a baptism? What do you remember about it? Maybe the water, the promises, or the candle? Turn to someone near you and share your favourite memory or idea about baptism.”

(After a couple of minutes, invite a few people to share their responses.)

Bible Reading

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

(Consider inviting a child or family to read this passage dramatically, with one person reading John the Baptist’s words and another narrating.)

Talk Part 1: Fear Not, You Are Loved

Leader:

“Did you notice what happened when Jesus was baptized? The heavens opened, the Holy Spirit came down like a dove, and God’s voice said, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you, I am well pleased.’

Let’s stop for a moment and think about that. Imagine hearing God say those words about YOU:

‘You are my child, my beloved. I love you!’

God said those words to Jesus, and through baptism, He says them to us too. Let’s do something together to remember this.”

Activity: You Are Beloved Mirror Craft

Materials: Small mirrors (or mirrored cards), markers, and stickers.

Leader:

“On your mirror, write or stick the words ‘I am God’s beloved’ around the edges. When you look in the mirror, remember that God loves you just as you are! If you don’t have a mirror, you can draw a picture of yourself and write the same words around it. Let’s take a few minutes to do this together.”

(Distribute materials and allow time for everyone to decorate. Encourage adults to help children.)

Talk Part 2: Baptism as a Calling

Leader:

“Baptism isn’t just about knowing God loves us - it’s about being part of God’s family and joining in His mission. When Jesus was baptized, it wasn’t the end of the story. It was the beginning of His ministry - healing people, helping the poor, and sharing God’s love.

When someone is baptized in church, the priest gives them a special sign. Does anyone know what it is?

(Wait for responses.)

That's right - a sign of the cross on their forehead, to remind them they belong to Jesus. The priest also gives them a candle and says, 'You have received the light of Christ; shine as a light in the world.'

Let's explore what it means to shine as a light."

Activity: Let Your Light Shine – working in groups

Materials: Battery-operated candles (one per group), large paper cutouts of a candle flame, and pens.

Leader:

"Each group gets a candle. Together, write on the paper flame one way you can show God's love this week - maybe being kind to a friend, helping someone in need, or saying thank you to someone who helps you. Then, attach the flame to your candle. When you take your candle home, remember to let your light shine for God!"

(Allow time for groups to discuss and complete the activity.)

Talk Part 3: A Shared Mission

Leader:

"Did you notice something about baptism? It's not just about me or you. When someone is baptized, we all say, 'We welcome you into the family of God.'

Baptism reminds us we're part of something bigger - a church family that helps each other reflect God's love to the world. Let's think about what that looks like."

Interactive Discussion: A Community of Lights

Leader:

"Imagine what happens when we all shine our lights together. What would it look like if we, as a church, showed God's love to everyone in our community? Turn to someone near you and share one idea of how we can shine as a church."

(Invite a few groups to share their ideas, writing them down on a large candle poster at the front.)

Response: Affirming Our Baptismal Promises

Leader:

"In baptism, promises are made to follow Jesus, fight for what is good, and share God's love. Let's affirm those promises together now."

(Lead the congregation in the baptismal promises, adapted for all ages.)

Leader: Do you promise to follow Jesus and walk in His light?

All: With God's help, we will.

Leader: Do you promise to love others as Jesus loves us?

All: With God's help, we will.

Leader: Do you promise to shine as lights in the world?

All: With God's help, we will.

Closing Worship and Sending Out

Song: Shine, Jesus, Shine (or another light-themed song)

Leader:

“Before we go, let's pray:

Loving God, thank You for calling us Your beloved children. Help us to live as people who shine Your light in the world. Bless us as we go out to share Your love with others. Amen.”

(As the congregation leaves, they can take their decorated mirrors or candles home as a reminder of their calling.)

Suggested intercessions / Prayers to accompany the service

Opening Prayer

Leader:

Gracious God,

As we gather on this first Sunday of Epiphany,
We thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ,
Revealed to us in His baptism.

As we reflect on His identity and calling,
Help us to hear Your voice speaking over us,
Calling us beloved,
And empowering us to reflect Your glory in the world.
Through Your Spirit, guide us in this time of worship.

All:

**Open our hearts to Your presence, O Lord,
And fill us with Your light. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for the gift of baptism,
For the assurance of Your love
And the calling to serve You in the world.
Help us to live as Your beloved children,
Empowered by Your Spirit and reflecting Your glory in all we do.

Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We pray for Your Church,
That we may be a community of light,
Shining with Your love and truth.
Bless our leaders, our families, and all who seek to follow Christ.
Equip us to share Your good news
And serve our neighbours with joy.

Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We pray for the world You love,
For places of conflict, injustice, and suffering.
May Your light break through the darkness,
Bringing hope and healing to all in need.
Guide leaders and communities to work for peace,
Justice, and the flourishing of all creation.

Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**
We lift before You those who are struggling today:
The sick, the lonely, the grieving, and the weary.
Surround them with Your love and comfort,
And fill them with the light of Your presence.
We name them now in our hearts... (pause).

Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We give thanks for the saints who have gone before us,
Who lived as lights in the world,
Reflecting Your love and grace.
May we, too, follow their example
And shine with Your glory until we join them in Your eternal kingdom.

Lord, in Your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

A Prayer of Commitment

Lord Jesus,
As we remember Your baptism,
We commit ourselves to walk in Your light,
To live as Your beloved,
And to share Your love with others.
Strengthen us to be faithful witnesses of Your truth,
And guide us by Your Spirit each day.

All:
May our lives reflect Your glory, O Lord,
And shine as lights in the world. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Loving Father,
As we go from this place,
May we carry with us the assurance of Your love
And the challenge to reflect Your light.
Empower us by Your Spirit
To live as Your beloved children,
Bringing hope and healing to the world.

All:
Send us out in the power of Your Spirit,
To shine as lights in the world,
To the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Suggested hymns/songs

Traditional Hymns for Epiphany and Theme

Christ Whose Glory Fills the Skies {Tune-Ratisbon}

- *Celebrating Christ's light and asking Him to transform and reflect His glory through us.*

Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning {Tune Epiphany}

- *A classic Epiphany hymn celebrating Christ's revelation.*

Songs of Thankfulness and Praise {Tune St Edmund}

- *A hymn covering many Epiphany themes.*

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

- *Celebrating Christ's glory and power*

O Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness

- *A hymn reflecting worship. – "bow down before him, his glory proclaim".*

Christ is the World's Light

- *A call to reflect Christ's light in the world.*

Come Down, O Love Divine

- *A prayer for the Spirit's presence and guidance.*

At the Name of Jesus

- *Reflecting on Christ's identity and calling.*

O for a thousand tongues to sing –

- *A hymn re Christ's identity with the line 'Assist me to proclaim!'*

Lord, the Light of Your Love is Shining (Shine, Jesus, Shine)

- *A well-loved hymn about shining Christ's light in the world.*

Take My Life, and Let It Be

- *A hymn of dedication, offering ourselves to reflect God's purposes.*

Go Forth and Tell! O Church of God, Awake

- *A hymn calling the Church to proclaim and reflect Christ's message of love.*

Contemporary Worship Songs for the Theme

Jesus, Hope of the Nations (Brian Doerksen)

- *Celebrates Christ as the light and hope of the world.*

Build My Life (Housefires) {worthy of every song we could ever sing/we live for you}

- *Focus on living out our calling.*

Who You Say I Am (Hillsong)

- *Emphasizes our identity as God's beloved children.*

Build Your Kingdom Here (Rend Collective)

- *A song inviting God's kingdom and light to shine through His people.*

I Will Offer Up My Life (Matt Redman)

- *A personal response to Christ's sacrifice, offering ourselves to reflect His love.*

Light of the World (Here I Am to Worship) (Tim Hughes)

- *Focused on Christ as light and our response to reflect His glory.*

Lord, I Need You (Matt Maher)

- *A song of dependence, inviting God to shine His light through us.*

Living Hope (Phil Wickham)

- *Celebrates the glory of Christ's resurrection and the hope we are called to share.*

This is Amazing Grace (Phil Wickham)

- *Celebrates God's grace and glory.*

Goodness of God (Bethel Music)

- *A reminder of God's faithful love.*

Holy Spirit (Bryan and Katie Torwalt)

- *Invoking the Spirit's presence and guidance.*

Kid-Friendly Songs for the theme

Shine from the inside out. (Nick Jackson)

– *Great song talking about reflecting God*

Shine, Jesus, Shine (Graham Kendrick)

– *Encourages shining Christ's light in the world*

Our God is a Great Big God (vineyard)

– *Celebrates God's greatness and our place in His family.*

This Little Light of Mine (various)

– *A perfect fit for reflecting Christ's light.*

God's Love is Big (Nick and Becky Drake)

– *High energy affirming Gods love for us*

I Am a New Creation

– *A song about renewal and transformation in Christ.*

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- reflectionary.org – lectionary-based resources
- engageworship – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)