

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

Telephone Service for Sunday 9th January 2022 – The Baptism of Christ

The service can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley Benefice for Sunday 9th January which has been put together by Liz Howlett. We worship together across the valley in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are in the season of Epiphany and our theme for this morning is the Baptism of Christ.

Hymn: Be still, for the presence of the Lord

1 Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;

Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear.

In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground;

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

2 Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;

He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned.

How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light!

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

3 Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;

He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace.

No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him;

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place. Amen.

David J Evans (born 1957) © 1986 Thankyou Music/Adm. by worshiptogether.com songs CCLI Licence 2370586

Invitation to Confession

By the mercies of God, let us confess our sins and present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him, which is our spiritual worship.

Prayers of Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit: Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart: Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided: Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins, heal and strengthen us by his Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Heavenly Father, at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son: may we recognise him as our Lord and know ourselves to be your beloved children; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

First Reading

Isaiah 43: 1 – 7

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk

through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Gospel Reading

Luke 3: 15 – 17; 21 – 22

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Reflection

'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'

Two exciting things have happened to me this week – the first, and most important, was on Monday when I met my first grandchild for the very first time! What a privilege to hold a week-old baby – it is a sacred moment. And his parents and I were saying how awesome it is to name another human – to give them the name that they will be known by through their life. We join with God in God's work when we give names to babies in this way.

Then, less importantly but still exciting for me, on Thursday, the 1921 Census was opened to the public for the very first time. It is now possible to search for family members alive a hundred years ago. I found my dad, a boy of 8 living with his mum and dad and four siblings in Milton, near Sittingbourne in Kent. In addition to the thrill, it also struck me really for the first time, how fortunate he was to have both parents living, for this was the first census after the Great War in which his father had been a stoker on steam ships in the navy and after the Spanish flu had brought death and devastation to so many families around the world. If you are familiar with the questions asked in previous censuses, you will see that there are new ones for 1921. One of the things this census was designed to highlight was how many single parent families there were, and how many 'blended' families – asking of every child on the census whether both of their parents were alive, even if they weren't living with both. This census, like no other before it, would have provided these detailed family statistics to the government for the challenging years ahead.

'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'

These words, from our first reading, would have offered hope and reassurance originally to those Israelites who were languishing in exile in Babylon in the 6th century BC. They had seen their capital, Jerusalem, taken by king Nebuchadnezzar; their own king was now in prison in Babylon and the temple where God's presence was understood to be, had been demolished. These were tough times for Israelites – they weren't just experiencing physical trauma, they were questioning the very existence of their God and their own identity as God's people. Is our God still 'there'? Has God been defeated as we have? Have the gods of the Babylonians made our God impotent and helpless? If yes, then who are we? If yes, then what is the point of our existence?

It was through these tough times that new understandings of God and Jewish identity were forged. And the hope and vision of the future which this part of the book of Isaiah offered helped a great deal with

that. You can find God wherever you are – God is not confined to a building; you can live for God wherever you are – even in places you would rather not be and working for people you haven't chosen.

'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'

And what of us? We have stepped over the threshold into a new year – 2022: what will it bring? We know only too well one thing that has come with us into this new year. Thank goodness that when we went into lockdown for the first time in March 2020, we had no idea that we would still be battling the Covid virus two winters later. We haven't gone through a war, like our ancestors a hundred years ago, and thankfully we have vaccines to protect us against Covid – (all they had against the Spanish flu were the mitigations familiar to us, such as closing schools, churches and theatres, encouraging people to wear masks and isolate as best as they could during the two years it was potent). However, we too face challenging times ahead.

Those in exile in Babylon did eventually have the opportunity to return to Israel, when Cyrus king of Persia defeated the Babylonians. Some of them did indeed go back to their beloved land and home but they returned to a place of change and struggle. There is a moving account in Ezra of how some of the old people who remembered the Temple as it had been before they left, wept to see it in its current sorry state. We may not have had to leave home, but the world in which we live has changed around us.

'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'

One of the clearest indicators that God has called us and not forgotten us is told in our Gospel reading – Jesus is baptised in the river Jordan at the start of his ministry on earth. The Jordan was a well used river by those living on its banks in those days – everything would have gone into it. Jesus was baptised, not in clean water in a font, but in the water of human life – all the flotsam and jetsam of everyday living. He was baptised into the struggles and challenges of life on earth and we are told that this was when the Holy Spirit came upon him, as he stood alongside men and women, with them, not lording it over them. And so let us be reassured as we seek to help bring in God's kingdom on earth in the coming year.

'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'

Amen

Hymn: All my hope on God is founded

1 All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

3 God's great goodness ay endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of nought.
Evermore, from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

4 Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

5 Still from man to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Prayers

Jesus calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light. Washed clean by the waters of baptism, let us pray that we may live the life to which he is calling us.

Lord Jesus, baptizing with the Spirit and with fire, strengthen us to withstand all the trials of our faith. Lord of truth. **Hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, bringing forgiveness to all who repent, deepen the dependence of all your followers upon your grace. Lord of truth. **Hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, fulfilling the promises of old, give hope to all who suffer or are ignored. Lord of truth. **Hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, bringer of hope, share with all the riches of eternal life. Lord of truth. **Hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus Christ, in you God makes us and all things new. Transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

And as our Saviour taught us, so we pray
**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 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**

Introduction to the Peace

We are the body of Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body. Let us then pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life.

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you. Amen.**

Hymn: Holy Spirit, living breath of God

1 Holy Spirit, living Breath of God,
breathe new life into my willing soul.
Bring the presence of the risen Lord
to renew my heart and make me whole.
Cause your word to come alive in me;
give me faith for what I cannot see;
give me passion for your purity;
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.

kindness to the greatest and the least,
gentleness that sows the path of peace.
Turn my strivings into works of grace;
Breath of God, show Christ in all I do.

2 Holy Spirit, come abide within,
may your joy be seen in all I do.
Love enough to cover every sin
in each thought and deed and attitude:

3 Holy Spirit, from creation's birth,
giving life to all that God has made,
show your power once again on earth,
cause your church to hunger for your ways.
May the fragrance of our prayers arise;
lead us on the road of sacrifice,
that in unity the face of Christ
may be clear for all the world to see.

Keith Getty (born 1974) and Stuart Townend (born 1963)

© 2005 Thankyou Music/Adm. by Kingswaysongs, a division of David C Cook, www.kingswayworship.co.uk Used by permission CCLI Licence 2370586

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, is copyright The Archbishop's Council (2000). New Patterns for Worship, is copyright The Archbishop's Council (2002).