

Sunday 11 January 2025  
Morning Worship  
for the First Sunday of Epiphany  
Led by Michaela McNeill, ALM  
<https://zoom.us/j/82311473640>



## Greeting

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you  
**and also with you.**

## Hymn – Holy, Holy, Holy

- 1 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;  
holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!
- 2 Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore thee,  
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,  
which wert and art and evermore shalt be.
- 3 Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide thee,  
though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,  
only thou art holy, there is none beside thee  
perfect in power, in love, and purity.
- 4 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God almighty!  
all thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea;  
holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Reginald Heber (1783-1826) (Public Domain)

## Prayers of Penitence

The grace of God has dawned upon the world  
through our Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who sacrificed himself for us to purify a people as his own.  
Let us confess our sins.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you;  
we have done evil in your sight.  
We are sorry and repent.  
Have mercy on us according to your love.  
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.  
Renew a right spirit within us  
and restore to us the joy of your salvation,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins,  
and restore us in his image to the praise and glory of his name,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## Praise

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus,  
**giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ.**

Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:  
**let us sing to God with thankful hearts.**

Open our lips, Lord:  
**and we shall praise your name.**

## The Venite – a Song of Triumph

O come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us heartily rejoice in the rock of our salvation.  
**let us come into his presence with thanksgiving  
and be glad in him with psalms.**

For the Lord is a great God  
and a great king above all gods.

**In his hand are the depths of the earth  
and the heights of the mountains are his also.**

The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands have moulded the dry land.  
**Come, let us worship and bow down  
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.**

For he is our God;  
we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.  
**Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning, is now and shall be for ever. Amen.**

### **Bible readings by Dona McCullagh**

#### **Acts 10:34-43**

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup> You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup> We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

For the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## **Gospel Reading: Matthew 13:13 - 17**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### **Reflection by Sue Nelms**

This morning's gospel reading is quite short and is one that we may have heard several times before. As we read it again, is there anything we can see that adds to our understanding of this passage?

The lives of John and Jesus are intertwined. They are related; their mothers Elizabeth and Mary are cousins and were both chosen by God for a specific reason, to carry and give birth to a baby who will grow to play a key part in God's purpose on earth. Remember the excitement that the unborn baby John showed when he leapt in his mother's womb at the moment Mary arrived to visit Elizabeth when they were both pregnant (Luke 1.41). John couldn't even see Jesus that day, but yet he recognised the presence of his saviour.

John recognises Jesus again when he arrives at the River Jordan. Jesus asks John to baptise him despite knowing himself to be the Son of God. John protests that he is not worthy to baptise Jesus and that Jesus should be baptising him, but Jesus insists that they need to do things properly in order to fulfil God's intentions. John doesn't need to be told twice; throughout his whole life he has been obedient to God and

his plan and this day will not be any different.

Baptism represents the washing away of sin. Unlike us, Jesus did not need to be baptised because he was perfect and had no need to be washed clean. However if he had not come for baptism, some of the scriptures pointing towards his role as Messiah would not have been fulfilled in the presence of witnesses and recorded for the generations to follow.

A phrase from the writings of Isaiah chapter 11 verse 2, is echoed in this morning's narrative. Isaiah states 'The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord'. It is all very visual. In the passage from Matthew's gospel, 'suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him'. The onlookers have the opportunity to share in a wondrous moment; the moment when God's plan starts to fall into place as Jesus begins his journey to the cross.

Jesus coming to the Jordan also fulfils a prophecy from Isaiah chapter 42 verse 1 which states 'Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.' Matthew's gospel echoes these words when we are told that a voice from Heaven said 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

Three important statements proudly made by God for all observers at the River Jordan to hear:

- First, Jesus is God's Son.
- Second, God loves his Son; he calls him the Beloved.
- Finally, God is well pleased with Him.

The statements are not just for the observers on the day in relation to Jesus. The statements are also for us to strive towards both in our relationship with God and in our relationship with our own families. In our modern world there will be children, both young and grown up,

who may not know whose child they are. Not all children grow up in a loving relationship with their parents; they grow up neither being shown they are loved nor being told they are loved. Finally, sadly, many children struggle to know that their parent, parents or carers are pleased with them. For them life is a struggle to try and earn that pleasure and they may never achieve it.

We know from our reading of the gospel that Jesus spends his life living out the will of God secure in the knowledge that God loves him and is well pleased with him. Those of us who have never been told that we are someone's beloved child and that they are well pleased with us, may struggle to understand. They may struggle to grasp and understand that, like Jesus, we are also God's children and that he loves us. He loves us for who we are, not what we do or achieve. We don't have to try and earn that love. For some, that can be and probably is, a difficult concept to get our heads around.

John didn't need to baptise Jesus, but by being obedient and doing so, he came alongside God in order to do what was required of him to fulfil God's will and the prophecies. After all, Jesus could not have been baptised without someone physically there to baptise him. God doesn't want to do everything on his own. He wanted to walk alongside John in what he was doing, just as he wants to walk alongside us in what we do each day and as he walked alongside Jesus, his beloved Son.

Baptism is important for us because it represents the washing away of sin. Whilst we may not undertake it every day, baptism services are good opportunities not only to welcome new members to our church family but also for us to remember that our sins can and are washed away when we confess them to God. Confession is important for us – we see that throughout the Bible. For example King David wrote 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me (Psalm 51.10). In his first letter John wrote 'If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1.9)'.

Jesus didn't need to come and be baptised that day, but by doing so, he showed his full humanity, walking alongside us. We humans, however, do need to go through the cleansing that baptism represents because unlike Jesus we are not perfect. But we are not alone as we go forward for that cleansing at baptism; we know that Jesus has been there too. We can also take the opportunity to remember and reflect on that cleansing when we make subsequent acts of confession. We know that Jesus is by our side even if we don't see him there.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we receive Your grace and mercy as demonstrated at the baptism of your beloved son. Make us a living testimony of Your love and redemption. **Amen.**

### **The Apostles' Creed**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ,  
his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.**

**Amen.**

## Intercessions by Michaela McNeill

And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' Heavenly Father, we strive to be your children. We pray that we will also please you, just as your Son pleased you. We thank you for your Church here on earth, we thank you for the opportunity to be your hands and feet, as we show your love to our community. Give us the words when we need them, strength when we struggle and, like John the Baptist, the willingness to do the things that surprise us. Send your spirit into our lives just as you sent the Holy Spirit into the life of your son, Jesus.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, we pray that you will give strength to your people. Bless your people with peace. We pray today for the countries in our world that are at war, both the oppressed and the oppressor. We pray that world leaders will learn to fear you and desire to do what is acceptable to you, that they will act with wisdom, humility, honesty and compassion as they make decisions which affect the lives of so many. Bless them with empathy and the ability to relate to those who may be different from them rather than seeking to dominate them. Inspire them to work together to rebuild the parts of the world that have become so damaged by our actions.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Creator God, thank you for the wonder of your creation. Help us to care for and nurture it rather than using and abusing it. It is so easy to lose sight of our connection to nature and its connection to us and we pray that we will take the steps we need to maintain both its health and ours.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Father we pray for our country, for King Charles, Queen Camilla and the Royal Family. We pray for our government as it tries to tackle the challenges that face it. We pray that it will not lose sight of the ordinary people whose lives are affected by the decisions it makes. We



pray for local councillors and all who work for the benefit of our local communities. We also pray for everyone who works to keep communities running; medical services, schools and colleges, shops, businesses and farmers. Help us to remember that we work together to achieve community.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we pray for everyone who is dealing with illness at the moment, whether in body, mind or spirit. We ask that you will comfort them and give strength and compassion to the people who might care for them, whether employed or family and friends. Open our eyes to the challenges faced by families dealing with long term illness. We pray for families who might be struggling; help them to find support when they need it. We pray for young people who try to make sense of the world around them, and older people who might feel isolated. No-one knows what goes on behind closed doors and we pray particularly for people for whom home might not be a safe space. We take a moment of silence to lay before God the names of any people on our heart.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate Father we pray for people who have died or who are coming to the end of their earthly lives. We pray that you will welcome them into your loving arms and that they will rest in peace and rise in glory. We pray also for people grieving, whether that grief is new and raw or older but still painful. Again, we take a moment of silence to lay before God the names of any people on our heart.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

### **The Collect for the First Sunday of Epiphany**

Almighty God,

give us grace to cast away the works of darkness

and to put on the armour of light,

now in the time of this mortal life,

in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;  
that on the last day,  
when he shall again in his glorious majesty  
to judge the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**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.**

**Lead us not into temptation**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,**

**and the glory are yours**

**now and for ever.**

**Amen.**

### **Hymn – Holy Spirit, Living breath of God**

I     Holy Spirit, living Breath of God,  
      breathe new life into my willing soul.  
      Bring the presence of the risen Lord  
      to renew my heart and make me whole.  
      Cause your word to come alive in me;  
      give me faith for what I cannot see;  
      give me passion for your purity;  
      Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.

- 2 Holy Spirit, come abide within,  
may your joy be seen in all I do.  
Love enough to cover every sin  
in each thought and deed and attitude:  
kindness to the greatest and the least,  
gentleness that sows the path of peace.  
Turn my strivings into works of grace;  
Breath of God, show Christ in all I do.
- 3 Holy Spirit, from creation's birth,  
giving life to all that God has made,  
show your power once again on earth,  
cause your church to hunger for your ways.  
May the fragrance of our prayers arise;  
lead us on the road of sacrifice,  
that in unity the face of Christ  
may be clear for all the world to see.

Keith Getty (born 1974) and Stuart Townend (born 1963)

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## Notices

### Conclusion and Blessing

Christ the Son of God perfect in us the image of his glory  
and gladden our hearts with the good news of his kingdom;  
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy  
Spirit, be among us and remain with us always.

**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of Christ. Amen.**