

## **First Sunday after Epiphany – Year C**

### **Baptism of the Lord**

**Sunday 12 January 2025**

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Dawn Westwood, Assistant Minister to Clydesdale, and Lesley Ewing, Youth & Children’s Worker at Kirkton Church; Candidate in Training (OLM), for their thoughts on the first Sunday after Epiphany.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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## Introduction

Dawn and I have been colleagues for the last 15 months. Until Dawn moved on after her probation period and I went on placement as a candidate for the Ministry, we worked closely together each week preparing our Sunday Worship.

We are both passionate about intergenerational worship, and we felt it was very important to include elements that would be suitable for all ages, including our music choices that would appeal, not just to children and young people, but for all those worshipping. When planning, it is helpful to think about those who make up your congregation, their ages and stages, and what could work with them and what might not.

When we approach sermon and prayer writing, we find it beneficial to start by taking time to read and reflect on the passages, highlighting words and parts of the passages that stand out to us. From there, we read different commentaries. For example, *Working Preacher* and *Interrupting the Silence*. Again, it comes back to how the Word has spoken to you; each of us will have our own interpretation, and this can differ each time we read a bible verse, even a verse that is well-known to us. Prayer writing is a very personal experience, but we all have to be aware of the language we use and be open to the things that have gone on within our community and the world.

Listen to God for the things that are weighing heavy on people's hearts and minds, and to what God is saying to you through the Word.

The baptism of Jesus may be a passage that we and congregations might feel they know; when considering the texts for this week, let us be reminded afresh of the call to live out our baptism and encourage others to do likewise. How do we reach out to those who are still searching and new to their faith journey, young and young at heart?

This week's four lectionary passages contain themes of renewal, restoration and unity and the revelation of Jesus as God's Son through baptism.

### [Isaiah 43:1-7](#)

This passage conveys the message of comfort and assurance to God's people.

**Verses 1-2:** These verses emphasise the intimate relationship with God's people. Having created and formed them, God assures them not to fear, redeems them, indicating a promise of salvation and God's presence during difficult times. Within these verses, the

imagery of water and fire symbolises trials and hardships, but the assurance is given that God's people will not be harmed.

**Verses 3-4:** These verses highlight the worth and value placed on God's people. They are precious and honoured in God's sight, and they are loved profoundly. We read in these verses how God identifies as the Holy One and Saviour, displaying sovereignty and power. The mention of Egypt, Cush, and Seba suggests that God's people are valued highly, even to the point of offering nations in exchange for them.

**Verses 5-7:** God's reassurance, again, not to fear. God promises to gather them, symbolising restoration and unity, regardless of where they are scattered. Not only does it demonstrate the care for God's people but also command over all creation. God's people will be called back to Him, emphasising God's authority and desire for His people to return. The passage concludes with the affirmation that all who are called by God's name are created for God's glory. This reinforces the idea of purpose and identity in relation to God.

This passage serves as a reminder of God's love, protection, and the significance of God's people. It encourages believers to trust in God's presence and promises, especially in times of trouble.

## [Psalm 29](#)

In this psalm, powerful and majestic imagery is used for God's voice, depicting the Lord as sovereign over creation. Within this psalm, there is a theme of God's divine presence in nature and the call for humanity to recognise the sacredness of the world around us.

It highlights the importance of social justice and ethical living, serving as a reminder of our responsibility to care for creation and advocate for peace and justice within our communities. The Psalmist's portrayal of God's voice as breaking cedars and shaking the wilderness can be seen as a metaphor for the transformative power of divine truth, urging us to listen for God's voice in our own lives and to respond with action that aligns with compassion and justice. Psalm 29 can inspire a call to recognise the divine in the natural world and to engage in ethical practices that reflect God's glory and justice in our lives.

## [Acts 8:14-17](#)

This passage describes a significant event in the Early Church regarding the spread of the Gospel and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

The apostles in Jerusalem learned that the people of Samaria had accepted the message of Jesus. This marked the expansion of the Gospel beyond the Jewish community. The apostles sent Peter and John to further support and strengthen the new believers. This passage depicts the importance of the Holy Spirit within our lives and suggests that the apostles recognised a need for everyone to experience this empowerment.

Although the Samaritans had been baptised in the name of Jesus, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. This distinction emphasises that baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit were separate experiences within the Early Church. Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritans, and they received the Holy Spirit. The act of laying on of hands signifies the transmission of spiritual authority and blessing, and it highlights the communal aspect of faith in the Early Church.

These verses illustrate the process of receiving the Holy Spirit in the Early Church, emphasising the apostles' role in facilitating this experience for new believers in Samaria. It shows the expansion of the Church and the importance of the Holy Spirit in empowering believers for their faith journey.

### **[Luke 3:15-17, 21-22](#)**

This passage provides important insights into the ministry of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus.

The people were eagerly awaiting a Messiah and were curious if John the Baptist was the one they had been waiting for. This shows the heightened anticipation among the people for a saviour. John clarifies that while he baptises with water, there is someone greater coming – referring to Jesus – who will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. This highlights the transformative power of Jesus' ministry and the significance of the Holy Spirit.

Within this passage Jesus is baptised by John, which signifies the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and shows His identification with humanity, even though He was sinless.

After Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit descends upon Him, symbolising divine approval and empowerment for His ministry. The voice from heaven confirms Jesus' identity as God's Son, affirming His mission and relationship with the Father.

The passage highlights John the Baptist's role in preparing the way for Jesus, the significance of baptism, and the divine affirmation of Jesus' identity and mission through the Holy Spirit's descent at Jesus' baptism.

## Sermon ideas

### Isaiah 43:1-7

Each of these sermon ideas invites the church to engage with the reading in ways that emphasise God's expansive love, protection, and assurance of God's presence.

- God's call to "not fear" because of His redeeming love.  
This text speaks to God's liberating love that frees us from fear, both personally and collectively. God's assurance to Israel reflects this commitment to free us from any force, internal or external, that diminishes our full humanity. How do we let go of the fears that hold us back from embracing our worth, advocating for justice, and loving boldly? Let us see God's love as a call to courage.
- God's intimate knowledge of His people, expressed in: "I have called you by name, you are mine."  
Being called by name signifies God's personal care and attention to everyone. It's a reminder that we are known and seen by God in a unique, personal way. How do we cultivate a deeper relationship with God, knowing God sees and understands us fully. We are not lost in the crowd; God's love is deeply personal.

### Psalms 29

Psalms 29 describes the powerful "voice of the Lord" as it echoes through creation, displaying strength through thunder, wind, and water. But ultimately, God's power is directed toward peace, not fear.

- How do we listen for God's voice in the world around us, in the beauty of nature, in moments of awe, and in calls for justice and compassion?
- Rather than interpreting power as dominance, let us see God's power as a force that seeks to restore balance and bring peace.
- How do we join with God in advocating for peace, caring for creation, and standing up for justice, echoing God's voice in the world?
- Encouraging a reverence for creation, a respect for divine power that calls us to peace, and a commitment to embody that peace through actions of justice and care.

**Acts 8:14-17**

This passage reveals that God's love and Spirit extend to all people, regardless of past divisions or societal boundaries.

The apostles' act of affirming the Samaritans' faith shows that in God's kingdom no one is excluded or treated as an outsider. God's Spirit is for everyone, and we are called to embrace one another as equal members of God's family. How can we extend love and inclusion to those who may feel marginalised or overlooked? Just as the Early Church opened its arms to include the Samaritans, we, too, are called to be a Church of welcome and acceptance, breaking down barriers and creating a community that reflects God's radical love and unity, as we embrace inclusivity as a reflection of God's love.

**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

Each of these sermon ideas highlights aspects of Jesus' baptism that can inspire the Church to live with greater love, humility, and purpose, reflecting God's presence and Spirit in the world.

- Just as Jesus is named "Beloved" by God, we, too, are invited to live in the security of being beloved children of God. This identity is not something we earn; it's freely given, calling us to live out of love rather than fear or striving. How do we embrace our identity as beloved children of God, letting it shape how we see ourselves and treat others? Our identity calls us to love others as God loves us, bringing peace, compassion, and acceptance to the world.
- John's humility highlights a new kind of Messiah: one who serves, forgives, and lifts others up. Jesus' baptism marks Him as a Saviour who walks with humanity, meeting us where we are with gentleness and grace. How do we follow Jesus' example of humility and servant leadership? In a world that often celebrates status and power, how can we show kindness, humility, and selflessness in our own lives, embodying the values of Jesus?
- The baptism of the Spirit represents God's refining work in our lives, giving us strength to live out our faith. Jesus' baptism shows us that receiving God's Spirit calls us to purpose, empowering us to bring love, justice, and peace to the world. How do we see our faith as active and transformative, a call to participate in God's work? We remember that the Spirit empowers us to be agents of change in our communities, bringing hope and healing to others.

- The moment of baptism reveals that God is not distant but fully present, inviting each of us into a close, personal relationship. Just as God names Jesus, each of us is also called by name, affirming our worth and purpose. How do we hear God's voice in our own lives, finding reassurance in God's closeness and care? How might we seek ways to share this sense of belonging with others, particularly those who may feel forgotten or undervalued?

### **Intergenerational/ Reflective**

Have some small coloured glass stones or pebbles ready for your congregation in a bowl of water. Invite people to come forward and remove a pebble from the bowl of water – reflecting on what it means to be renewed by God and, where appropriate, their baptism.

Encourage people to keep the stone in their pocket or bag and travel with the stone and their baptismal vows and reflect on what it means for them in community, life, and Church over the next weeks and months.

### **People who help us**

Whether we are baptised as children or adults, baptism marks the beginning of our lives as Christians and as members of the Church, and when we are baptised we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Think about all the different people who help us in different times and situations in our lives. For example, police officers, paramedics, teachers, doctors, and nurses. Think about what roles they play in our lives, and how we have the Holy Spirit as a helper in our lives who guides us.

## **Prayers**

### **Gathering/ Call to Worship**

Come, all who seek a deeper understanding of God's presence in our world.

**We come with open hearts, seeking the Spirit that moves among us.**

As Jesus was baptised in the Jordan, He stood alongside all humanity.

**Let us seek to live lives of compassion, justice, and love.**

Let us worship the God of love, who calls us all beloved.

### **Prayer of approach and adoration**

Gracious God,

we come before You.

We come to sit a while at Your feet.  
We come just as we are, knowing that we can  
open our hearts to You expectantly,  
just as those who gathered by the Jordan  
waited with longing for the One who would bring new life.  
Like them, we too look for Your presence among us.

Loving God, You are the One who baptises with the Holy Spirit.  
Cleanse us and renew us, may we come to You with sincerity,  
humility, and a readiness to be transformed.

As You revealed Jesus as Your beloved Son,  
help us to see His light more clearly and to follow in His way more closely.

We bring our hopes, our fears, our doubts,  
and our joys into Your holy presence,  
knowing that You receive us with love.

Fill us with Your Spirit, just as You filled Jesus,  
empowering us to live as Your beloved children in this world.

You are the source of all life, who reveals  
Your Spirit to us and calls us into a deeper love for one another.

Yet we confess that we often fall short of this calling.  
Too often, we have allowed fear to limit our compassion,  
judgment to cloud our kindness  
and indifference to turn us away from those in need.

We confess that we are slow to change,  
holding onto what is comfortable instead of reaching out in love, as Jesus taught us.

Forgive us, O God.  
Renew us in Your Spirit,  
help us to let go of pride and selfishness,  
embracing instead the humility and grace that Jesus lived.

Fill us with a heart for justice, a spirit of peace,  
and a love that reflects Yours

as we remember Jesus' baptism.  
May we also hear Your voice, calling each of us beloved.  
Help us to carry that love into the world,

to live with courage, compassion,  
and a commitment to justice.

We ask all this in the name of Jesus, our Saviour, our teacher, and our Friend.  
Saying together the words that Jesus taught us,

Our Father ...

*[The Lord's Prayer can be said according to your tradition]*

### **Prayers for others/Intercession**

Loving God,  
as we reflect on Jesus' baptism and the blessing of Your Spirit,  
we lift up our prayers for the world,  
trusting that You are with us in our hopes, needs, and challenges.

We pray for Your Church across the world,  
that it may be a source of hope, compassion, and justice.  
May we, as Your people, remember our baptismal calling to be a light in the world,  
sharing Your love with humility and courage.

Empower us to follow Jesus' example of radical compassion,  
reaching out to those in need and advocating for justice in our communities.

We pray for leaders of all nations,  
that they may seek wisdom, integrity, and a commitment to peace.  
May they govern with justice,  
and may their decisions bring life, safety, and hope to all people.  
Strengthen them to care for the vulnerable,  
the poor, and those who seek refuge and freedom.

God of Comfort, we lift up all who suffer today –  
those who are burdened by illness, loss, or isolation.  
We pray for those facing oppression or hardship,  
that they may feel Your strength beside them.

Grant healing to the sick, peace to the grieving,  
and community to the lonely.  
Help us to be Your hands and feet,  
bringing comfort and love wherever there is pain.

Creator God, we pray for the earth,  
Your beautiful creation.  
Guide us to be responsible caretakers,  
tending to the planet with respect and wisdom.  
May we work together to protect it,  
ensuring a future for generations to come.

Finally, Lord, we lift up our own lives,  
asking that You would renew our faith and open our hearts to Your Spirit.

Help us to live as Your beloved children,  
caring for others, standing up for what is right,  
and offering compassion to all we meet.  
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

### **Blessing/Closing prayer.**

May you go forth with the assurance  
that you are deeply loved and cherished by God.

May you find your true identity in God's unending love,  
just as Jesus was called the beloved Son at His baptism.

May the Holy Spirit rest upon you,  
filling you with peace, joy, and a sense of belonging.

Go now, with the blessing of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
guiding and strengthening you in all you do, as you live out your calling.  
Amen.

### **Musical suggestions**

*God Welcomes All* (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music version is now available; and the words-only book, digital resources including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from

<https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

#### Gathering

- GWA 42 – “God welcomes all”
- CH4 124, MP564 – “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”
- CH4 147 – “All creatures of our God and King”
- CH4 196 – “Come, now is the time to worship”

#### Responsive Hymns

- CH4 111, MP 237 – “Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!”
- CH4 127, MP 528 – “O worship the King, all glorious above”
- CH4 132, MP 327 – “Immortal, invisible, God only wise”
- CH4 335 – “Out of the flowing river Jesus ascends”
- CH4 502, MP 624 – “Take my life, Lord, let it be”
- MP 613 – “Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me”
- Fischy Music – “We your children” – CCLI song #7025270
- Fischy Music – “How we need you” – CCLI song #7025267
- “Christ, when for us you were baptised” –  
<https://hymnary.org/text/christ-when-for-us-you-were-baptized#instances>

#### Blessing

- GWA 85 – May the Lord bless you
- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 throughout Epiphany can be found on the [Church of Scotland website](#)

- GWA 105 – “Christe, lux mundi”
- GWA 106 – “God Incarnate, living presence”
- GWA 107 – “A voice was heard in Ramah”

## Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of ‘holy chaos’.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?  
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/  
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different “Spiritual Styles”?

- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?  
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?  
Did it function well as a whole?  
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?  
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?  
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/  
community?  
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?  
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

## Useful links

*God Welcomes All* can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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