

**SERVICE OF WORSHIP FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH AND SHEPPARTON RURAL
CONGREGATIONS JANUARY 10, 2021**

Introit:

Welcome/Introduction:

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also, with you.

Acknowledgement:

I pay my respect to the traditional custodians of the land in which I live, work and worship. To the members and elders of the Yorta Yorta nations past, present and emerging.

Call to Worship:

The One whom God is pleased is one with us, standing before us clothed in robes humanness, entering the waters of our drowning yet rising free as living witness to God's power and grace. This is the Christ of the universe, vulnerable and passionate, blessed for all people at all times to gather all into the life of God.

Let us worship our God.

Hymn: 179 (TiS) 'Praise with joy the world's Creator'.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

Thanks be to God for the water of life, shed in tears of grieving then flowing in healing balm. Thanks be to God for the water of kindness, dried up in the scorching heat of our mistakes and returned in kindness to quench our parched souls. Thanks be to God for the water of creativity, spent in lavish self-indulgences and given as a gift for a new future.

O God, just as John the Baptist asked why the Christ would approach him for baptism, so we wonder why you would come to us here.

We are far from worthy to receive you, Jesus Christ. We sometimes wonder if you would do better in a world without our human company.

There are so many times when we fail you, when those we meet receive less than your grace from us.

When we look at the world, we know that we have far to go before your reign is established. We know that at times we have betrayed your hope for your church and for your creation. We have taken much and given little. We serve out of our sense of duty rather than the joy of serving you in the world.

Come close to us now, we pray O God. Refresh our lives with the flowing grace of your forgiveness. Remind us of our calling that we may be your people.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness:

In our baptism, we are assured of the unfailing love of God. Even before we could know it or earn it, we were surrounded by grace. God in Christ will never fail us.
We are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Doxology: 768 (TiS) 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow'.

Readings: Genesis 1: 1-5, Mark 1: 4-11

Hymn: 447 (TiS) 'Lord, your almighty word'.

Message: 'Baptism: A new creation, new hope, and a new identity'.

- For many the year 2020 will be remembered for its many challenges and the loss of lives. The responses to the global pandemic have taken centre stage in the news and social media, and even in passing conversations in the streets.
- Towards the close of 2020, many commented that it is a year to forget. They are hoping that this year 2021 could be different with better, brighter days.
- And there are of course those who wish they had done things differently.
- What the global pandemic has done for many is to highlight what is really important in life. And often the lament I hear "I wish I hadn't said that", I wish I had acted in a different way, I just want to live my life differently now.'
- All these reveals something about us because the things we hope for, how we see ourselves and the things we do are intimately connected.
- And what we need most is the opportunity to start again. The opportunity to live at the deeper level, the chance to participate and be part of a new creation.
- A new creation in which the first day of that new creation is today. A day that we welcome with excitement and newness.
- Can you remember the first day of your married life? That was the day that held all the promises that might be or can be. The day when no harsh words had been spoken, no feelings hurt, and you were alive, full of dreams and possibilities.
- What about the first day of being a parent? You look at your first born with joy in your heart and you can't think of the right word to say.
- I would like to suggest that that is how God looked at the first day, in the beginning of time. No relationship broken, no guilt or regret and no sin to confess.
- A new day of a new creation full of light, the light of life, the light of love, the light of promise and hope; the light of God. And it was good and therefore since then, the first day is always a day of creation!
- Today, as we celebrate the baptism of Jesus, our readings suggest and continue to remind us every year, that this is and can be the first day of a new creation for you and your family, for the church and for the whole world.
- Our wishes for a new beginning and a new day is not really about turning back time. It is about becoming a new creation, a new being, a new hope with a new identity.
- Ultimately, it is about returning to the waters of Jesus' baptisms. And that is what we are doing today.
- We gather around the symbols of his baptism and return to the first day of creation.

- Our reading from Genesis tells us that in the beginning the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.
- We hear from Marks gospel that the Spirit of God descended on Jesus as he is coming up out of the water.
- In the beginning God said, "Let there be light."
- At Jesus' baptism God said, "You are my Son, the Beloved."
- In Jesus' baptism God was "well pleased."
- The creation and the baptism of Jesus are God's gifts to us. In these gifts, God is present to us and everything that God does God does it for us.
- The Son of God did not need a baptism, we needed Him to be baptized. The baptismal water did not sanctify Jesus; Jesus sanctified the baptismal water for us. Jesus' baptism is not the means by which we identify with Him; it is the means by which He identifies with us. Our baptism allows us to participate in His baptism.
- In the baptism of Jesus, the whole of humanity is being presented and baptized. It is to that union between humanity and the divine in Jesus Christ that the Spirit descended.
- It is our humanity in this new creation that the Father spoke and with whom He was well pleased.
- The whole of humanity is again recreated in the baptism of Jesus. This is the first day of that new creation. In baptism we are a new creation, a new being.
- Every time we return to this sanctuary and gather around the baptismal font, we claim our new identity in Jesus as beloved sons and daughters.
- Every time we gather around this baptismal font God again manifests and reveals himself in humanity.
- Every time we gather around this baptismal font, we return to that first day of light, love, life, and the promise of all that might be.
- Whatever your life has been or might now be, the baptismal waters await you. So, come. As we gather around the baptismal font, we return to the water. Let the water of Jesus' baptism wash and rid you of fear, resentment and despair. Immerse yourself in the mercy of God's love. Bathe yourselves in the water of God's forgiveness and enjoy the current of God's grace.
- Let today be the first day of a new beginning in God's new creation.

Hymn: 270 (TiS) 'On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry'.

Notices & Concerns:

Offering:

In gratitude and thankfulness, we offer our gifts and talents and fruits of our labour, that you may bless them and use them in the work of your new creation.

Amen.

Prayers of the People:

Life-giving God, we bring to you our prayers for the world and for the church.

At the dawn of time your Spirit hovered over the waters of the deep and brought form and life to your creation: overshadow your world today and give to us a new sense of wonder and responsibility for this planet and all its creatures.

God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

In the days of the great flood you saved Noah from the waters of death and make a covenant with him and his descendants: look with compassion today on all in danger from natural disaster and from those catastrophes that we inflict on ourselves.

God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

In ancient times you brought your chosen people from slavery to freedom through the waters of the Red Sea: liberate your people today who are held in the bondage of cruelty, oppression or injustice, so they may live in dignity, freedom and hope.

God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

In the waters of the River Jordan, your Son Jesus Christ was baptised with those he came to save: bring your people today to receive the salvation that you offer so we may turn away from all that holds us in the power of evil.

God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Through the baptism Jesus you seal us as your own and make us one with all who bear your name: empower us with your spirit to faithfully serve you and proclaim your good news of justice, peace, redemption and love.

God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Ever living and Eternal God, by the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us to new and everlasting life: may we so pattern our lives on your Son, that we, also, may be found pleasing in your eyes and take our place with your beloved daughters and sons of every time and nation.

God, in your mercy,

hear our prayer. Amen!

Hymn: 250 (TiS) 'Christ, when for us you were baptized'.

Blessing:

Let us leave this place of worship and fellowship in faith, moving into the world with the vision of God's justice before us.

Go with courage of God to challenge fear, with the clarity of Christ to confront confusions and the comfort of the Holy Spirit flowing over our lives.

Amen.

(Recessional song: 666 (TiS) 'We are marching in the light of God'.)