

BAPTISM OF JESUS

10/1/21

Caves Beach UCA

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come from the demands of everyday life, to experience peace.

We will experience peace as we worship the Holy One.

Come from the routine of everyday life, to experience community.

We will experience community as we support and encourage one another.

Come from the predictability of everyday life, to experience a challenge.

We will experience a challenge as we respond to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Come from the uncertainty of everyday life, to experience security.

We will experience security as we put our trust in God, who loves us beyond limits.

Opening Prayer love blessings: of God rejoicing

Wonderful is your blessing of family, O God.

We rejoice in the joy we find among those we love.

Wonderful is your blessing of our daily activity, O God.

We rejoice in the achievement, friendship, and creativity of our day.

Wonderful is your blessing of our learning, O God.

We rejoice that there is still so much for us to find out and put into practice.

Wonderful is your blessing of faith, O God.

We rejoice that, with the Word, you inspire us and send us out to empower the oppressed and to listen to the downhearted.

Wonderful love is your mark, O God.

**We thank you for its fullest expression in Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

HYMN 409 O breath of life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vf8jnukhAK8>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Jesus Christ, giver of life,
we give thanks for the gift of water;
for the waters of baptism,
and the waters of birth;
for the waters of everyday living that clean and refresh us,
and the waters of fun filled days of swimming and recreation.
Above all, for the living water that you offer us, we give our thanks and
praise,
for it is in these waters that we find ourselves re-created, loved and
sustained,
full members of your community and beloved members of your family.

With gratitude and joyful hearts, we give thanks.

Generous and loving God,
you embrace us in our frailty and the fullness of our humanity.
In baptism, by water and the Spirit you offer us new life,
and call us to live in the light, as members of your family.
And yet, so often we fail to live into the fullness of our calling.
We squabble amongst ourselves,
we make poor choices that impact the wellbeing of others,
we fail to see the bigger picture of your movement in the world.
Forgive us, loving God.
Send your Spirit amongst us, to call us to account,
and recentre our living to align with your work in the world.

In baptism, you offer us unique gifts that contribute to the Body of Christ.
And yet, so often we hide our talents, or denigrate the gifts another brings.
We fail to be full participants in your movement in the world.
Forgive us, loving God.

Send your Spirit amongst us, to encourage and renew us.
Inspire us once more to contribute to your work in the world.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

People of God,
nothing can change God's love for each and everyone one of us.

Let us live as the people of God – called, affirmed, forgiven and free;
recipients of grace upon grace;

God's beloved children.

Amen.

READINGS

- **Acts 19:1-7**

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples.² He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."³ Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism."⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus."⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.⁶ When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—⁷ altogether there were about twelve of them.

- **Mark 1:4-11**

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.”

HYMN 250 Christ, when for us you were baptised

SERMON

Here we are fully into a new year.

How much have things changed for each of us in the last year?

This time last year we were looking at grey skies caused by bush fire smoke. Now we have monsoonal grey skies causing persistent damp and wet weather.

Last year our travels were restricted by roads being blocked by fires. This year we have boarder closures between states and parts of states caused by COVID. Let’s not even talk about international travel.

My point is that things have changed. During coming services I would like to invite those of you who are able to share briefly about what has gone on for you in the last year. In particular how all the different changes to worship have helped or hindered your spiritual life during this time. COVID has certainly impacted deeply on all of our social lives as well.

In the passage from Mark’s Gospel today we have heard the story surrounding Jesus being baptised by John in the Jordan River.

The common view of the Jewish faith at that time was that there would be no more prophets like those who had come to them in the past. Malachi was the last prophet recognised by them and that had occurred over 400 years previously. The words of the ancient prophets were constantly being re-examined and analysed as people looked forward to the time when all of those promises would be fulfilled.

The final chapter of Malachi's prophecy opened with promises that stirred the hopes of every righteous lover of God. *“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evil doer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the Lord Almighty.*

Change was certainly something to look forward to but what had been foretold was a whole new deal. The Jewish people were expecting decisive action from God in a dramatic way. As a nation they had constantly been attacked and subjugated and they wanted to rise up and dominate their world. Rather than being an insignificant pawn in the world they believed that they should be the rulers.

Malachi had in his final words promised a sign. *See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.* Elijah was a wild and confronting prophet who had confronted the way people were living in his day.

Like John, Elijah had a leather belt around his camels hair tunic. He had spent some time in the desert and he ate wild honey, etc.. When his time came Elijah did not die but was reported to have been taken into heaven in a chariot. It was believed that Elijah would return to prepare the way for the Lord. Isaiah too had promised a voice crying out in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight the roads for him." And so the people waited and prayed and hoped.

It is in this context that we come to the passage from Mark today. John comes out of the desert in his rough clothes calling on people to be baptised and repent of all their sins. He said that it was time to change their lives and embark on a journey to prepare for the Lord. As there was a general expectation in the community about such an event it did not take long for crowds to filter out of Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside to be confronted with his challenging words.

John's novel preaching methods soon also attracted the attention of the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem. After all they had a nice comfortable little life going on with all the varying religious activities sustaining their insular world. John threatened this lifestyle.

The population were in some ways no longer engaged with the old ways and were now wanting the Lord to come and fulfil the prophets' promises of the glory foretold in past centuries. Times had changed and it was time for a fresh approach.

It didn't take long for some of those religious elite to start joining with the crowds to ascertain personally what they had been told by the throngs who had already ventured to the banks of the Jordan River. Is this really what Elijah and Malachi foretold or is just another wild stirrer?

John was very specific about his role in this situation. He clearly recognises and points out to the crowds that he is not the Messiah. "Coming after me

is one who is far more powerful than I am. I am not worthy to even bend down and tie his sandals. I baptise you with water for repentance but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”

Baptism in Jewish traditions had been previously used sparingly to prepare Gentiles for conversion but what John is offering was a whole new experience. Here John was doing it with people who were already practising Jews. He was calling on them to prepare for the main event which was about to occur.

Mark, in his traditional way of describing things, says that all of the people from Jerusalem along with people from the local Judean countryside came out to meet with John. This wild man was calling on those who turned up to: “Repent. Be converted. Make a complete turnaround in your heart, your mind, your behaviour, your life. Repent.”

We can gain some insight into the message when we look at the wording used. The words used called on people to ‘get a new mind.’ This is not just change but a complete rethink. Here is where we need to listen carefully. People were not being called to simply undergo some simple modification of their lives but a completely fundamental reprogramming of their whole faith and the way that they expressed it.

And apparently the people came. And they came confessing that they were no more righteous than gentiles and that they too needed the forgiveness of God, and confessing their sins, they were baptised by John in the Jordon River.

“But,” said John, “This is by no means the end of the story. After me is coming one far more powerful than me. I am not worthy even to bend down and dust his sandals. I baptise you with water for repentance, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit. Prepare the way for him.

You are looking for the great and dreadful day of the Lord when fire will destroy the evil. Well I tell you, you are going to get fire alright. For he who comes after me will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And that is really going to be something. My baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. It will take care of your past and allow you to stand clean and pure before God.

However the Lord’s baptism with the Holy Spirit will give you power for the future. The baptism with the Holy Spirit will give you the power to confront the future and to turn the world on its head. It will give you the power to face up to evil and overcome it. It will enable you to recognise the seeds of war in your own hearts and to overcome your own lust for power and for

dominance and for revenge, and then empower you to stand up before the armies of the world and call for peace.

The baptism will enable you to recognise the seeds of racism in your own hearts and to overcome your own craving for privilege and your fear of being on the outside, and then empower you to stand up against the tide of hatred and ignorance and bring reconciliation. Prepare the way for the Lord. Convert and be baptised in water and prepare for the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.”

Then we come to the culmination of the passage. *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan.* There are no fanfares of trumpets. There are no chariots of fire coming out of the heavens. There are no marching armies. These are the things that those who came to see John expected to see when the Messiah came. There is just some non-descript bloke from Nazareth in Galilee. His hometown was so insignificant that it is not even mentioned in the Old Testament.

We have heard nothing of Jesus since he visited the temple when he would have been about 12 years old. Here he is appearing back on the stage about 18 years later. If we accept that Jesus was without sin, why did he need to be half drowned by his cousin John?

This is a turning point for Jesus and the whole direction of Mark's Gospel. Within another 7 verses we've got people quitting their jobs to follow him. Within 13 verses we've got demons screaming at him in the synagogue. Within 17 verses we've got the news spreading all over Galilee. Within 34 verses he can no longer enter a town openly because of the disturbance that would be caused. Within 41 verses he is being accused of blasphemy by the lawyers. And within 62 verses we've already got the pharisees and the Herodians plotting to kill him.

As Jesus came out of the water after his baptism there was a whole new approach to faith being revealed. It was not just a new mind-set, there was a whole new approach, lifestyle, a new missional focus as the Kingdom of God moved through Jesus. To give confirmation to this we have God's Spirit descend on him and a voice booms across the river bank saying: "You are my Son whom I love; and with you I am delighted; I am well pleased."

How pleasing it can be for a child to hear such words from their parents. Yet it was so much more powerful when right in front of this crowd that Jesus is affirmed by God.

This passage has caused me to reflect on where we are today at the start of another year. In our service on 7 February 2021 we will take the time to recommit ourselves for the year ahead. We will be taking part in a Covenant Service where we affirm our ongoing desire to follow in the mission that we undertook when we entered into our mature faith journey.

In thinking of my since last year I have seen a strong parallel between the changes we have experienced and those which the community experienced as they responded to John's call to look at their faith in a whole new way. John called those coming to the banks of the Jordan River to look at their world differently as everything was about to change.

Well hasn't our world changed since we last made our commitment in the Covenant Service last year!

For a start we went from hearing about some flu-like virus coming out of China. Then there was a ban on people coming into Australia from China. Then we all were forced to abandon traditional worship services as we were confined to our homes in lockdown.

This is where I can see the Holy Spirit at work not only in the way we adapted to the differing requirements around worship but in the leadership given to us by people like Bob Willoughby when we accelerated the refurbishment of the church to correct the problems of failing foundations. This for me is so symbolic as we fixed our foundations. As a community we deepened our connection to the very community where we live and the walls were reinforced ready for a new future.

In a time of massive social changes our church took the time to build new foundations and open the way for a whole new future. This to me is the message that John the Baptist was sharing with the faithful on the banks of the Jordan.

Not only did we make these fundamental changes but we also had the vision to start to help one another do worship differently. It started out with emails, then for those not on email there was a printed service delivered each week to your door on Sunday mornings. While all the other work was going on with the building the air conditioning was installed and access to the toilets was improved. Along with this came the weekly sermon that I provided on Face Book for those who could access the internet.

Following on from this has been the installation of our video system to allow our services to be shared weekly with people all around Australia and even the world. We still pass on our service in a printed form to some people and also by email to some who are currently not well. This resource has also

been picked up by other churches who make our service available to their people too and even put it on their website.

Like those who met John by the Jordan River we have been part of a whole new mind set around our community and the ways that we interact. As we come into the new year and look to recommit our lives and faith let us also affirm how far the Holy Spirit has lead us during the last 12 months.

As part of our service over the next few weeks I would like to invite people to also give us their perspective on what the massive changes has meant to them. I will be providing a time during the service for you to bring this to us, or it can be read out for you if you wish.

Just like those people by the Jordan we are on an ongoing journey with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

HYMN 491 Father welcomes all his children

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIXrP0u55K0>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Generous God,
we love, because you first love us.
We bring the fullness of our lives and our gifts in response to your love.
Use them and us, that love may abound and deepen, in us, in our community and in our world. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God, whose love is deep and embrace is wide,
for those who feel abandoned and alone we pray.
You knit each one of us, delicately together, in love.
We pray this day for those who do not know their worth or value.
We pray for children, that they may be raised in loving homes,
where they are respected and nurtured.
We pray for people whose loneliness has been enhanced or disconnection from community made evident, as the world is more physically distanced to respond to COVID-19.
Whisper your affirmation to each one: "You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased."
Open our ears that we may hear your loving words, and know our intrinsic worth. Open our eyes, that we may see one another as your beloved, and know the intrinsic worth of each and every one.

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 390 Give thanks to the risen Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U1MuOCHon4>

BENEDICTION

You are the beloved of God,
showered in blessings, made new by the Spirit.
Go out into the world, with hearts full of joy,
for you belong to God.

Listen for the voice of the Spirit that renews and affirms;
pay attention for the grace that surrounds your living,
and live in response to the love that is poured out upon you.
May the love of God, the call of Christ and the guidance of the Spirit be
yours,
this day and always. Amen.

Shalom To You Now

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-u-WxpmOpN4>