

LANGBANK CHURCH
Sunday 10 January 2021
Order of Service



WELCOME TO WORSHIP

Look at the picture above.

It shows an imagined Jesus emerging from the waters of the Jordan having been baptised by John the Baptist.

See, in the moment, how the sun shines, the sea sparkles.

See the joy and energy in Jesus as, having answered God's call to baptism, he receives the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

God calls people at every stage of life but always in the here and now. He calls us to new things out of bad situations as well as good and promises to all who believe in him the Gift of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us.

The Books of the Bible were written at different times by different groups of people but many were set against events such as those we are experiencing now. We learn from these accounts that God speaks to us out of storm and sickness, flood and fire. Over and over he tells us, **“Do not be afraid”!**

***Our first hymn outlines the events of Jesus' Baptism:
'On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry....'***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plr21lLgFpg>

[lyrics included in video]

Let us pray

Lord, we praise you for this new day.
We arise today to a horizon
 guiding our eye beyond the everyday ...
to a dawn gently lighting up
 the wonders of your creation,
to a frost of silver powder
 rooting us firmly to this precious earth.
For this we thank you.

Lord, we praise you for a new year.
We arise today to the knowledge
 that Christ goes before us ...
to the hope that through his presence
 all people will be transformed
to the promise of salvation for all
 and for this we thank You.

Lord, we praise you for a new start.
We arise today turning our backs
 on the ways of judgement and criticism,
sloughing off narrow-minded assumptions,
 reaching out to enemy and friend
 with generous compassionate hearts.

For the promise of a new start,
 a new year, a new day,
for these gifts and for so much more
 we thank you.....
*and we pray together now in the words
you taught us, saying....*

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 debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom, the power,
and the glory, for ever. *Amen*

READING: Mark 4: 4-11

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: *'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with^o the Holy Spirit.'*

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

REFLECTION

We've heard a lot this week about a man who has to win at all costs. We've watched in horror at where this has led so far and at the legacy he has left – five people dead and a country divided. President Trump's recent behaviour is as good an example as it gets of what can happen to a man and his country when the ambition to win takes over.

In contrast, we start a new year with a new account of a man who came to redeem the world by being servant of all. Where Trump tells his supporters, *“You’ve got to be strong, it’s no use being weak”* – Jesus says,

“and whosoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus is the greatest, God incarnate – but he entered history as a servant and this is the main message Mark wants to convey. Mark’s was the first of the Gospels, written to around the year 60 CE to encourage the Christians in Rome and to prove beyond a doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. Mark presents a rapid succession of vivid pictures of Jesus in action, and in this way his identity is revealed more by what he does than by what he says. Jesus’ life is presented as a journey in which we are frequently invited to ‘follow him. Mark has no birth stories to link Jesus with Jewish prophecy or customs. Instead, he begins with John the Baptist announcing the coming of the Messiah - and three verses later Jesus emerges from the waters of the River Jordan to be affirmed as God’s dear Son. He is thirty years old and his baptism marks a coming-of-age.

In the Jewish tradition of God’s call to service it is a high moment with a glimpse into heaven itself. The Jews of Jesus’ time believed in a series of heavens, in the highest of which sat God himself, in a light that was so bright no-one could approach. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul mentions that he knows someone who met God in the third heaven, and it is thought this may refer to his own call. Here, God speaks directly to Jesus, calling him ‘my dear Son’ and anointing him with the Holy Spirit. The dove is a symbol of gentleness and peace, and this will characterise his ministry.

El Greco’s painting of Jesus’ Baptism, painted in the 17th century, shows his interpretation of the scene. However, it is clear from the text that God and Jesus are sharing a beautiful, private moment, invisible to those around him.... and that is a much more helpful way to understand it.



As baptised believers, we too are counted among the sons and daughters of God – and we, too are called to follow Jesus and work for God’s Kingdom on earth. The call to discipleship is one that involves our whole being – our thoughts, our words and our deeds and if we are responding faithfully, it also shapes our attitudes, so that our lives become increasingly Christlike. That’s the hard one.... and as we follow the original twelve disciples through the pages of Mark, we will be relieved to see how often they fail to understand, let alone follow. Hardest of all is to follow Jesus’ example of servanthood. Keeping our egos in check is a constant battle and how to turn around our instinct for conquest characterizes so much of Jesus’ teaching.... for the harm it does to ourselves and to our societies. We only have to look around the world today to realise the truth of this.

Within our general call to Discipleship, we may be called to particular roles. Some of these earn the title of ‘vocation’. The examples usually given are ministry, teaching, medicine and nursing – but really should involve police

officers, fire-fighters, and all who govern, because they all share a common call to serve others.

Another vocation is the call to marriage, and to motherhood and fatherhood. This may seem surprising but it is still upheld in the understanding of Christian marriage. Marriage is still a sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church, but one where the man and the woman offer one another the sacraments – the outward sign that God is present in their union. A Roman Catholic friend of ours surprised us in mentioning over a curry that his brother had been called to the priesthood but he had been called to marriage and fatherhood and this was viewed in the church as an equally high vocation. Have we lost touch, I wonder of the importance of some of the roles we are called to?

I think back on the Babycare Unit of Lewisham Hospital, where my little grandson spent the first few days of his life. I took turns to accompany my daughter there at feeding times, and there were a couple of likely lads in their late teens, who were reluctantly visiting their newborns. They stuck out like bulls in a china shop and I was struck at how the special nurses talked to them, taking no truck with their banter. One was given a right good talking to on the responsibilities of fatherhood by a very powerful Jamaican nurse, before being handed a bottle and shown how to hold his baby..... Looking back, this was his coming of age, his realisation that he had a grown up role to play in the nurture of his tiny, son.

We notice these things in others – but, in fact, all through our lives we ourselves are called to step up to meet the challenges that come our way. These are not always easy – but it makes a difference to know that God is affirming us in our decision to take the responsibility. Where God calls us he also equips us with the Holy Spirit, aka The ‘Comforter’, who strengthens us for the task .

Often, we are called to serve at the other end of life too. Sometimes we are called on to care for parents in a role-reversal of the parent-child relationship. And years on, the words *‘for better or for worse’* take on a new immediacy when we are called to care for a loved one in sickness, disability or in frailty. Caring for loved ones in this way calls on all the compassion and strength and humour that we have. It can threaten to engulf our lives and yet it can also give back many precious moments and unforgettable memories.

Today God calls Jesus into service and next week we see how he calls others in turn, as the Nurse did that day to young dad in Babycare. God’s call and our

response is not always the result of a strange and numinous moment, but an integral part of our journey of life and faith. It is the way God leads us on and helps us to grow and affirms us as His in the service we give to others. And in these small acts of everyday kindness, God's Kingdom is built on earth.

We sing now, 'Spirit of God, unseen as the wind...'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy8AZ46GKqc>

[lyrics included in video]

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

We hold in God's light

all across the continent of Europe,
who yearn for deep peace and the resumption of trade.

We pray for those whose businesses are disrupted or in jeopardy
and for the haulage industry, which plays such a massive role in our lives.

We hold in God's light this one fragile planet which we inhabit.

We pray for greater understanding of the causes and consequences
of global warming and the will to change our lives to save the earth.

We pray for justice for the poor and the persecuted.

Keep them always in our mind, and bless those who are specially called
to protect them from the systems that govern us,
that so often leave them out.

We hold in God's light all who live with anxiety, fear, dread or despair
and for all who help them in any way.

We pray for those struggling with Covid,
and for those who treat and nurse them
in hospital or in Care Homes.

We hold in God's light those who have lost livelihoods or opportunities
in the past year, for school children and students
and those who teach them.

We hold in God's light those who are lonely, and those who are fragile.
Bless them and those who care for them.

We hold in God's light the village and parish of Langbank
that people here may withstand
the difficulties of the months that lie ahead
and bless your church that we may remain faithful to our call to serve you.

We take some time now to quietly bring before you
the names and faces of any we know and love
who need your prayers today.

[pause]

Lord, be with us through the week ahead
and remind us and remind us
that our task is to be your hands and hearts
on this earth. *Amen*

Our final hymn is 'Christ be our light.....'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y5N6oxIKH0>

[lyrics included in video]

BENEDICTION

**Now go in peace;
and may your journey into this new year
be filled with faith and hope and love.
And the blessing of God Almighty
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you all
now and evermore,
*Amen***