



Order of Service
9th January 2022

INTROIT TiS 402 (**verses 1 and 3**) Come, gracious Spirit, heavenly dove

CALL TO WORSHIP

Today we celebrate a special baptism;
the baptism of Jesus of Nazareth.

God says:

Look! See my chosen servant,
the One in whom I utterly delight;

**I have placed my Spirit on him,
he will bring true justice to the nations.**

When Jesus was baptised, the heavens opened up,
and Spirit came down like a dove;
and there was a voice from heaven saying:

**“This is my dearly loved Son,
with whom I am delighted.”**

The joy of the Lord be with you all.

And also with you.

Opening Prayer

Most wonderful God, foolish and flawed though we are,
we too delight in your beloved Son.

As in his name we gather in the house of many praises,
may the heavens be opened for us,
that we may catch a glimpse of that Light and Love
that transforms our common days with a beauty not of our making.
Through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen!

Acknowledgement of First Peoples

We respectfully acknowledge that we gather on Bangerang country of the Yorta Yorta nations. We honour the custodians of the lands and waterways; and pay our respects to their elders - past, present and emerging.

WELCOME

HYMN TiS 154 Great is your faithfulness



Psalm 29 - The Voice of God in a Great Storm

- ¹ Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- ² Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy splendour.
- ³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
**the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over mighty waters.**
- ⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
- ⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
- ⁶ He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- ⁷ The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
- ⁸ **The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.**
- ⁹ The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,
and strips the forest bare;
and in his temple all say, "Glory!"
- ¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

ALL

- ¹¹ **May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God with us. You come to your people in a manger, at the temple, and on a riverbank. During your earthly ministry, you inhabited everyday spaces: the places where your people went to tend to their livelihood, to pray, and to collect water. Too often, we imagine you only in these traditional biblical scenes, instead of looking for you in our everyday lives: in our workplaces, our places of worship, and our homes. Forgive us.

Open our hearts, eyes, and ears to encounter you today. Ready our hearts to shout "Glory," when we hear your voice and see your work in our lives.

Too often, we acknowledge your holy identity, but we forget to remember that we share in your baptism. Forgive us.

Remind us again this day that we are claimed as God's children and are sent to show the love and justice we see in you. Amen.

Words of affirmation

God's voice publicly claims Jesus as "my child, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

We too are called by God: God knows us, loves us, claims and names us. We are beloved and empowered!

AN EARLY WORD

HYMN TiS 417 Loving Spirit, loving Spirit



BIBLE READINGS:

Isaiah 43:1-7

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Acts 8:14-17

REFLECTION

It's only two weeks and one day since we celebrated the birth of Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem. Today, our gospel reading has taken us across a chasm of time into the adulthood of Jesus, as we remember his baptism by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. What has happened in those intervening years?

Apart from a brief reference in Luke's gospel to Jesus in the temple when he was 12 years old, we don't know what else happened because gospel writers didn't think it was important enough to tell us.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each wrote down what they believed were the most important details about Jesus. And, in many instances, they differed over what they thought was important because the body of people to whom they were each writing differed in some degree.

Mark's gospel was the first to be written and in it Mark is believed to be writing to influence Gentile Christians - Greeks and Romans and other non-Jewish people. His gospel begins with the words "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" and then he launches straight into the prophecy of Isaiah detailing a messenger preparing the way. He describes John the Baptist as the one now preparing, and goes on to tell of the adult Jesus coming from Nazareth to be baptised in the Jordan by John the Baptist. He says nothing about Bethlehem, or angels, or shepherds, or even about Mary and Joseph. To Mark the birth of Jesus is an unimportant detail.

Not so in Matthew or Luke. In these two gospels we find the stories of Jesus' birth, but each with differing details, because each writer has different priorities.

Matthew wrote mainly for Jewish converts so he emphasises how Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy, how he is the expected Messiah from David's line. So, Matthew begins his gospel with a genealogy "This" he writes "is the list of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, who was a descendant of Abraham."

Once Matthew has established Jesus' credentials, he goes on to tell the story of his birth, but instead of the shepherds that Luke describes, Matthew relates the story of the wise men - the visitors from the East, because his agenda is to impress upon Jewish people the importance of this baby born in an obscure village in Judea. So he doesn't write about a group of shepherds out in the fields, because shepherds were looked down on by respectable Jewish folk. Instead, he chooses to tell the story of a group of travellers bearing costly gifts and kneeling down and worshipping the Christ child. And all through his account, Matthew quotes passages from the prophets to substantiate his message that Jesus is indeed the prophesied Messiah.

Luke's agenda, on the other hand, was firstly to convince his readers that what he was writing about was historical fact. He himself hadn't witnessed these things, he wrote, but people who had, had told him and he wrote their reports down as faithfully as possible in two parts - his gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. His priority was to show how the history of the church was dominated by the same Spirit which shaped and dominated the life of Jesus. He is therefore looking backwards from the time of the early church to the reason for its existence, Jesus Christ.

He takes care, then, to build up the authenticity of the account of Jesus' birth, telling the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptist, then the visitation of the angel to Mary and the subsequent birth of Jesus.

John's priorities are as strong as these other two, but, slightly different again. In the conclusion to his gospel - he says he has written these things "...that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, in believing you might have life in his name." And so, John, like Mark, says nothing about Jesus' birth, because, to him, it was immaterial how it happened; the more important thing was that it did happen - the Word became flesh...the light shines in the darkness - all to give us life.



Their agendas all come together, however, as they each pick up the story of John the Baptist which leads to the first significant event in the life of Jesus described by all four gospel writers - the baptism of Jesus. And why is it so significant? Because Jesus' true identity as God's Son was revealed in that moment and he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

If we could compare the four gospel writers to four musicians each playing a different variation of the melody - in Jesus' baptism we have them not only playing the same notes but reaching a magnificent crescendo: You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you.

In these words come the revelation of Jesus true identity – the Son of God - breaking into human history to reveal the light that darkness would never extinguish, the love that embraces all humankind from every nation. And this Jesus is gifted at his baptism and empowered by the same Spirit who gifts and empowers us at our baptism and sends all of us out, like Jesus, to a ministry of servanthood.

And so, it doesn't matter that these gospel writers all tell the story of Jesus in a slightly different way. The most important fact is that God so loved the world that he gave us Jesus.

Martin Luther, the great Reformation leader, passionately reminded people to "Remember your baptism!" Of course many of us were baptized as babies and can't "remember" our baptisms. But I think Luther meant something bigger than our historical memory of one day. In his catechism, Luther wrote, "A truly Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism once begun and ever to be continued." I think Martin Luther wanted us to remember each day who we are, and whose we are, and how beloved we are.

The hymn we are about to sing summarizes what happened for Jesus at his baptism and the outworking of that.

Christ, when for us you were baptised, God's Spirit on you came, as peaceful as a dove, and yet as urgent as a flame..."

and the last verse -

"Baptize us with your Spirit, Lord, your cross on us be signed, that likewise in God's service we may perfect freedom find." Amen

HYMN TIS 250 Christ, when for us you were baptised

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dedication of offering

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

God of heaven and earth, in Jesus' baptism, you spoke Jesus' true identity as your child, the beloved with whom you are well pleased.

Help us remember that Jesus' baptism is an invitation to each one of us to die to sin, be raised to a new life in Christ, and hold firm to the life that Jesus taught us to live.

In Baptism, our identity as children of God is made visible, and we become brothers and sisters in Christ. As part of God's family, our hearts are opened to pray for one another.

We pray...

For those among us who carry a heavy burden into the new year,
For those who grieve a diagnosis or death,
For those who are restless or sad or unsatisfied and cannot put a name on the feeling,
For those who feel alone,
For those living in harm's way or those recovering from an act of violence,
For those who are sick,
For those who are impacted in all sorts of ways by COVID-19,
For each one of us who needs your strength and guidance daily,
Lord, hear our prayer.



We pray in the name of the one who taught us how to pray and love one another as we say together:

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 forever. Amen.

HYMN: As the old year passes (to the tune *TiS 382*)

1. As the old year passes we look back, reflect:
times of joy and promise, times we'd best forget.
God of the ages help us walk your way.
Help us greet your future, seize tomorrow's day.
2. As the old year passes sorrow wells within:
loved ones no more 'round us, all that could have been.
God of compassion heal each ailing heart.
Guide us to your future where new life may start.
3. As the old year passes we cry for our struggling world.
Climate ever-changing, fighting too-often heard.
God, you have called us to cherish all you give.
Call us to your future where all in peace, might live
4. As the new year dawns now we would give you praise.
Faithful God, come lead us onward in new ways.
We'll love and serve you in the faith of Christ,
in your Spirit's future; people of new life.

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Blessing

Beloved of God, go into this world that God loves.

Bless it with your imagination; transform it with your courage; renew it with your compassion.

And may the Spirit's presence fill you with abundant hope and everlasting joy.

Amen.

HYMN TiS 781 Father, bless us as we go

