

This short act of worship has been prepared for you by Revd Dan Haylett to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

We gather before you creator God,
bringing you our praise and worship,
and to experience your love for us.
Be with us, reminding us of all that unites us within that family
of faith.
Refresh us in body, mind and soul and open our hearts to your
word. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Hymn: Speak O Lord, as we come to you (Singing the Faith 161)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://youtu.be/ubRIJj8xkds>

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,

that the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.

Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.

Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.

Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.

Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.

And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.

Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
and the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

Prayer

Unwrapper of grace, Unveiler of glory, you are the God of surprises! You delight in all you have made and rejoice in turning the tables and challenging expectations. We lift our hearts to you.

Revealer of love, joy and peace, Holy Spirit of God! You come to renew, cleansing and healing and turning our lives back to God. We open our lives to you.

Saving, redeeming and loving Lord Jesus! You come to be at one with us, that we might be at one with God. You share in our weakness and assure us of the kingdom's power and purpose. We bring our thanks and praise to you.

As you reveal truth to us, we begin to see ourselves and our world as you see us. We recognise that which needs to change and grow, to stop and to start. We see the problems and the failings and we hear at the same time your affirming words of grace. To all who turn to you, who seek to change and turn around, grace is given! As we seek forgiveness and renewal, may we each find new grounds for hope and rejoicing for you come to us and will not leave us.

God of surprises, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we offer our worship today.

Today's Gospel Reading: Mark 1:4-11 NRSV

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Time to Reflect

At Jesus' baptism, the heavens open and Mark records those powerful words of God for God's Son, "...with you I am well pleased".

Those are powerful words of affirmation for anyone to hear, and I hope that through our worship today we might learn to hear God's delight over us as children too.

But first: John the Baptist? I thought we'd finished with him in Advent and put him away again with the decorations for another year! Yet here he is again, so soon, with his insistent clarion call of a message of repentance, change, and transformation. In Mark's gospel no space is given for the gifts of Magi or in describing the harrowing flight of the Holy Family as refugees. Nothing is said of the infancy of Jesus in the haste to skip to the beginning – the beginning of the good news of the kingdom.

For Mark, and the other Gospel writers, John the Baptist needs some careful positioning in the text. All are concerned not to give him the best seats in the text. No more so than in these stories about Jesus' own baptism. We clearly see the discomfort that Matthew has in telling this same story, where Jesus concedes that for the time being and to "fulfil all righteousness" John must baptise Jesus. We hear the great unspoken question just beneath the text: Why? Why does Jesus, the Holy One, need to submit to baptism?

Mark offers some brief hints at a solution. The baptism account is shown to be a moment of epiphany, of revelation and manifestation. It is not, as some later claimed, that Jesus is somehow adopted by God at the moment of baptism; but that through this profound encounter Jesus is affirmed for who he really is: the Son of God.

Yet make no mistake. This is something more and deeper than the sort of individual spiritual experience that we might crave or even, God forgive us, boast about. It is an experience of deep affirmation that is rooted in God's truth and therefore revealing of Kingdom purpose. It's not so much that Jesus gets a boost or a buzz that will help him through all that will come, or that he is given a spiritual high only for himself to treasure: the voice from heaven affirms and celebrates Jesus' place as one of us, undertaking baptism to unite us with him. In seeking to underscore this human connection Karl Barth wrote about Jesus coming to the Jordan uniquely confessing his own need "without side-glances at others". I love this image. Jesus as One completely self-aware enough to recognise his own dependency within God, with no room left for pretence and with a focus that rejects the easy or casual judgement of others. Living without "side glances" might well be a good way for us to grow into this likeness this year.

The truth about Jesus' baptism matters. Jesus was baptised, as we are or can be. This really matters! In baptism we are bound into God's family, affirmed for who we really are in the eyes of heaven and commissioned into God's service. You notice, I hope, that Jesus is affirmed and owned as the Beloved Son before Mark describes anything that he has done, before the healings and teaching. As we say in celebrating God's grace within our baptismal services: "all this for you, before you could know anything of it." Mark along with the other Gospel writers are clear: God's affirmation comes first, as God rejoices in what God has made.

God's affirmation is real and bears the costly hallmarks that real truth carries. It is not the cheap or passing status of being popular, or being liked on social media. It is a world away from the dangerous truth denying self-affirmation that we've seen this week in the USA that led to such unrest and even deaths. The affirmation received by the Son comes out of God's love and purpose as a sign of God's intention for all. As Jesus is baptised by John, he takes another step towards us, to be at one with us, so that we might truly be at one with God.

The truth really matters, and at the climax of the Gospel reading today, we got to hear of that truth. The voice from heaven calls out to the Son as the Beloved, the One who God

delights in. Because of that, and because Jesus comes to share in our real struggles and joys, we might hear that same voice calling affirmation to us too. What a difference that word makes: God is pleased with you. God delights in you. God loves you.

May that truth shape your living, guide you in the wilderness and bring joy and peace to you and to many. Amen.

A time of prayer

Jesus, baptised as one of us, with us: we pray to you for those who feel themselves to be alone, isolated and isolating, removed from normal patterns of life and work.

Lord, hear us: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Jesus, affirmed as the Saviour, the Holy One, here among us: we pray to you for those who need to know that they are loved by you, wanted by you, called by you. We pray for all who find themselves in abusive or difficult relationships or unhealthy patterns of work.

Lord, hear us: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Jesus, consenting to do what is most needed, come to us now: we pray for all who find themselves in vulnerable and dangerous places and situations. We pray for those who are unwell at this time, for those in hospitals and homes, and for all who care and give themselves for the sake of love. We pray with all who find these days hard and painful, filled with fear. Lord, hear us: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

God in Christ you come to us to help us come to you. May your spirit bind our prayers to our actions and attitudes, that we may share in Jesus' mission here and now. May the whole earth be transformed with the vision of your glory, to become the kingdom of love, justice and peace that you desire. Lord, hear us: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

Hymn: Take my life and let it be (Singing the Faith 566)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of4I5bTdZ8M>

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King;
take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart - it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store;
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for Thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

A prayer of blessing

God of revelation, who opens eyes and hearts, affirm us for
who we are in your sight: as beloved daughters and sons.

May God's deep blessing be with you this day and for ever; the
blessing of God the One in Three and the Three in One sustain
and keep you always. Amen.