

Opening responses

The world belongs to God,
THE EARTH AND ALL ITS PEOPLE.

How good it is, how wonderful,
TO LIVE TOGETHER IN UNITY.

Love and faith come together,
JUSTICE AND PEACE JOIN HANDS.

If Christ's disciples keep silent,
THESE STONES WOULD SHOUT ALOUD.

Open our lips, O God,
AND OUR MOUTHS SHALL PROCLAIM YOUR PRAISE.

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Hymn StF 506, HP 799: My heart is full of Christ

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| 1 My heart is full of Christ, and longs
this glorious matter to declare!
Of him I make my loftier songs,
I cannot from his praise forbear;
my ready tongue makes haste to sing
the glories of my heavenly King. | 3 Gird on thy thigh the Spirit's sword,
and take to thee thy power divine;
stir up thy strength, almighty Lord,
all power and majesty are thine:
assert thy worship and renown;
O all-redeeming God, come down. |
| 2 Fairer than all the earth-born race,
perfect in comeliness thou art;
replenished are thy lips with grace,
and full of love thy tender heart:
God ever blest! we bow the knee,
and own all fullness dwells in thee. | 4 Come, and maintain thy righteous cause,
and let thy glorious toil succeed;
spread forth the victory of thy cross,
ride on, and prosper in thy deed;
through earth triumphantly ride on,
and reign in every heart alone. |

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Creator God, the whole earth reveals your infinite care and love for all your hand has fashioned. You give form, light and colour, depth and shadow, to the vast mountains, infinite skies, rushing rivers and distant jungles, which all team with abundant life. You give birth to sound and music, the rhythm of the seasons, the warmth of the sun and life-giving rain. You give harmony: the largest and most impressive forms of life dependent upon the smallest. Everything demonstrates your wisdom.

In our ignorance and pride we forget our dependence and exploit your gift; we overlook your personal revelation of who you are in Jesus, and take for granted his love, death, and eternal life. May we seek you in all things, in all life, in all creation, and find in their depths that new life which is your enduring presence, around us, within us, before us and behind. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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 today our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory; for ever and ever. Amen

Address: Remember your baptism

Who remembers their baptism?

If we were together in one place, some of your hands might go up, because a few of us may have been baptised as adults or older children. More of you might be thinking, "Are you crazy? I was only 3 months old!"

For those who remember this event, you might be recalling the nervousness or excitement beforehand, the splash of not quite warm enough water over the face, or perhaps even total immersion in a pool. And a rising up with a sense of joy, a oneness with God and with the church family who surround and welcome them, and in whose presence a great and personal declaration has been made.

Now I have a God-son. I was asked to do this job by friends, who, it seems, trusted me to be his friend as he grew up; somebody from the church whom he could rely on. I'm really not sure how successful I have been, but one thing I have done is sent him a card each year on the anniversary of his baptism. In it is a rhyme – usually a daft little poem – but it always includes the words, **"Remember your baptism!"**

He, like me, and many of you, will never remember the event itself. But it does seem important to me that we never forget that we once were baptised, and that in that moment God moved in our lives in a mysterious and wonderful way; as promises were made by people who loved us, to support and encourage us, and to carry on a way of worship at church into which we can grow up; and even more mind-blowing than all these lovely people doing that for us – if that were possible – as the Holy Spirit of God gives us a special identity: a special place in God's kingdom which says to us, "You are loved by God; you are saved by God; you are chosen by God; you will forever be in God's embrace." A stamp of belonging!

So, please, remember your baptism! Find out the date, if you don't know it, or select a date on which to remember it each year. For in that moment you were marked for ever as God's own child; and even if you didn't realise it then, that is something that you should treasure every day!

Amen.

Hymn StF 533: Covenant child

(Alternative from Hymns and Psalms 589: This child from God above)

As you sing, be reminded that this is the church, God's gathered people, singing to you! Whether you have been baptised or not; whether you remember it, or not.

1. Covenant child,
water comes as a sign
of the washing and cleansing
renewing your mind.
Covenant child,
you are claimed as God's own.
You are one of His people,
his church is your home.

3. Covenant child,
we are praying for you.
May you stay close to Jesus
in all that you do.
Covenant child,
grow strong in the faith.
Seek after God's kingdom
and walk in His way.

2. Covenant child,
you are here by God's grace,
by the work of our Saviour,
who died in your place.
Covenant child,
you are living in Christ.
Buried with Him in suffering,
with Him you will rise.

Mary Rose Jensen

The drama of Incarnation

- Leader** When the time was right, God sent the Son.
- Women** Sent him and suckled him,
- Men** Reared him and risked him;
- Women** Filled him with laughter and tears and compassion,
- Men** Filled him with anger and love and devotion.
- Leader** Unwelcomed child, refugee and runaway,
- All** CHRIST IS GOD'S OWN SON
- Leader** Skilled carpenter and homeless wayfarer,
- All** CHRIST IS GOD'S OWN SON
- Leader** Feeder and teacher, healer and antagonist,
- All** CHRIST IS GOD'S OWN SON
- Leader** Lover of the unlovable, toucher of the untouchable, forgiver of the unforgivable,
- All** CHRIST IS GOD'S OWN SON
- Leader** Loved by the least, feared by the leaders;
befriended by the weak, despised by the strong;
deserted by his listeners, denied by his friends;
bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh,
writing heaven's pardon over earth's mistakes,
- All** CHRIST IS GOD'S OWN SON
- Leader** The Word became flesh,
- All** HE LIVED AMONG US, HE WAS ONE OF US.

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Reading: John 1.29-42

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.' ³²And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' ³⁹He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).

Hymn StF 501; HP 474: Help us, O Lord, to learn

1. Help us, O Lord, to learn
the truths your word imparts,
to study that thy laws may be
inscribed upon our hearts.
2. Help us, O Lord, to live
the faith which we proclaim,
that all our thoughts and words and deeds
may glorify your name.
3. Help us, O Lord, to teach
the beauty of your ways,
that all who seek may find the Christ,
and make a life of praise.

William Watkins Reid (b. 1923)

Sermon – *Names and Encounters*

One aspect of a baptism service in some traditions is that of a Christening, when a Christian name is given to the child brought to the church. In a sense, we could say that this happened with Jesus when he came for baptism by John: he was given a new name by John, the Lamb of God.

Names are funny things. They are words attached to an individual by which we distinguish them from all the other individuals. Names can often tell us something about the person. Consider Tobias Blastworthy; what sort of a person is he, and what might he look like? I don't know the answer, as I just made up the name, but in my mind's eye is a mad inventor with hair and clothing in disarray, for whom nothing ever seems to go quite as he intended! If I met Tobias, I might find him to be a tall, elegant man of quiet disposition, smart dress and efficient ways, quite different from my notion of him.

In biblical times, names often had deeper meanings than we might read into them today. In Genesis 35 we read of the birth of Ben-oni; the name means *son of my sorrow*, and was given to him by his mother, Rachel, who, after a hard labour, died in giving birth. His father Jacob renamed him Benjamin, *son of the right hand*, a place of honour, and Benjamin went on to become one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus, too, has a particular meaning, *the Lord is salvation*. A fitting name for the Saviour of the world.

And the one that God sent to prepare the people to receive God's Son – John! Now John may be a commonly used name today, but in its Hebrew roots is the meaning *God's gracious gift*. The relevance of this name is clear when the miraculous nature of his conception as recorded in Luke's gospel is recalled.

Our reading today comes from John's gospel. To be clear, the gospel writer was not John the Baptist, who is the subject of much of today's passage. In this gospel, much is made of testimony. In a legal sense, John the evangelist is presenting evidence throughout the gospel, and here in chapter 1 he is calling the first witness. One can almost hear the courtroom clerk yell, "Call the witness!" In the passage just before today's reading, investigators from the Pharisees had been sent to find out what all this hullabaloo caused by John was all about. They had sought to identify exactly who he was: Elijah?, the Prophet?, the Messiah? No, says John, I have no title. I am "the voice of one crying in the wilderness...", quoting Isaiah, and making clear that his role is to prepare the people to receive their Messiah.

John's testimony was this, in paraphrase, "Well now, I was out baptising in the Jordan and there before me was Jesus. I wouldn't have recognised him, but for..." Here, those listening might have expected him to refer to some distinguishing feature of Jesus, such as an unusual family trait or obvious tattoo. But John exceeds expectations, "...but for no less than God having told me that when I see the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and remain on a man, you'll know that he is my man". Now that kind of thing doesn't happen every day, and when it does, it certainly marks someone out. "Who exactly, is this man?" "Oh, he's the Son of God!"

The Jews were not able to take such testimony at face value, as the rest of the gospel reveals in plenty more controversies. John, however, continues by giving Jesus his own new name, "Behold, *the Lamb of God*, who takes away the sin of the world".

Lamb of God. This was a new one on them. For everyone, in fact, as it is not a name from Scripture. The Old Testament has several clues, but no *Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of*

the world. There's the Paschal Lamb, used at Passover to protect God's people from the destruction God was bringing upon the Egyptian people, but it did not remove sin. There's the lamb, led to the slaughter, in Isaiah's Servant Song (chapter 53), a passage which points to the promised Messiah. And there's the animal sent out into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement, to carry away the sins of the people... but that was a goat, not a lamb. So this is a new title, but one that encompasses several recognisable principles of God's saving grace from the Old Testament. And it stuck: Jesus' new name, Lamb of God, is used again in Revelation, of the One who gives his life for the people and reclaims it as ruler of all, having defeated the enemy of evil for all time.

This is Jesus, who comes amongst us and starts his work amongst us in this moment of baptism. John is clear from the outset: by this man, God will forgive your sins.

And the encounters begin. John has pointed out Jesus, as pointing away from himself to the Christ was the reason he came. First, it's his own disciples who follow Jesus, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" One of the two, who end up spending the day with Jesus, was Andrew, who became Jesus' disciple. And he brought his brother, Simon, with these remarkable words, "We have found the Messiah". Simon may have been sceptical, we don't know, but he hadn't joined Andrew in following John. Nonetheless, he goes to see Jesus, and something remarkable happens.

Simon was a plain-speaking fisherman, an ordinary, everyday sort of man. He operated a boat or two, made enough to feed his wife, children and mother-in-law, and probably didn't want for more. But his life was about to be turned completely upside-down, as he followed brother Andrew to Jesus. We're told, "Jesus looked at him, and said, 'You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas.'" Cephas translates to "Peter", which means "Rock".

A rock. A rock for Jesus. In this moment, God has gazed on Simon's soul, and seen truth, enduring steadfastness and reliability; and unshakeable resolve in an impermanent world. "You, Simon, shall be a Rock for me".

"Behold the Lamb of God!" Will you make that approach? Behold means, "Now pay attention", "You do not want to miss this". Now is the time to open your eyes, because Jesus is here. And under Jesus's gaze your weaknesses, frailties, wrongdoings and petty little selfishnesses are forgiven, taken away, and he sees the you God created you to be. And calls you to become that person.

Jesus brings us today to moments, places, of encounter. We may be desperate for those moments to come, aware that things need to change, that we are ready to stride forward with Christ. Or we may be quite happy where we are, thank you. But when God calls, it's time to look up and see. To see the Lamb, who gives everything so that you might receive life in all its fullness from him. To see the person you can be, unencumbered by the guilt of sins not let go. To see in yourself the person God sees: yourself loved by God, saved by God, chosen by God, forever in God's embrace. When God's time is right, no matter what's going on in your life, it's time to open your eyes, to behold the Lamb, and Jesus will break in.

And what name will the Lamb give you? What role? What blessing?

Amen.

Hymn StF 556; HP 697: Just as I am, without one plea

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|---|---|
| 1. Just as I am, without one plea
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! | 4. Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come! |
| 2. Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come! | 5. Just as I am – thy love unknown
has broken every barrier down –
now to be thine, yea thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come! |
| 3. Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
sight, riches, healing of the mind,
yea, all I need, in thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come! | 6. Just as I am, of that free love,
the breadth, length, depth, and height to prove,
here for a season, then above,
O Lamb of God, I come! |

Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871)

Prayers of Intercession

Let us voice our cares and concerns, knowing that God is listening to us.

Lord God, make yourself known to the people who come into our churches,
or who pass by and sometimes wonder, but who have not yet come in;
make us better bearers of your life to those who need you but have never met you.

Silence

True and living God: **we want to know you more.**

Lord God, the world lurches from crisis to crisis, and there is much misleading and misdirecting;
help us to recover the natural sense of what is right and just, honest and good,
so that our hearts are inclined to hear the voice of your leading and respond to it.

Silence

True and living God: **we want to know you more.**

Lord God, help us to take more seriously our responsibility of helping one another forward in faith,
as brothers and sisters;
we pray for those in our families whom we would love to bring to know you,
and for those who have drifted away.

Silence

True and living God: **we want to know you more.**

Lord God, there are some who are going through distressing, painful and worrying times.
We stand alongside them now, and ask for them your comfort, reassurance, healing and
peace of mind.

Silence

True and living God: **we want to know you more.**

Lord God, we thank you for all those who have directed us to know you better,
and for the way you are drawing us closer into friendship with you.

Lord God, you have enriched and enlightened us by the revelation of your eternal Christ.
Strengthen us to walk your path of light, so that by word and deed we may manifest the gracious
news of your faithfulness and love. Amen.

Based on Intercessions for the day from Living Stones, Susan Sayers, © Kevin Mayhew Ltd

Hymn StF 357, HP 264: Jesus, the name high over all

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| 1 Jesus, the Name high over all,
in hell or earth or sky!
Angels revere, and nations fall,
and devils fear and fly. | 4 O that the world might taste and see
the riches of His grace!
The arms of love that compass me
would all the world embrace. |
| 2 Jesus, the name to sinners dear,
the Name to sinners given!
It scatters all their guilty fear,
it turns their hell to heaven. | 5 His only righteousness I show,
his saving truth proclaim;
'tis all my business here below
to cry, "Behold the Lamb!" |
| 3 Jesus – the prisoner's fetters breaks,
and bruises Satan's head;
power into strengthless souls it speaks,
and life into the dead. | 6 Happy, if with my latest breath
I may but gasp his name,
preach Him to all, and cry in death,
"Behold, behold the Lamb!" |

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Blessing

Trusting in what is unseen,
believing the best is to come,
in hope the universe waits:
God's purpose shall be revealed.

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May you know the enduring friendship of the Christ who died for you, the close companionship of the Spirit who dwells with you, and the eternal love of God who holds you close, today and every day.

Amen.