

twelvebaskets



EPIPHANY 1C

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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First Sunday After Epiphany - Year C
12th January 2025



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

554 STF – In this place, with God’s word OR

25 STF – God is here! As we his people

Opening Prayers

The Lord’s Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded (StF 455)

88 STF – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation!

Readings: Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Hymn:

392 STF – O Holy Spirit, Lord of grace OR

374 STF – Come, Holy Spirit, descend on us

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

665 STF – Make us your prophets, Lord OR

440 STF – Amazing grace – how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

736 STF – In heavenly love abiding OR

503 STF – Love divine all loves excelling

Blessing

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Call to worship

We come into this place of worship, O God,
Turning aside from all that distracts and destroys us, O God.
In this space, we are tuning in to you again.
Speak to us, by your Spirit, we pray, O God,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

554 STF – In this place, with God's word OR
25 STF – God is here! As we his people

Opening Prayers

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,
Show me the way to follow you this day,
Help each of us gathered here today to follow you through the signs of the times, through
the many choices that face us, through our own doubt and fear.
Help me to know that I am loved, forgiven and set free, no matter what I have done, no
matter how much self-doubt I carry.

Lord Jesus Christ,
Show me the way,
And when I am lost, afraid or confused, descend with your Spirit of love so that I can keep
believing that love will change things and others, and even me, even each and every one of
us.

Show us the way to follow you Jesus,
through struggles to be faithful, through the many choices that face us through our
uncertainty.

Show us the way,
And when we are lost, afraid or confused descend with your Spirit of love so that we can
keep believing that love will change things and others, and even the Church.

Turn the signpost around Jesus
Show us the way to you, and to follow in your paths laid out for each and every one of us,
today and always.

We bring these prayers through your name, and in the healing power of the Spirit of God,
Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

All Age Talk

Have you ever waited for someone to come to your house, maybe a friend or a family member, only for the doorbell to ring and to realise it's a post person or, worst still, a salesperson?

It maybe wasn't who you were expecting. This very thing happens in our New Testament reading, which we'll hear later in our service.

In Luke's story, people were very excited and waiting for someone to save them. They thought John the Baptist might be the Saviour, but John said, "No, I'm not the Saviour. Someone much greater than me is coming!" He was talking about Jesus.

When Jesus came to John, he asked to be baptised. Does anyone know what baptism is?

[Take responses from the congregation].

Baptism is when you are lowered into water and completely covered. It is a symbolic act. Going into the water symbolises being washed clean from sin. Coming out of the water symbolises a new life with Jesus.

It's like starting fresh. However, when Jesus was baptised something incredible happened: Firstly, as Jesus was baptised, the heavens opened.

Then, the Holy Spirit came down like a dove. Lastly, a voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

This moment showed everyone that Jesus is God's Son and that he came to show us how much God loves us.

The power that was shown in that amazing moment of Jesus being baptised also came out in our Acts reading. In the book of Acts, Peter and John visit some people in a place called Samaria. These people had learned about Jesus and decided to follow him, but something special was missing - they hadn't yet received the Holy Spirit.

Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is God's special helper who comes to live in us, giving us strength and helping us make good choices. We might not always expect her presence, but we can welcome her into our lives and be transformed.

The gift of the Holy Spirit which came to Jesus, Peter and John is also for us to.

Let us pray.

Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to show us your love.

Thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit to help us live for you. Help us to remember that your power and love are for everyone. Amen.

Optional Activity

To remind us of the Holy Spirit, let's think about the dove that came down at Jesus' baptism. You could draw or make a paper dove, either today as part of the service [in which case you need to supply paper and pens and a template], or you could spend some time making your dove at home this week.

On the dove, write one way you can show God's love to others - maybe by being kind, helping a friend, or praying for someone.³

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded (StF 455)

88 STF – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation!

Readings: Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Hymn:

392 STF – O Holy Spirit, Lord of grace OR

374 STF – Come, Holy Spirit, descend on us

Reflections on the readings

We should probably rename John - rather than John the Baptist, we should think of him as John the Street Preacher. Maybe that phrase makes us shudder. We've all been down the high street perusing the shelves of different stores, popping in and out of shops in search of the items on our list – often just tempted to spend our money on things we probably could live without – only to hear the echoes of a street preacher damning the crowds and proclaiming their version of the good news. We're left wondering whether anyone ever takes them seriously or if it just pushes them away from opening up to the love of God.

Okay, so John may not have been on any streets, but he was doing something similar – and let's be careful we don't overgeneralise people who sincerely brave the streets to share the good news. But let's think about what John was up to. He was welcoming the crowds because they were looking for a new future; he was offering them the hope of a new direction – there was promise, but he was also clear about the changes that would need to be made, how people would need to repent, how they would need to alter their paths for the sake of the coming reign. In the midst of hope is judgement.

Unfortunately, in our apportioned reading, we miss some of the basis for this new direction. In the verses leading up to our reading, John preaches three practical things different groups of people should do. First, anyone who has two coats must share them with others, the same with food. Secondly, tax collectors should only take what they're asked to and not extra for themselves. Thirdly, soldiers should not extort money. All of them are concerned with financial fairness and sharing of resources – warm clothes, food, share them!

From these street-preaching words, the crowds discover the basis for the new direction and as they choose to commit to this new fairer, more equal world, he baptises them with water as a sign. But we miss yet another aspect of John's preaching in the missing verses from our reading. He's arrested by Herod the ruler because he chooses to speak out against him. Yes, this street preacher isn't attacking the crowds, he's attacking the corrupt powers. He's speaking truth to power. This gets him arrested and ultimately killed. John ultimately signals the way for the coming reign through invitation to the masses to join in with this new community standard of equality and speak out about the injustices and corruption of those who hold power.

Now that sounds like the sort of street preacher we could get on with. In some sense we're all invited through baptism, as we repent, to follow in the footsteps of John. We're asked to speak up about things that are not right, sometimes to put ourselves in uncomfortable situations to challenge injustice, to proclaim a fairer, more just, financially equal world. Yes, we begin by sharing our resources, our two (or many more) coats and food, but then we're also invited to speak truth to power – to compel those who see no need to share to also

repent, to change direction, to join the movement for good and move away from the greed and selfishness that corrupts the world.

It's not easy, and yes, we don't always have the opportunity, but there are other ways too. Part of living in this new reign is thinking about the impact our actions have on others and the world. We're called to make decisions that help others flourish – paying a fair price for goods we buy, learning about the practices of different organisations and choosing where to put our money, supporting organisations that are more ethical or make decisions that help the world, both its people and the environment. These are all ways we use our resources well for the good of all.

Yet, our following of John only goes so far, our baptism in water has its limits. Without the power of God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we are eternally bound to the systems that oppress and exploit. With our individual actions and collective moves, we can only go so far in changing things, or making things better. John, our street preacher, knew this. He knew the basis of the new reign, but he also knew even with masses, there was something it needed: the fire of God in the hearts of the followers. Only the coming Messiah – the anointed one, the one from God – could give people this added dimension, this something beyond the constraints of the earthly plane. He knew his mission was to point people to this coming reality and help people receive the fire from the coming Messiah.

We know from our Acts reading that baptism with water doesn't necessarily mean receiving the Holy Spirit. Yet baptism with the Holy Spirit is a key part of the faith journey for followers of Jesus. This might be another point that makes people shudder – their minds drifting to overdramatised examples of the Holy Spirit slaying people or mental images that seems too farfetched to be real. It's not our place to judge the different environments people discover God, or how individual relationships with God develop - or what God might do when God brings fire to people's hearts. But we should remind ourselves of the different ways God's fire – God's Spirit – comes to fill people's lives.

John Wesley sat quietly in a room when he felt the love of God strangely warm his heart. For some people the trumpet sounds, for others the quietness absorbs them, some hear God's voice affirm them as beloved. God moves in people in whatever way God wills. What we do know is that our openness to God's Spirit through our willingness to walk the way is an important aspect of our journey with God. John helps us prepare our hearts by showing us the way. We choose to open ourselves to the will of God and receive the Spirit – not promised to a few, but to all who choose to receive.

Sometimes we forget the importance of God's involvement in our striving to do what is right. Yet, without the fire, without the Holy Spirit, we miss an important dimension of being the people of God. It's never too late to ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit – John Wesley spent years striving, then suddenly it all clicked into place and the fire was burning in his strangely warmed heart.

“Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door is opened.” Matthew 7:7-8

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

665 STF – Make us your prophets, Lord OR

440 STF – Amazing grace – how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me

⁴ Reflection written by Gary Hopkins

Prayers of intercession

Let's pray.

Loving God,
as people who baptise with water,
baptise us with the Holy Spirit.
We open our hearts to receive your Spirit...

Silence

John the street preacher, your prophet,
laid out the basis of your reign,
one that is economically just and fair.

We turn our thoughts to those who are in poverty because of our unjust systems:
We pray for those who are homeless and displaced...
We pray for those in countries exploited by unequal trade relationships...
We pray for those who cannot find a place of financial security...

We turn our thoughts to those who cause the continuation of unjust systems:
We pray for the repentance of those who lead organisations and put profit before people...
We pray for the repentance of political leaders who use their positions to gain wealth...
We pray for the repentance of those who do not share their resources and cause others to suffer...

We turn our thoughts to ourselves and how we might challenge unjust systems:
We pray that we might find opportunities to share our resources with others...
We pray that we might make decisions that help to work for the good of all...
We pray that we might find strength to challenge injustice and help make the world more equal...

Through the love of God,
as our hearts burning with Holy Fire,
we bring our prayers to you.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

God of all grace,
May we make use of the resources we have,
May we make use of all that we have received,
Bless these gifts, Lord God,
That we may steward them well, use them well, release them into the world to help to build
your Kingdom.
Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Gary Hopkins

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Hymn:

736 STF – In heavenly love abiding OR
503 STF – Love divine all loves excelling

Blessing

God of each time and space,
Show yourself to us this week,
That as we seek to follow in your way,
You may guide our feet, and lighten our hearts,
Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker