

**Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
Service at Home - Sunday 7th January 2024**

prepared by Rev John Archer

Introduction

The lectionary lessons set for worship at this time of year bring home to us how little we know of the early life of Jesus. 13 days ago we were hearing about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Since then we have gone through the visit of the Magi, the flight to Egypt and life as a refugee family, and then, 7 days ago, the presentation of the 12 yr old Jesus in the Temple. Today we have the baptism by John of the 30 yr old Jesus in the Jordan at the start of his ministry.

Let us read, pray or sing (StF148)

“Come, let us with our Lord arise”

[Music Mondays - Come, let us with our Lord arise \(youtube.com\)](#)

- 1 Come, let us with our Lord arise,
our Lord, who made both earth and skies:
who died to save the world he made,
and rose triumphant from the dead;
he rose, the Prince of life and peace,
and stamped the day for ever his.
- 2 This is the day the Lord has made,
that all may see his love displayed,
may feel his resurrection's power,
and rise again, to fall no more,
in perfect righteousness renewed,
and filled with all the life of God.
- 3 Then let us render him his own,
with solemn prayer approach his throne,
with meekness hear the gospel word,
with thanks his dying love record,
our joyful hearts and voices raise,
and fill his courts with songs of praise.
- 4 Honour and praise to Jesus pay
throughout his consecrated day;
be all in Jesus' praise employed,
nor leave a single moment void;
with utmost care the time improve,
and only breathe his praise and love.
Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Prayers

Everlasting God

we celebrate your coming to our world in Jesus
Christ, your light that continues to shine in the
darkness of our world.

We praise you for the ways in which your love shone

during his ministry, through the healing he
brought to the sick, comfort to the distressed,
promise to the poor and forgiveness to the lost.

We praise you for the light that has shone in so
many lives since, the faith that you have nurtured
in hearts, new beginnings, new purpose, new life
born in them.

We rejoice that you are at work in our lives here and
now, inviting us to bring our hopes fears and
concerns before you in the knowledge that you
will always meet our needs, no situation beyond
your power to transform.

We praise you for the assurance that evil will be
overcome, that hope will replace despair, joy come
after sorrow, and life triumph over death that even
the deepest darkness shall be turned to light.

Fill us now with the light of Christ
may it illumine our worship and guide our
footsteps so that we may live as a lamp for others,
to the glory of your name.

Receive our worship and shine in our lives today.

In his name we ask it. **Amen**

We pray the Lord's Prayer

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 for ever. **Amen.**

Bible Reading - Mark 1 : 4 – 11

Let us read, pray or sing (StF) 376

“Crashing waters at creation”.

[Crashing waters at creation \("Crashing Waters"\) -
pipe organ, St Austell Parish Church \(youtube.com\)](#)

1 Crashing waters at creation,
ordered by the Spirit's breath,
first to witness day's beginning
from the brightness of night's death.

2 Parting water stood and trembled
as the captives passed on through,
washing off the chains of bondage –
channel to a life made new.

3 Cleansing water once at Jordan
closed around the one foretold,
opened to reveal the glory
ever new and ever old.

4 Living water, never ending,
quench the thirst and flood the soul.
Wellspring, Source of life eternal,
drench our dryness, make us whole.
Sylvia G. Dunstan (1955-1993)

Prayers of Confession

We rejoice Father that, in baptism, you have called us to new life, and assured us that the old life can be put away

We confess our need to be made new by your spirit for we have been so concerned with our own selfish desires that we have failed to notice the concerns of others.

We have been so involved with trivial things that we have lost our hope and trust in you who can transform us and make us new.

We confess our need to know again your purifying love, as those who have died to sin and risen with Christ to new life. We ask it for his sake

Amen

Bible Reading Acts 19 : 1 – 7

Let us read, sing or pray (StF) 233

“When Jesus came to Jordan”

[Stf233 HP132 When Jesus came to Jordan DAY OF REST HP704ii with BSL, v1 \(youtube.com\)](#)

- 1 When Jesus came to Jordan
to be baptised by John,
he did not come for pardon,
but as his Father's Son.
He came to share repentance
with all who mourn their sins,
to speak the vital sentence
with which good news begins.
- 2 He came to share temptation,
our utmost woe and loss,
for us and our salvation
to die upon the cross.
So when the Dove descended
on him, the Son of Man,
the hidden years had ended,
the age of grace began.
- 3 Come, Holy Spirit, aid us
to keep the vows we make;
this very day invade us,
and every bondage break.
Come, give our lives direction,
the gift we covet most:
to share the resurrection
that leads to Pentecost.

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

Sermon

On the face of it this is a strange story about Jesus being baptised by his cousin. John had burst upon the Judean scene like a bolt from the blue. A formidable character, a preacher who lived rough, ate little and wore a hair shirt – a sitting candidate for politicians to clear off our streets. But people flocked to hear him. To ordinary people tired of old ways and desperate for a new start, he came as a breath of fresh air.

1) to the Pharisees and Sadducees feeling comfortable and secure he came as a challenge and a rebuke. They believed that they held the truth and were superior to others.

2) to King Herod who was married to his brother's wife, he was an affront. His indulgent living and debauchery were being openly challenged by this nobody.

3) to The People he brought the exciting possibility of an end to the past and a new beginning. As our major political parties square up to each other ahead of a general election .John would have sharp words to say and questions to ask

John the Baptist's baptism was of repentance. It was meant for those who were sorry for their sins and wished to express their determination to leave them behind. But how does Jesus fit into this? He is the sinless one. Surely baptism is meant for those who sin. But if you look at it from Jesus' standpoint, this whole incident gave him an opportunity to launch his public ministry. It was a vital moment for Jesus

Firstly. It was a moment of decision

He had long been conscious that his public ministry must start soon. It was a vital moment for him.

Shakespeare, in “Julius Caesar”, writes:

“There is a tide in the affairs of man which taken at the flood leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their lives is bound in shallows and in misery.”

This was Jesus' moment He had waited for a sign, and this was it. It was unheard of in the whole of their history for a Jew to be baptised. That was what was necessary for non-Jewish converts. Jews were after all

- members of the chosen tribe
- sons of Abraham
- assured of God's salvation.

Baptism was for Gentile sinners, and yet here were Jews in their hundreds coming for baptism – not just searching for God, but asking for the God they knew to forgive their sins. This was the sign Jesus needed to make his decision.

Secondly. It was a moment of identification. Here was a movement of God's people back to God. A wealthy man can still identify with a movement of the poor, lay aside his wealth and become one with it. e.g Francis of Assisi. Jesus regards his baptism amongst repentant Israel as a necessary step in his accomplishment of God's plan of salvation. It squares with the moment of his birth and the moment of his death.

Thirdly. It was a moment of approval. No one leaves home and security lightly. We need to be reasonably sure we are making the right decision. Here in this incident God gives Jesus 'the seal of approval'. The words, we are pretty sure, were only heard by Jesus (the pronoun is personal). This is the recognition of his Messiah status. The words (recorded in 3 of the gospels) were important.

“You are my beloved son”
(Psalm 2 – description of the Messiah)

“With whom I am well pleased”
(Isaiah 42 – start of the description of the suffering servant)

It gave Jesus 2 certainties – that he was the promised Messiah and that it would involve suffering and the cross. He was to be a king but his conquest would have, as its weapon, suffering love. He was the one who had been promised Had not the children of Israel come out of slavery in Egypt to play their part as the people of God? Had not Jesus also come out of Egypt where he spent time as an exiled refugee? Had not Moses gone on to become leader when it became clear that those who sought to kill him were now dead? Had not Jesus emerged in Israel, now that Herod who had threatened to kill him was now dead? Had not Israel gone through the baptism of the waters of the Red Sea when they escaped from Egypt to become God's people on the march? And now Jesus completes the picture by going through the waters of the R. Jordan as he is baptised. All these historical resonances must have been there for him.

Let Jesus' baptism be the catalyst for each of us to think about our response to God's call. Let us not let the call go by. God comes to us to forgive us and to call us.

A final story.

John the Baptist is baptising in the Jordan, huge crowds are coming and it is all rather disorganised. So some business men in the crowd decide to sort things out and tidy it up. They set up tables and get people into queues and as each person reaches the front of the queue, they are asked their name which

is then written on a sticky label. Then the person behind the desk asks what their main sin is, what it is they want to be forgiven for. So Bob walks up to the table. What's your name? Bob

What's your most awful sin Bob?

I stole some money from my boss.

So the person writes down “BOB EMBEZZLER” on the label and sticks it on Bob's chest.

The next person comes forward

What's your name? Mary

What's your worst sin?

I gossiped about some people.

So the person writes down MARY – GOSSIP on the label and sticks it on her

The next person comes forward.

What's your name? George

What's your worst sin? I often think how much I would like my neighbour's car.

So the person writes down GEORGE - COVETER on the label and sticks it on him.

Another man comes up. What's your name?

Gordon

And what have you done Gordon? I had an affair.

So the person writes down GORDON – ADULTERER and slaps the label on his chest.

Then Jesus comes to be baptised. He hasn't got a label on his chest. But he walks down the line of people waiting to be baptised, and, one by one, he peels the labels off their chests and sticks them on himself. Then he goes to John to be baptised and as he steps down into the water the river washes away the writing of every single one of those labels.

God saves us. In Jesus we see what God is really like. Jesus' baptism is the advertisement for it !

Amen

Let us read, pray or sing (StF 541)

“To the river I am going”

[To the river I am going -Singing the Faith 541 \(youtube.com\)](#)

1 To the river I am going,
bringing sins I cannot bear;
come and cleanse me, come, forgive me;
Lord, I need to meet you there.

2 In these waters healing mercy
flows with freedom from despair.
I am going to that river;
Lord, I need to meet you there.

Precious Jesus, I am ready
to surrender every care.
Take my hand now, lead me closer;
Lord, I need to meet you there.

To the river ...
(repeat verses 1 and 2)

- 3 Come and join us in the river,
come, find life beyond compare.
He is calling, he is waiting;
Jesus longs to meet you there.

Refrain

Brian Doerksen (b. 1965), Michael Hansen and Brian Thiessen

Prayers for Others

Lord Jesus Christ
You came to our world but there was no place for
you
You came to your own people but they were not
ready to receive you
You were born in Bethlehem but there was no room
for you in the inn.
You had no place to rest your head
You know what it is to be homeless, hungry,
abandoned
So we bring you our prayers for all those who
endure such need today

Friend of the friendless hear our prayer

We pray for those who have no roof over their head
or no place to call their own
waiting perhaps on council housing lists,
or evicted because they can no longer pay the rent,
homes destroyed by natural disaster, or left behind
as they flee from persecution or threat of war
We pray too for those who feel they have no place,
the unemployed, the poor, the lonely, the
oppressed the persecuted, the terminally ill

Friend of the friendless hear our prayer

Lord, reach out to all who face such situations
grant the assurance that you care,
courage to believe in the future
and strength to meet the present.
May we all make real your love and show your
compassion working together for your kingdom,

Friend of the friendless hear our prayer
in your name we ask it

Amen

We read, pray or sing (StF 397)

“The Spirit lives to set us free”

[The Spirit Lives to Set Us Free \(Walk in the Light\)
Singing the Faith 397 / StF 397 by Damian Lundy
\(youtube.com\)](#)

- 1 The Spirit lives to set us free,
walk, walk in the light;
he binds us all in unity,
walk, walk in the light.
*Walk in the light, walk in the light,
walk in the light, walk in the light of the Lord.*

- 2 Jesus promised life to all,
walk, walk in the light;
the dead were wakened by his call,
walk, walk in the light.

- 3 He died in pain on Calvary,
walk, walk in the light;
to save the lost like you and me,
walk, walk in the light.

- 4 We know his death was not the end,
walk, walk in the light;
he gave his Spirit to be our friend,
walk, walk in the light.

- 5 By Jesus' love our wounds are healed,
walk, walk in the light;
the Father's kindness is revealed,
walk, walk in the light.

- 6 The Spirit lives in you and me,
walk, walk in the light;
his light will shine for all to see,
walk, walk in the light.

Damian Lundy (1944-1996)

The Blessing

Whatever today may hold,
whatever tomorrow might bring
the future is secure, for Christ is with us,
the same yesterday, today and for ever.
Live each moment with him in quiet confidence
and joyful celebration,
for he is ours and we are his
for all eternity **Amen**

Acknowledgements

*Amended prayers from “Prayers for All Seasons”
Fawcett*

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