

**Worship for the Baptism of the Lord Sunday
(complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

Welcome to our Circuit Service. We are pleased you have joined us for worship today. Thank you to all who have played a part in making this service happen. We have begun a new year with trepidation but also with hope as we continue our journey with God.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Loving God,
Like the Psalmist, we have entered your gates with thanksgiving and your courts with praise. This is the day that You have made; we rejoice and are glad in it.

Hymn: StF 28 – Jesus calls us here to meet him

- 1. Jesus calls us here to meet him
as, through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.**
- 2. Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of life and Lord of all,
sharer of our flesh and frailness,
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory
came to earth to meet us here.**

- 3. Jesus calls us to each other,
vastly different though we are;
creed and colour, class and gender
neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.**
- 4. Jesus calls us to his table
rooted firm in time and space,
where the Church in earth and heaven
finds a common meeting place.
Share the bread and wine, his body;
share the love of which we sing;
share the feast for saints and sinners
hosted by our Lord and King.**

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

Opening Prayers

O Lord, Your love endures for ever,
Your faithfulness continues through all
generations.

We praise You, Almighty God,

Blessed be Your holy name through Jesus Christ
our Lord and Saviour.

Forgiving God,

We confess to You the many ways in which we
have fallen short of Your expectations of us.

Often, we have failed to testify of our faith in
You,

of our love for You and of Your care for us.

Often, we have chosen the easy way of talking

about everything else
but of our relationship with You.

Have mercy upon us, grant us Your grace that by
Your Spirit,
we will be true disciples of our God
whose son Jesus Christ, lived on earth, died and
rose again for the forgiveness of our sins

Gracious Lord,
As we receive Your forgiveness, we ask that You
be present with us in this time of worship.
Amen

The Lord's Prayer

And now let us pray the prayer which Jesus
taught his disciples

**Our Father who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the
glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen**

Hymn: StF 594 – Lord Jesus Christ

**1. Lord Jesus Christ,
you have come to us,
you are one with us,
Mary's Son;
cleansing our souls from all their sin,
pouring your love and goodness in;
Jesus, our love for you we sing,
living Lord.**

- 2. Lord Jesus Christ,
now and every day,
teach us how to pray,
Son of God.
You have commanded us to do
this, in remembrance, Lord, of you;
into our lives your power breaks through,
living Lord.**
- 3. Lord Jesus Christ,
you have come to us,
born as one of us,
Mary's Son;
led out to die on Calvary,
risen from death to set us free;
living Lord Jesus, help us see
you are Lord.**
- 4. Lord Jesus Christ,
we would come to you,
live our lives for you,
Son of God.
All your commands we know are true;
your many gifts will make us new;
into our lives your power breaks through,
living Lord.**

Patrick Appleford (b. 1925)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalms 29 (NIVUK)

- ¹ Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- ² Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name;
worship the Lord in the splendour of his
holiness.
- ³ The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord thunders over the mighty waters.
- ⁴ The voice of the Lord is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is majestic.
- ⁵ The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;

the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶ He makes Lebanon leap like a calf,
Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷ The voice of the Lord strikes
with flashes of lightning.

⁸ The voice of the Lord shakes the desert;
the Lord shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

⁹ The voice of the Lord twists the oaks
and strips the forests bare.

And in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'

¹⁰ The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord is enthroned as King for ever.

¹¹ The Lord gives strength to his people;
the Lord blesses his people with peace.

Acts 8:14-17 (NIVUK)

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (NIVUK)

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, 'I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

The baptism and genealogy of Jesus

²¹ When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

In our Gospel reading John was baptising with water, but Jesus was baptised with the Holy Spirit.

Hymn: StF 394 – Spirit of God unseen as the wind

***Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.***

**1. You spoke to us long, long ago,
gave us the written word;
we read it still, needing its truth,
through it God's voice is heard.**

***Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.***

**2. Without your help we fail our Lord,
we cannot live his way;
we need your power, we need your
strength,
following Christ each day.**

***Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.***

Margaret V. Old (1932–2001)

Sermon

We are well and truly in the season of Epiphany now which of course is a time of revelation.

Today in our Gospel reading we have heard more of the long-prophesied pronouncements of John the Baptist who not only calls for repentance and cleansing baptism in The Jordan River but admits that his baptism by water is only in fact preparation for the true baptism by one who follows him and will baptize all with The Holy Spirit and fire.

This is the first revelation of Jesus Christ as a fully-grown man but not just any man! Here is the true likeness of God in essence, nature and spirit represented in the form of a human being. God has put himself on display and confirms this with his booming voice “this is my son with whom I am well pleased”. As if this wasn’t enough all present saw something in bodily form ‘like a dove’ alighting on Jesus’ shoulder, indeed the Holy Spirit.

How wonderful would it be today if we were able to witness the Holy Spirit in this way! Well I guess many of us have been in situations where something has occurred and we have detected a tangible presence of something that we can’t explain or prove but we know that something has taken place outside of our normal range of senses.

I can remember myself returning from business abroad to learn that my father had died whilst I was away. I prayed and sobbed alone beside myself with grief and guilt that I was not there when he passed but then strangely I felt a light touch on my shoulder and a shiver ran up my spine. At the time I thought it was my father reaching out to comfort me but later I realised that it was something else and I thanked God.

Yes the Holy Spirit I believe is with us and within us throughout our lives!

By that I am not generally talking about mind or soul bending experience with heavenly choirs

and flashing lights although I accept that some may be fortunate enough to experience something along these lines. I am not talking about miraculous events changing our lives once and for all for the better although again there may be some who have experienced this

For most of the time we are not fully aware of his presence and we don’t have the tangible signs or sensory feelings to prove it or to remind us. It is hard to imagine that the Spirit though is trying to communicate with us offering guidance, sustenance, protection, motivation and yet peaceful rest. Not like the proverbial genie in a lamp though waiting for our instant wishes and commands. The potential relationship that we have within us has to be nurtured through prayer and reflection.

However once that relationship is established the Holy Spirit is most certainly a refuge in time of dire need and brings the word of God straight into our hearts and minds.

In my own case maybe I was expecting the Spirit to make the first move proactively coercing me to change direction in life in ways that I had never contemplated; maybe I was expecting my good fortune in life to grow even more so; maybe I was expecting a voice in my head or more taps on my shoulder but it wasn’t like that.

Almost imperceptibly though I notice that life was getting more difficult to deal with. Family conflicts; bereavements; difficulty with decisions and actions at work; how to exercise authority to motivate and guide others yet with humility; how to make very uncomfortable and distressing decisions in my personal life. Facing up to new challenges like preaching a sermon in front of people who probably knew the bible much better than me;

But I found the Holy Spirit within me! Not that I myself was any wiser or cleverer or more perceptive but within me there was a counsellor, a comforter when I was down, someone to wrestle with but at the same time a voice of reason, a purveyor of compassion and love, a demonstrator of humility, a measure of wisdom and discernment.

However this came with a conscience that screamed at me when I contemplated transgression or hurt; an irritating pin that pricked me when hypocritical thoughts entered my head and an uncomfortable sadness when I let myself and my saviour down.

We each will have our unique relationship with the Holy Spirit and have to find out how to live with The Spirit within us; how can we sustain its presence; how dare we approach it; how can we reconcile that possessing The Spirit does not give us special powers to be used in our own interest or to assert our own position or status; how we can reconcile the fact that possession is an invitation to live in humility and love rejecting power and domination. How can we perceive that The Spirit within us is to be used for the benefit of those outside us transforming their lives for the better and convincing them of faith in Christ?

Well fine words and intentions to be applied in all walks, moods and moments of life. A coping mechanism that outweighs all difficulties and setbacks, outranks purchased pleasure with heartfelt joy and love. It doesn't start off like this but grows and develops and will never be finished for our relationship with God is but work in progress. But it can develop and blossom within us as we cling on to our faith stumbling along the path of life receiving cuts and bruises along the way and learning some hard lessons.

At this stage you might say well Malcolm I've been baptized in my church and I therefore have the Holy Spirit within me and that is that! Well I agree but whilst baptism is essential to awaken the God given Spirit within us it is only the start of a long road.

As we progress together through the biblical life of Jesus in the coming year let's see how the Holy Spirit was manifested in his life and maybe compare that with our own life experiences.....

AMEN

Hymn: StF 372 – Come down, O Love divine

- 1. Come down, O Love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.**
- 2. O let it freely burn,
till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes, in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path
illumining.**
- 3. Let holy charity
mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;
true lowliness of heart,
which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with
loathing.**
- 4. And so the yearning strong,
with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human
telling;
for none can guess its grace,**

**till he become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.**

Bianco da Siena (*d.* 1434)

translated by Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–1890)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God,
We come to you in prayer,
Knowing that there are many ways in which your
world is crying out in need.

God of all grace,
We hold before you all the news stories, all the
world-situations, all the global leaders, all the
'big decisions' that we have heard about this
week, and the ones that worry us most.

We pray for all affected by the Coronavirus, and
the ongoing impact of lockdowns and restrictions
on economies, on mental health, on families.

We pray for all who do not feel safe at home,
and who have been forced into fleeing their
homes, as refugees or internally displaced
people.

Come, Comforting Father, come, Prince of Peace,
come, Holy Spirit.

God of this neighbourhood,
We pray for those closer to home who are on
our minds,

For those in hospital, those living alone, those
grieving and hurting and wishing things were not
as they are.

We pray for all who live with the brokenness of
human relationships.

In a moment of stillness, we bring to you now
the people we know, who are on our
hearts, who we wish to pray for this day.

Silence

Lord, you know our hearts, and you know the
pain we carry.

At the beginning of this new year, come by your
grace, to set free the oppressed, to heal the
wounds, to give a fresh start to those who feel
weary.

Come, Comforting Father, come, Prince of Peace,
come, Holy Spirit.

And finally, Lord God, we take a moment to pray
for ourselves.

Help each one of us, to hear your still small voice
– prompting and reminding us to be a part of the
change we want to see in the world.

Lord, we pray, help us to be an answer to prayer
today.

Amen

The Offering & prayer

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.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 673 – Will you come and follow me

- 1. Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?**
- 2. Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?**

**Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?**

- 3. Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?**
- 4. Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?**
- 5. Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.**

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

Prayer & blessing

The Father, who created us, is with us;
the Son who redeemed us, is with us;
the Spirit, who strengthens us, is with us.

Go in peace to serve the Lord
Amen

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StF 28 – Jesus calls us here to meet him

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

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StF 673 – Will you come and follow me

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

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StF 372 – Come down, O Love divine

Bianco da Siena (*d.* 1434)

translated by Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–1890)

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StF 594 – Lord Jesus Christ

Patrick Appleford (*b.* 1925)

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StF 394 – Spirit of God unseen as the wind

Margaret V. Old (1932–2001)

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Bible Verses

NIV

New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

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