

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 11 January 2026 - 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 42.1-9; Psalm 29, Acts 10.34-43, Matthew 3.13-end

Homily

Today's homily has been written by Sue Nelms, Bishop's Advisor for Disability and LLM, The Lordsbridge Team (Benefice)

This morning's gospel reading is quite short and is one that we may have heard several times before. As we read it again, is there anything we can see that adds to our understanding of this passage?

The lives of John and Jesus are intertwined. They are related; their mothers Elizabeth and Mary are cousins and were both chosen by God for a specific reason, to carry and give birth to a baby who will grow to play a key part in God's purpose on earth. Remember the excitement that the unborn baby John showed when he leapt in his mother's womb at the moment Mary arrived to visit Elizabeth when they were both pregnant (Luke 1.41). John couldn't even see Jesus that day, but yet he recognised the presence of his saviour.

John recognises Jesus again when he arrives at the River Jordan. Jesus asks John to baptise him despite knowing himself to be the Son of God. John protests that he is not worthy to baptise Jesus and that Jesus should be baptising him, but Jesus insists that they need to do things properly in order to fulfil God's intentions. John doesn't need to be told twice; throughout his whole life he has been obedient to God and his plan and this day will not be any different.

Baptism represents the washing away of sin. Unlike us, Jesus did not need to be baptised because he was perfect and had no need to be washed clean. However, if he had not come for baptism, some of the scriptures pointing towards his role as Messiah would not have been fulfilled in the presence of witnesses and recorded for the generations to follow.

A phrase from the writings of Isaiah chapter 11 verse 2, is echoed in this morning's narrative. Isaiah states 'The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord'. It is all very visual. In the passage from Matthew's gospel, 'suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him'. The onlookers have the opportunity to share in a wondrous moment; the moment when God's plan starts to fall into place as Jesus begins his journey to the cross.

Jesus coming to the Jordan also fulfils a prophecy from Isaiah chapter 42 verse 1 which states 'Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.' Matthew's gospel echoes these words when we are told that a voice from Heaven said 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

Three important statements proudly made by God for all observers at the River Jordan to hear:

- First, Jesus is God's Son.
- Second, God loves his Son; he calls him the Beloved.
- Finally, God is well pleased with Him.

The statements are not just for the observers on the day in relation to Jesus. The statements are also for us to strive towards both in our relationship with God and in our relationship with our own families. In our modern world there will be children, both young and grown up, who may not know whose child they are. Not all children grow up in a loving relationship with their parents; they grow up neither being shown they are loved nor being told they are loved. Finally, sadly, many children struggle to know that their parent, parents or carers are pleased with them. For them life is a struggle to try and earn that pleasure and they may never achieve it.

We know from our reading of the gospel that Jesus spends his life living out the will of God secure in the knowledge that God loves him and is well pleased with him. Those of us who have never been told that we are someone's beloved child and that they are well pleased with us, may struggle to understand. They may struggle to grasp and understand that, like Jesus, we are also God's children and that he loves us. He loves us for who we are, not what we do or achieve. We don't have to try and earn that love. For some, that can be and probably is, a difficult concept to get our heads around.

John didn't need to baptise Jesus, but by being obedient and doing so, he came alongside God in order to do what was required of him to fulfil God's will and the prophecies. After all, Jesus could not have been baptised without someone physically there to baptise him. God doesn't want to do everything on his own. He wanted to walk alongside John in what he was doing, just as he wants to walk alongside us in what we do each day and as he walked alongside Jesus, his beloved Son.

Baptism is important for us because it represents the washing away of sin. Whilst we may not undertake it every day, baptism services are good opportunities not only to welcome new members to our church family but also for us to remember that our sins can and are washed away when we confess them to God. Confession is important for us – we see that throughout the Bible. For example, King David wrote 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me (Psalm 51.10). In his first letter John wrote 'If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1.9)'.

Jesus didn't need to come and be baptised that day, but by doing so, he showed his full humanity, walking alongside us. We humans, however, do need to go through the cleansing

that baptism represents because unlike Jesus we are not perfect. But we are not alone as we go forward for that cleansing at baptism; we know that Jesus has been there too. We can also take the opportunity to remember and reflect on that cleansing when we make subsequent acts of confession. We know that Jesus is by our side even if we don't see him there.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we receive Your grace and mercy as demonstrated at the baptism of your beloved son. Make us a living testimony of Your love and redemption. Amen.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' Heavenly Father, we strive to be your children. We pray that we will also please you, just as your Son pleased you. We thank you for your Church here on earth, we thank you for the opportunity to be your hands and feet, as we show your love to our community. Give us the words when we need them, strength when we struggle and, like John the Baptist, the willingness to do the things that surprise us. Send your spirit into our lives just as you sent the Holy Spirit into the life of your son, Jesus.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, we pray that you will give strength to your people. Bless your people with peace. We pray today for the countries in our world that are at war, both the oppressed and the oppressor. We pray that world leaders will learn to fear you and desire to do what is acceptable to you, that they will act with wisdom, humility, honesty and compassion as they make decisions which affect the lives of so many. Bless them with empathy and the ability to relate to those who may be different from them rather than seeking to dominate them. Inspire them to work together to rebuild the parts of the world that have become so damaged by our actions.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Creator God, thank you for the wonder of your creation. Help us to care for and nurture it rather than using and abusing it. It is so easy to lose sight of our connection to nature and its connection to us and we pray that we will take the steps we need to maintain both its health and ours.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Father we pray for our country, for King Charles, Queen Camilla and the Royal Family. We pray for our government as it tries to tackle the challenges that face it. We pray that it will not lose sight of the ordinary people whose lives are affected by the decisions it makes. We pray for local councillors and all who work for the benefit of our local communities. We also pray for everyone who works to keep communities running; medical services, schools and colleges, shops, businesses and farmers. Help us to remember that we work together to achieve community.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we pray for everyone who is dealing with illness at the moment, whether in body, mind or spirit. We ask that you will comfort them and give strength and compassion to the people who might care for them, whether employed or family and friends. Open our eyes to the challenges faced by families dealing with long term illness. We pray for families who might be struggling; help them to find support when they need it. We pray for young people who try to make sense of the world around them, and older people who might feel isolated. No-one knows what goes on behind closed doors and we pray particularly for people for whom home might not be a safe space. We take a moment of silence to lay before God the names of any people on our heart.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate Father we pray for people who have died or who are coming to the end of their earthly lives. We pray that you will welcome them into your loving arms and that they will rest in peace and rise in glory. We pray also for people grieving, whether that grief is new and raw or older but still painful. Again, we take a moment of silence to lay before God the names of any people on our heart.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Suggested hymns/songs

Source and Fount of all Creation
The sinless one to Jordan came
On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Joy to the World, the Lord is come
Holy, holy, holy
All hail the power of Jesus's name
You are the King of Israel
To God be the glory
Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Hail to the Lord's anointed
Breathe on me breath of God

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](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)