

Call to Worship Isaiah 42: 1 – 4

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Prayer of Praise

Loving God, we praise you that you choose such everyday things to reveal your power and glory. A normal, humble home to be the birthplace of Jesus our Saviour, a river as the place to bring about the nature and mission of Christ our Redeemer, a group of friends and a wooden cross to declare your mercy and love.

We adore you for the way you have come to us in Jesus, and strengthened and encouraged the ordinariness of our lives with your renewing Spirit.

We praise you that you still make all things new through Jesus Christ our Guide. Amen.

Hymns StF 546

Behold the servant of the Lord!
I wait thy guiding eye to feel,
to hear and keep thy every word,
to prove and do thy perfect will,
joyful from my own works to cease,
glad to fulfil all righteousness

Me if thy grace vouchsafe to use,
meanest of all thy creatures, me,
the deed, the time, the manner choose;
let all my fruit be found of thee;
let all my works in thee be wrought,
by thee to full perfection brought.

My every weak though good design
o'errule or change, as seems thee meet;
Jesus, let all my work be thine!
Thy work, O Lord, is all complete,
and pleasing in thy Father's sight;
thou only hast done all things right.

Here then to thee thine own I leave;
mould as thou wilt thy passive clay;
but let me all thy stamp receive,
but let me all thy words obey,
serve with a single heart and eye,
and to thy glory live and die.

Charles Wesley

Prayer of Confession

It is easy to take the way of the world, to think only of ourselves, to be greedy, dishonest, and eager to possess what belongs to others. It is hard to acknowledge that we can do nothing, in the end, to save ourselves from the harm which such attitudes do to others and ourselves.

Yet we want to have the assurance that we are loved by God and will be united in heaven.

And God's promises are sure, the way of salvation has been opened to us.

Loving God, we thank you that we can share life with Christ, on earth and in heaven, and through your grace we are forgiven and through Jesus we are saved.

It is easy to read the words: 'Your sins are forgiven.' It is hard to receive them for ourselves.

Saviour, help us to accept your grace and mercy, and understand your endless love.

Strengthen our faith and fill us with you Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please pray whichever version in whatever language you prefer

Reading Matthew 3: 13 – 17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptised by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptised, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved,^[a] with whom I am well pleased.'

Reading Acts 10: 34 – 43

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

Hymn StF 233

When Jesus came to Jordan
to be baptised by John,
he did not come for pardon,
but as his Father's Son.
He came to share repentance
with all who mourn their sins,
to speak the vital sentence
with which good news begins.

He came to share temptation,
our utmost woe and loss,
for us and our salvation
to die upon the cross.
So when the Dove descended
on him, the Son of Man,
the hidden years had ended,
the age of grace began.

Come, Holy Spirit, aid us
to keep the vows we make;
this very day invade us,
and every bondage break.
Come, give our lives direction,
the gift we covet most:
to share the resurrection
that leads to Pentecost.

Fred Pratt Green

Reflection

At the turn of the year, when the birth of Jesus has dominated the end of last year and now we go from a baby to a full grown man. A man who has come to be baptised in the river, in full view of all the people, by a known, outspoken prophet, who we call John the Baptist, the son of Zacariah and Elizabeth, so some sort of cousin to Jesus.

We are on the precipice, just about to topple into this amazing time of following Jesus' ministry within one calendar year, including his death and resurrection, remembering that in real life it was three years only that all of this was accomplished, and then the Word and the Way spread throughout the world.

It is fairly incomprehensible when you try to think of it like that, so we take it bite sized, bit by bit, reading and hearing familiar Bible passages and finding new meaning as we change and grow and the world turns.

And our reading from Acts tells us and all the people how this all started with this baptism. As much as John baptised all who sincerely came to him wanting to repent and be forgiven, Jesus welcomed and continues to welcome everyone who comes to him. Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends and followers, the leader of the early church, clearly and calmly declares that Christ's peace is for each person, regardless of upbringing, nationality, wealth, or status. What started in the backwater of Galilee, has grown exponentially. In place are those who were the first eyewitnesses, those who saw him after the resurrection, those who were given the task of taking the Good News to all the world, known and unknown. And here they are doing just that task, recorded for posterity, passed by oral tradition, letters and written gospels. Translated into many, many languages, each with their own idioms giving rise to some confusion, but on the whole, we get the message, the mission, the ministry of Jesus. I wonder if people reflected on Jesus' ministry in the way we say 'before Covid' or 'after Covid' as a time marker. We know that we used BC (before Christ) and AD (anno Domini – in the year of our Lord), until the recent past, but at the time, I wonder?

In our Bibles, our date markers are normally through who was king, emperor or chief priest/prophet. But date markers occasionally occur through other significant events, like the fall of Jerusalem; but did people talk about before Baptism and after Baptism? Before the healings, teachings, miracles, and signs and after. Did this become something immediately after his death and resurrection or was it only with hindsight that we attribute such things? We possibly will never know, but what we do know is that, publicly, it all started here.

John knew who Jesus was, not just a family member, but he has knowledge of who he really was, the Son of God. He may have got this through being told, but he doesn't seem someone to take things on face value. He may have understood this by spending time with Jesus, talking things through with him, firming up their ideas, but it seems to me to be a surprise to John that Jesus has come to be baptised, not something planned. We know John is widely regarded as a prophet, so he may have innately known or been given a vision or message by God, but we're not told that is the case.

So it seems to me that locally, at least, Jesus has been teaching and preaching maybe, performing healings and other signs and miracles, and that witnesses have come forward to tell John, in case this was another false prophet. John, after all was born to be the forerunner, so may have been looking out, listening carefully to reports of what was happening, aware of his mission as he grew up, only a few months older than Jesus.

Whichever way I ponder it, I still come to the same conclusion, that this was the first of many points in Jesus' life, excluding his birth, when it starts to unfold and nothing is ever the same again. What a wonderful thing to witness, even after all this time. The anticipation is there and, even though we may know the story, let us this year look below the surface, to find the depth of God's love for Jesus and all children, us included.



Hymn StF 541

To the river I am going,
bringing sins I cannot bear;
come and cleanse me, come, forgive me;
Lord, I need to meet you there.

In these waters healing mercy
flows with freedom from despair.
I am going to that river;
Lord I need to meet you there.

*Precious Jesus, I am ready
to surrender every care.
Take my hand now, lead me closer;
Lord, I need to meet you there.*

Come and join us in the river,
come, find life beyond compare.
He is calling, he is waiting;
Jesus longs to meet you there.
Precious Jesus, I am ready...

Brian Doerksen, Michael Hansen
& Brian Thiessen

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

As we celebrate the birth, presentation and baptism of Jesus Christ we thank you for the ministry that follows, the rubric for our lives, the pattern for our words, actions, and attitudes. We thank you that everything that Jesus did and said has relevance for our life and times, as humanity and divinity are constant presences. We thank you for the memories of the last year and the opportunities of this, as we continue to walk in your Way. We pray for all our world leaders that they may serve their people with wisdom and insight. We pray for the life of the baptised that Christians everywhere may recognise their common unity in Christ, and that all who are called are sustained by God's Spirit. We pray for all God's people, that we all may grow in grace and be a sign of the new life in Christ, We pray for grace to seek and do what is God's will for us. God of all, as we offer these prayers to you, enlighten our minds and purify our heart. May it be our desire to do your will and seek your glory alone, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn StF 394

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.*

You spoke to us long, long ago,
gave us the written word;
we read it still, needing its truth,
through it God's voice is heard.
Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,

Without your help we fail our Lord,
we cannot live his way;
we need your power, we need your
strength,
following Christ each day.
Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,

Margaret V Old

Blessing

The guarding of the God of life be on you,
the guarding of loving Christ be on you,
the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you
every night of your lives,
to aid you and enfold you
each day and night of your lives. Amen.