

21st February 2021 6pm The Spirit sends Jesus out from His Baptism

Service led by Paul Lewis (with Helen joining in the responses), Sermon by Val Whiteman, Bible readings by Geoff Whiteman, Stephen Prestwich and Paul Lewis. Prayers by Helen Lewis

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Greetings

[Paul:] Good evening. I'm Paul Lewis, and I'll be leading us through the service, and Val Whiteman will be bringing us our sermon this evening. Hi Val.

[Val:] Hi.

[Paul:] And Geoff and Steve Prestwich will be doing our readings, and Helen will be leading us in our prayers, and our technical guru this evening is Charlie Palmer.

Today's the first Sunday in Lent and it's interesting, talking to my colleagues at work, the question arose of what are we giving up for Lent, and it's interesting how the idea of giving something up and leading a simpler life actually appeals to people around us who aren't necessarily involved in the church. It's interesting how some of our church practices connect with people. The theme this evening is 'the Spirit sends Jesus out from his baptism'. In fact the last service I led back in December was on the theme of John calling out in the desert. And Val was speaking then as well, so I don't know what it is about Val and I and desert themes, but we'll look forward to seeing what our next one is going to be.

[Val:] I shall see you later.

[Paul:] Okay, take care. So we start our service with a sentence or two of preparation.

Preparation

The light and peace of Jesus Christ be with you

All **and also with you.**

The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

All **Let us rejoice and sing God's praise for ever.**

We have come together in the name of Christ

to offer our praise and thanksgiving,

to hear and receive God's holy word,

to pray for the needs of the world,

and to seek the forgiveness of our sins,
that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to the service of God.

Confession

We pause to confess.

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' So let us turn away from our sin and turn to Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

All **Most merciful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy, forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.**

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.

All **Amen.**

Prayer of thanksgiving

Blessed are you, sovereign God,
our light and our salvation;
to you be glory and praise for ever.
You led your people to freedom
by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
May we who walk in the light of your presence
acclaim your Christ, rising victorious,
as he banishes all darkness from our hearts and minds.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

All **Blessed be God for ever.**

Opening prayer

The day is almost over, and the evening has come;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your Spirit come down upon us
to set us free to sing your praise
for ever and ever.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: Cornerstone (My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less)

1. My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly trust in Jesus' name.

Repeat Verse 1

Chorus:
Christ alone, Cornerstone
Weak made strong, in the Saviour's love
Through the storm
He is Lord, Lord of all

2. When darkness seems to hide His face
I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.

Chorus x 2

1st Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22 [NIVUK 1984]

18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, **19** through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison – **20** who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, **21** and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22** who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

2nd Reading: Mark 1:9-15 – The baptism and testing of Jesus [NIVUK 1984]

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. **10** Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. **11** And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, **13** and he was in the desert for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. **15** "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

This is the word of our Lord.

Thanks be to God.

And now we will move to the sermon, with Val.

Sermon

[Val Whiteman:] Let's have a moment of quiet while we think about the readings that we've just heard, and think about Jesus in the wilderness.

So it's the beginning of Lent, and we're starting to think about the start of Jesus' ministry. As Paul said earlier, the last time I was preaching, I think it was about the baptism of John, and now we're thinking about the very start of

Jesus' ministry and His baptism. The gospel we had is Mark's gospel, and as you know it's what you might call the speedy gospel, lots of 'immediately's. And in the few verses from Mark that we heard, we get the baptism, the temptations, and the start of the ministry. There's an awful lot in there if you think about the same thing in Luke and Matthew, there's a lot more content. There are the temptations, for a start.

So, what does Mark think and what does, behind him, the revelation that Peter had of Jesus' ministry, what did they think were the important things that they wanted us as readers to remember here? Well, if you look, there are two speeches, actually two people talking.

- First of all, God says that Jesus is His Son, and He's pleased with Him.
- And then a little later, Jesus says, "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is here."

And between these two speeches Jesus is tempted. As a man, He takes the battles of forces of evil, but as God, He conquers them now and throughout His ministry. The problems that we have as living as human beings are solved through Jesus.

So He proclaimed that the Kingdom, so long hidden, is now revealed in Him. Commentators say that the end of our reading, verses 14 and 15, where He proclaims that He is going to tell us about the coming of the Kingdom, but they're actually the summary of what's going to happen in the next part of the gospel, as the gospel writer sort of unpacks what the Kingdom of God means, as Jesus lives it. He travels through Galilee, proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom.

Now, the Epistle reading, the reading from Peter, odd though it is, takes us to the end of Jesus' ministry and the effects on us of the Kingdom coming through Jesus. It's quite a challenging passage, as you'll have heard, there's the easy part and then the harder part.

- The easy part is the beginning. Jesus suffered death to enable all of us to experience salvation. Peter talks about the body being put to death and then Jesus being made alive in the Spirit, just as we are when we accept Jesus and His baptism. The John baptism was for the repentance of sin. Jesus' baptism, we renounce sin but we're filled with the Spirit of God, to live for Him.
- And then there's the second part of the reading, where Peter's talking about what happened after Jesus' death. You remember in our Creed we say, "Jesus descended into Hell, and then rose again," and this is the sort of the part that Peter is talking about. Now it may be a story from the Book of Enoch, but it developed over the centuries into one of my most favourite plays in the mystery play cycle, 'The Harrowing of Hell'.

I'm really sorry if you've heard me on this subject before, but it's worth a reminder. After the Crucifixion, the play shifts to a scene in Hell. In prison there are all of prophets and kings who spoke about Jesus and God's work in the Old Testament, and they're waiting as if in Limbo (This may be theologically unsound but it's good theatre) and they speak their prophecies, and they talk about their hope of the coming salvation. They know something is coming because God has told them through the prophecies and through the prophets that a King will come, but they're waiting and waiting and waiting for Jesus to come. Then some devils come to Lucifer, and tell him with great joy that they have ensured that Jesus is dead and will be in Hell shortly. Lucifer is absolutely horrified by the news. "What have you done?!!" he says. And at this point, Jesus arrives outside the gates of Hell. When I saw it, they projected the gates through a spotlight onto the stage, and Jesus as a silhouette behind them, shouts at the gates, "Lift up your heads, O you gates and be lifted up, you everlasting doors and the King of glory will come in!" (The words of Psalm 27). And at that point because the King of glory has come, the doors fall away, and to the discomfiture of all the devils, who are absolutely powerless, Jesus leads out the prophets and kings from Hell rejoicing that their salvation has come at last.

Now, whether Peter was meaning that or something else, he's making it clear that Jesus' death and resurrection has cosmic implications: it's not just good for us in the present. He likens the baptisms that Christians undergo to the saving of the eight members of Noah's family from the flood. As they were saved by water, so Peter says, we too are to be saved through baptism, accepting what Jesus has done for us by His death and resurrection. The striking thing about what Peter says is his utter certainty that Jesus' death has changed the universe for good and all, and that we, as His disciples, are part of that fundamental change.

Jesus has mended broken humanity, if we accept His grace to us. I think that's an amazing thing to start thinking about as we begin our Lent journey. It makes us think, "Well, who do we think Jesus is?" Now the Creeds and the foundation statements of the church from the beginning make it clear that Jesus was both man and God. There have been various heresies throughout history which have tried to soften this by stressing one or the other. Either He is completely man, or He is completely God, but Mark's having none of them. In Genesis, you remember, God created humans in His image, male and female created He them. In Jesus, part of the Godhead, God came as human into His world. And I think that is so amazing, so remarkable, that we have to pause and think about it. He fully identified with His creation, even to being tempted as we are, but without sin, as it says in Hebrews 4:15. It's because He was fully God and fully man that He's able to bring about the healing that we as humans need. It's wonderful news for us, now and always.

I don't know whether you've read the story by C.S. Lewis, which is called *The Great Divorce*¹, which is looking at the difference between Heaven and Hell. It's only a novella, it's a slight book, but it's a really good read. And what C.S. Lewis suggests there is that when people die, they are in a sort of Limbo. I mean it's not sort of theologically serious, again it's a good story, but he says that if you want to, you can leave Hell and go to Heaven and there's the celestial bus that takes you with a bus driver. When C.S. Lewis, the figure in the story, gets to Heaven, where everything is so very, very solid, unlike Hell which is just dusk, no colour, no joy, nothing. When he gets there, he questions the person who comes to meet him, George MacDonald, his mentor. And he says, "Well, can't you go back down to Hell and tell people?" and George MacDonald says, "But nobody can, nobody except Jesus could do that, because it takes a miracle of miracles."² And C.S. Lewis says, "But you know, there was a great chasm I came up. Why can't you do it?" And George MacDonald says, "Well look down at the grass: you see that little tiny crack where the ground has dried? You came up through one of those or something smaller. It is impossible for people to come from Heaven to Hell. Only Jesus, only Jesus can do that." Only Jesus can bring the salvation that we need as human beings. And it's because He came as a child, as a human, that He can do that.

So this wonderful news, let us look at it, think about it as we as we go through Lent. Think about how you see Jesus. Do you see Him as fully God, fully man? And what part of His ministry do you think that God wants you to concentrate on? I want to end with a passage from 1 Peter chapter 1, which reminds us of where we stand before God.

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

Amen .

1 Various editions, including ISBN 978-0007461233

2 paraphrases

Hymn: Be Still, for the Presence of the Lord

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|---|---|
| <p>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</p> | <p>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</p> |
| <p>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</p> | |

Creed

[Paul:]

We'll join together now with the words of the Creed.

All **I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

Intercessions

[Helen:] So now we have our prayers. After each different section, I will say, 'Lord in Your mercy'. And if you'd like to respond, the response is 'hear our prayer'. Let us pray for the church and for the world, and let us thank God for His goodness.

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, You promised through Your Son Jesus Christ to hear us when we pray and faith.

We pray for the church, as we seek to rise to the challenges presented by this period of pandemic and lockdown. Thank You for the blessings of technology, helping us to stay connected and be able to share in worship services together. Thank You for those who provide a framework for our services week by week, carefully preparing sermons, readings and sung worship and ensuring that the technical and legal aspects run smoothly. Help us to stay faithful in private and public worship during this time, and to take hold of the new opportunities it presents with courage and with good grace.

Strengthen Christopher our Bishop and all Your Church in the service of Christ; that those who confess Your name may be united in Your truth, live together in Your love, and reveal Your glory in the world.
Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, be with our world leaders, and all those in authority over the nations of our world, helping them to govern effectively and with justice during these challenging times.

Please support the people of the USA as they adjust to the new administration in Washington. Give wisdom to both Republican and Democratic officials as they seek a way forward and try to heal the divisions of recent years. Lord, come to the aid of the people of Texas as they struggle with the unusual temperatures and subsequent power outages.

Heavenly Father, be with the people of Myanmar, as they resist the leaders of the military coup. Guide and guard them as they seek to offer peaceful resistance and restore democracy to their land.

Lord, be with our leaders here in the UK, as they seek to address the double challenges of the COVID pandemic and the impact of Brexit. Lead them as they respond to the changing situation, and try to chart a path out of the current lockdown measures.

Bless and guide Elizabeth our Queen; give wisdom to all in all in authority; and direct this and every nation in ways of justice and peace; that men may honour one another, and seek the common good.
Lord in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for ourselves, and those known to us. Fan the flame of faith in our hearts and help us to place our trust in You during the challenges of pandemic and lockdown. As we enter this season of Lent, help us to walk with You through the words of Scripture, as You tread the path of service and self-sacrifice. Give us eyes to see the needs of those around us and help us to be Your hands and feet, as we reach out to family, friends, neighbours and strangers. Give us the courage to learn new skills and patterns of life.

Give grace to us, our families and friends, and to all our neighbours, that we may serve Christ in one another, and love as He loves us.
Lord in Your mercy,
hear our prayer

Lord, we pray now for those known to us who are unwell at this time.

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles; and bring them the joy of Your salvation.

We spend just a few moments now, calling to mind those who are in need of our prayers at the moment.

Hear us as we remember those who have died in the faith of Christ; according to Your promises, grant us with them a share in Your Kingdom.

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all Your saints, we commend ourselves and all Christian people to Your unfailing love.

Merciful Father,
accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Collect for the day (1st Sunday in Lent)

[Paul:]

Today being the first Sunday of Lent, the collect for this day.

Heavenly Father,
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,
and grew closer to you in the desert:
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer
that we may witness to your saving love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

And now, gathering all our prayers and praises into one, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray.

All **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.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.
Amen.**

Blessing

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.

All **Amen.**

The Grace

Perhaps in our individual situations we might just say the grace to each other, virtually.

All **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.
Amen.**

I wish you all a blessed week ahead, and may you be conscious of God at work with your life and guiding you in the challenges you face. We have a hymn now, *All Creatures of our God and King*.

Hymn: All Creatures of our God and King

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| <p>1. All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou, burning sun with golden beam,
Thou, silver moon with softer gleam,
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!</p> <p>2. Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three-in-One,
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!</p> | <p>3. All the redeemed washed by His blood
Come and rejoice in His great love
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Christ has defeated every sin;
Cast all your burdens now on Him;
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!</p> <p>4. He shall return in pow'r to reign;
Heaven and earth will join to say
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Then who shall fall on bended knee?
All creatures of our God and King.
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!</p> <p>O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!</p> |
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[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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All Creatures Of Our God and King – original words (verses 1-2) by St .Francis of Assisi, translated by William Henry Draper; usual tune “Lasst uns erfreuen” (let us rejoice), 1623 traditional German tune. In the version played in the service, tune adapted by Jonathan Baird and Ryan Baird, who also wrote verses 3 and 4. Copyright © 2013 Sovereign Grace Worship (ASCAP). Used by permission.