

FIRST SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY 10TH JANUARY 2021

PERSONAL PREPARATION BEFORE THE SERVICE BEGINS.



Please take time
to remember
where you are, and
why you are here.
Give thanks
and become still
in the presence of God

O GOD, YOU SEARCH ME AND YOU KNOW ME.

O God, you search me and you know me.
All my ways lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down, you go before me:
Ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising.
You discern my purpose from afar,
and with love everlasting you besiege me:
In ev'ry moment of life or death, you are.

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
you have known its meaning through and through.
You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, my past and future too.

Although your Spirit is upon me,
still I search for shelter from your light.
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:
Even the darkness is radiant in your sight.

For you created me and shaped me,
gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:
Safe in your hands, all creation is made new.

GATHERING TOGETHER

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

And also with you.

ISAIAH 42, 1-7

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
**I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.**
He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
**A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.**
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
he will not falter or be discouraged
**till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”**

This is what God the Lord says—

“I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.

**I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,**

to open eyes that are blind,

to free captives from prison

and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Amen**

THE COLLECT FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN EPIPHANY

Eternal Father,
who at the baptism of Jesus
revealed him to be your Son,
anointing him with the Holy Spirit:

grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit,
that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

FIRST READING

The reading is taken from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 19; 1-7
Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God
Our hearts and our minds are open.

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark 1, 4-11
Glory to you, O Lord

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 baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around 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 baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized 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."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON



There are services which I have never forgotten. One was the burial of a child 8 days old. There was a mother, drugs and other problems, and no apparent father. Desolation. A nurse told me: "when I saw how ill the child was, I baptised her." In some sense it was a comfort for the mother in her misery to know that her daughter had been baptised, and that her baptism had been registered in the Baptism Register of the parish. Her child was no longer an accident, something which shouldn't have happened.

The baby had become a person as valuable as any other in that Baptism Register.

And perhaps it is important for us all to realise that in an emergency anybody can baptise somebody else.

The gospel today, the 1st Sunday in Epiphany, is always the story of the baptism of Jesus. Epiphany is the revelation of the glory of Jesus to the three wise men and today the revelation of his glory in the baptism through John. Of all the sacraments baptism is the most important. It was Luther, who once said, whenever I am in difficulties then I reassure myself with the knowledge that I have been baptised.

I needed a young curate to make this clear to me. In the church in Bad Krozingen the baptism font was in a corner, out of the way (as in many other churches). I gave the curate the chance to rearrange the furniture in the church. She put the font in the middle in front of the steps to the chancel. Holy Communion was received in a circle of people standing around the font. It has remained so to this day.

It is time for us to look a bit more closely at the readings for today. Mark's gospel is the shortest of the four and his version of the story of John the Baptist is also the most concise.

Maulburg once became the Oberammergau of the Wiesental. The church building, dedicated to John the Baptist, was 250 years old. We commissioned a musical about John which was performed by the church choirs of my parish and the Catholic parish, the Männergesangsverein and the Musikverein to packed audiences in the village sports hall four nights in a row.

One difficulty was that in the story of John the people who were to be baptised confess their sins. The man who in the musical confesses sharp practice in the bills which he gives people for the work he does for them, harvested great laughter, as this was a bit too near to the reality of daily life with this man in the village. Shortly afterwards his firm went bankrupt. John, this difficult and unusual man, makes it very clear that for him baptism is about confessing wrong doing and changing the way we live. The people loved him for it. He was pointing his accusing finger at many in society responsible for the suffering of others. What he did verges on populism, with the exception that he wasn't doing it for his own advantage. He criticised the love life of Herod and was beheaded.

Mark says very succinctly: John was preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In our way of thinking about baptism this relationship of repentance, and the being washed clean in the waters of baptism, has always played an important role. We can see it in our baptism liturgy with the rejection and renouncing of evil, the repentance of sins and the turning to Christ. Or as it is put in the Pastoral Introduction to the Baptism Liturgy: "Our drowning in the water of baptism, where we believe we die to sin and are raised to new life, unites us to Christ's dying and rising."

This is where we leave John's baptism of repentance and move on to Jesus.

We speak of Jesus as one without sin, yet he feels the need to be baptised by John.

Why?

This not a piece of showmanship, public relations, or the desire to make a theological point. Sin is, in the words of the baptism liturgy, being separate from God and our neighbour. And in this sense, the very basic and fundamental sense of sin, Jesus, son of Mary and yet also son of God, is well aware how he is continually walking along a very narrow line. Aware of how easily he can stray from one side of this line to the other, he realises that he needs the baptism of John. In the following years, the line becomes narrower. He needs the times out, the retreats in the wilderness, just as the sweating blood in Gethsemane and his doubts are also part of his reality.

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."

At the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus commissions his followers to go out into whole world and baptise people in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles Paul meets with people who are followers of Jesus but are baptised with the baptism of John. Paul makes the distinction between the baptism of repentance, put a little unfairly, backward looking, forgiving wrong done, and on the other hand the baptism in the Spirit, which is receiving new life, becoming with Jesus a child of God, growing anew.

Our baptism is not backward looking, an attempt to hold on, to set right or retrieve a golden past. Paul lists elsewhere the fruits of the Spirit. Our baptism goes forward. It is a journey into the fullness of God's love, not just for each other in a small community but for all people, of whichever colour, language, or sex. Our having been baptised is a present from others, from our parents. It is saying yes to life, whether to the life of a baby who dies 8 days old or to life in its vulnerability in the pandemic, keeping distance, protecting and respecting and supporting the life of others.

Our being baptised is to know that God has said yes to each one of us, just as he said to Jesus: "You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

LORD OF ALL HOPEFULNESS

Lord of all hopefulness
Lord of all joy
Whose trust ever child-like
No cares could destroy
Be there at our waking
And give us we pray
Your bliss in our hearts Lord
At the break of the day

Lord of all eagerness
Lord of all faith
Whose strong hands were skilled
At the plane and the lathe
Be there at our labours
And give us we pray

Your strength in our hearts Lord
At the noon of the day

Lord of all kindness
Lord of all grace
Your hands swift to welcome
Your arms to embrace
Be there at our homing
And give us we pray
Your love in our hearts Lord
At the eve of the day

Lord of all gentleness
Lord of all calm
Whose voice is contentment
Whose presence is balm
Be there at our sleeping
And give us we pray
Your peace in our hearts Lord
At the end of the day

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Jan Struther
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INTERCESSIONS

Loving God, we give thanks for this beautiful day, for the sunshine, the crisp air, the snow on the mountains and the beauty and wonder of your creation. This morning we meet together to reflect on the Baptism of our Lord by John the Baptist. Let us think of our own Baptisms, whether we experienced these passively as babies or actively as adults, Baptisms of our children, Baptisms we have witnessed or have taken an active role in and let us ponder on what this means for us and the course of our lives. May we be filled with joy as we are called through Baptism to be part of your family and may our hearts beat faster as we recognize those who we meet along our journey who help and have helped us understand the mystery of the Baptism of your Son. May we be your disciples and be mindful of your presence day by day.

Lord; in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Creator God, we remember all countries where there is conflict. We pray particularly at this time for the people of America, who are speechless, shocked, dumbfounded, horrified and appalled at what has happened in their country in recent days. The force of emotions incited by leading politicians has led to anger, threats, violence, deaths has shaken the core of a country that prided itself on its democratic values. Lord, you seek us and you know us. We however, are struggling to understand each other and are ripped apart between those crowing in jubilation and those crying in despair. We pray you will be there to hear our prayers, concerns, disbelief, anger, helplessness, and despair – and that justice will prevail. Jo Biden recalled the words of President Abraham Lincoln: “We shall nobly save or merely lose the last best hope on earth. ... The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just — a way that, if followed, the world will forever applaud and God must forever bless.”

Lord; in your mercy hear our prayer.

We remember all the teachers, children and students returning to school and university under the cloud of Covid 19 and its mutants. We pray for the wisdom and guidance of politicians, leaders and parents at this time, that they make work out together a way forward for the young pupils and students in educational institutions. We pray particularly for those facing decisive exams under duress and uncertainty, for parents struggling to find childcare and financial resources and for teachers under pressure not knowing whether to prepare material for virtual or face to face lessons.

Lord; in your mercy hear our prayer.

We remember all who are feeling badly bruised, by illness, by accident or by circumstance. For all who have suffered spiritually or mentally, for those with memories that disturb or frighten them. We remember all who have lost confidence in themselves or in others.

We pray for the sick and remember particularly Margaret and Brian. We have lost sight of many of our community and don't always know how they are faring. We pray that they will be under your protection and you will keep them safe. Help us to be thoughtful, mindful and caring for all those around us and encourage us to pick up the phone or write an email to see how those in our community or circle of acquaintance are doing. Often just a little token on our part can bring great encouragement and hope. Help us to remember the promise of our Baptism, to be engaged within a living and loving community. We take a few moments to pray silently....

and shared it with his disciples, saying:
'This is my body, given for you.
Do this to remember me.'

After they had eaten, he took the cup of wine,
gave thanks, and shared it with his disciples, saying:
'This is my blood, poured out for you and for many,
for the forgiveness of sins.'

So Father, with this bread and this cup
we celebrate his love, his death, his risen life.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

We pray together as our Lord has taught us: Our Father....

THE GIVING OF COMMUNION

Jesus is the Lamb of God
Who takes away the sin of the world.
Blessed are those who are called to his supper:
**Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but only say the word, and I shall be healed.**

SONG DURING COMMUNION

HERE IS BREAD HERE IS WINE

Here is bread here is wine
Christ is with us He is with us
Break the bread drink the wine
Christ is with us here

Here is grace here is peace
Christ is with us He is with us
Know His grace find His peace
Feast on Jesus here

Chorus

In this bread there is healing
In this cup there's life forever

In this moment by the Spirit
Christ is with us here

Here we are joined in one
Christ is with us He is with us
We'll proclaim 'til He comes
Jesus crucified

Chorus

In this bread there is healing
In this cup there's life forever
In this moment by the Spirit
Christ is with us here

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PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Lord of all time and eternity,
you opened the heavens and revealed yourself as father
in the baptism of Jesus your beloved son:
by the power of your Holy Spirit
complete the heavenly work of our rebirth
through the waters of the new creation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

LEAD ME LORD

Lead me Lord lead me in Your righteousness
Make Your way plain before my face (repeat)
For it is You Lord, You Lord only
That makes me to dwell in safety (repeat)

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NOTICES

BLESSING



Christ, son of Mary, son of God,
perfect you in the image of his
glory and gladden your hearts with
the good news of his kingdom;
and the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
come upon you and remain with
you always.

Amen

DISMISSAL

Go in the peace of Christ
Thanks be to God

MUSIC AT THE END OF THE SERVICE