

Worshipping God Together : Apart  
Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2022 at 10.30am  
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United  
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

*A Call to Worship God*

God created us - and calls each of us by name  
God formed us - and calls each of us by name  
God saves us - and calls each of us by name  
God loves us - and calls each of us by name  
Do not fear, because God calls us by name

*Hymn – R&S 79: (Tune: R&S 45 – Bunessan – Morning has broken)*

This day God gives me strength of high heaven,  
sun and moon shining, flame in my hearth;  
flashing of lightning, wind in its swiftness,  
depths of the ocean, firmness of earth.

This day God sends me strength to sustain me,  
might to uphold me, wisdom as guide.  
Your eyes are watchful, your ears are listening,  
your lips are speaking, Friend at my side.

God's way is my way, God's shield is round me,  
God's host defends me, saving from ill;  
angels of heaven, drive from me always  
all that would harm me, stand by me still.

Rising, I thank you, mighty and strong one,  
King of creation, giver of rest,  
firmly confessing Threeness of Persons,  
Oneness of Godhead, Trinity blest.

*based on 'St Patrick's Breastplate' 5th-7th cent. Gaelic James Quinn (1919- )*

## Prayer

Lord God, I am here, expecting to meet with you.  
hoping for a glimpse of your glory  
and the touch of your love  
the touch of your Spirit.

You are present, even when I am distant.

I hear you speaking to me and calling to me  
from the stories in the pages of the Bible.  
through the lives and words of others who have told me what it means to  
know you and to love you.

You call to me from music and movement and poetry and film  
You call to me from the very stuff of creation; from leaf and lake;  
from shell and sky; from molecule and mountain  
Your image is imprinted in everything that bears your hallmark.

You call me by name, because I am your child.

And so, because you created me in your own image,  
I realise with a sense of responsibility  
that your image is imprinted in me.

Therefore, call me afresh today to worship you and follow your way, Lord  
God, because you are my inspiration, example and sustainer,  
and the one who taught us all to pray in simplicity and humility

*Our Father, who art in heaven...*

## Gospel Reading - Luke 3: 15 - 17, 21 - 22

<sup>15</sup> The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, 'I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

<sup>21</sup> When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

## Setting the Scene

Luke was describing what happened when Jesus was baptised. He tells us that the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus.

So, we'll think about what some of the symbols of the Holy Spirit mean. Each item in the pictures represents the Holy Spirit.



The feather represents the dove that came down upon Jesus. Doves are gentle, comforting and peaceful. The dove also connects heaven with earth, it's a reminder of 'good news' for us - like the dove sent out from Noah's Ark which came back with a fresh olive branch bringing 'good news' that the flood waters were drying up.

The candle represents powerful fire. Fire can be warm and exciting, but also dangerous.



Water represents baptism as well as the Holy Spirit – bringing cleansing, forgiveness and a fresh start.



I wonder, which is your favourite symbol of the Holy Spirit and why?

## Hymn – Singing the Faith 394: (Tune: The Skye Boat Song)

*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. © Scripture Union*

## Prayer of Confession

Lord God, I confess that my ears are often closed to your voice.  
I do not hear you in the challenge or plea  
of those who call to me in the wildernesses of life.  
I confess that my eyes are sometimes likewise closed –  
I do not see the signs of you all around.  
Complacent, contrary, and often cynical,  
I neither expect nor seek revelations or surprises.  
So Lord God, startle me with your grace.  
Open the heavens this day; speak your truth to my heart,  
and descend upon me in the power and gentleness of your Spirit.  
Amen.

## Old Testament Reading - Isaiah 43: 3 - 7

- <sup>3</sup> I am the Lord your God,  
the holy God of Israel, who saves you.  
I will give up Egypt to set you free;  
I will give up Ethiopia and Seba.
- <sup>4</sup> I will give up whole nations to save your life,  
because you are precious to me  
and because I love you and give you honour.
- <sup>5</sup> Do not be afraid — I am with you!  
“From the distant east and the farthest west  
I will bring your people home.
- <sup>6</sup> I will tell the north to let them go  
and the south not to hold them back.  
Let my people return from distant lands,  
from every part of the world.
- <sup>7</sup> They are my own people,  
and I created them to bring me glory.”

## Hymn - R&S 294: MP 89:

*Bianco Da Siena (d. 1434) tr. R. F. Littledale (1833-90)*

Come down, O Love Divine, seek thou this soul of mine,  
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing; O Comforter, draw near,  
within my heart appear, and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn, till earthly passions turn  
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming; and let thy glorious light  
shine ever on my sight, and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity mine outward vesture be,  
and lowliness become mine inner clothing; true lowliness of heart,  
which takes the humbler part, and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with  
loathing -

And so the yearning strong with which the soul will long,  
shall far outpass the power of human telling; for none can guess its grace,  
till he become the place wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

## Reflections

*I'd do anything for you dear, anything  
for you mean everything to me*

*I know that I'd go anywhere for your smile  
anywhere, for your smile everywhere I see*

*Would you climb a hill?*

*Anything*

*Wear a daffodil?*

*Anything*

*Leave me all your will?*

*Anything*

*Even fight my Bill?*

*What fisticuffs?*

*I'd risk everything for one kiss, everything, yes I'd do anything*

*Anything?*

*Anything for you*

*I'd do anything for you dear, anything, for you mean everything to me*

*I know that I'd go anywhere for your smile  
anywhere for your smile everywhere I see*

*Would you lace my shoe?*

*Anything*

*Paint your face bright blue?*

*Anything*

*Catch a kangaroo?*

*Anything*

*Go to Timbuctu?*

*And back again*

*I'd risk everything for one kiss, everything.*

*Yes I'd do anything.*

*Anything?*

*Anything for you*

*I'd go anywhere for your smile, anywhere,  
for your smile everywhere I see*

*I know that I'd do anything for you dear, anything  
for you mean everything to me*

Perhaps you recognised this song from the Musical Oliver – perhaps you sang along (you sounded lovely). When I read the lectionary readings for today, and those words from Isaiah, they reminded me of that song.

*I'd do anything for you dear anything, for you mean everything to me.*

Isaiah's words are like a love song, or a love letter, or love poem perhaps from the first flushes of love when you'd make rash promises - promising to go to the ends of the earth for the sake of the one you love. You'd gladly pass over a thousand Tom Cruise's or Ross Poldark's (insert your own heart throb!!) for one hour in the presence of the one you love.

You'd give up whole nations to save his/her life, because s/he is precious to you. And because you love him/her you will give him honour

Look again at the song. There they are, words straight from Isaiah, an outpouring of love for a people so precious that God would do anything for them.

Oh! If only people would realise and embrace this outpouring of God's love and desire to be in a relationship with them, accept God's divine embrace! Oh! If only!

Read Isaiah 43 verses 3 – 7 again, as though it's a love letter to you!

Now, it's worth thinking about what was going on at the time when Isaiah was writing. Many of the people of Judah were living in exile in Babylon, a foreign land where they were oppressed and crushed and without hope. Isaiah was telling them that God was about to set his people free and

take them home to Jerusalem to begin a new life. These are messages of promise and hope in difficult times.

In chapters 40 to 55 Isaiah portrays God as the God of all history and God's plan for His people includes their mission to all nations who will be blessed through Israel's open handed welcome.

Crashing on in time, to the start of Jesus Ministry, Luke describes the events surrounding Jesus' baptism.

For about 2,000 years, people have wrestled and wrangled over the whys and wherefores of Jesus Baptism, and I'm not going to spend time contemplating with you why the sinless one seeks baptism, a cleansing and repentance of sin, or whether Jesus understood his role before, or only at the moment of baptism.

But I will remind you that in the moment of Jesus' baptism, God's great love story continued apace and God, who had acted in love throughout history was heard, intervening – affirming Jesus in every respect:-

You are my Son, The beloved. With you I am well pleased.

Luke's account of this moment reminds us of the relationship between God and Jesus and, if we'd read chapters 1 and 2 and hadn't realised it by now, Luke is telling us loud and clear, dear reader, the good news that Jesus is God incarnate, God as flesh and blood, beloved and pleasing just as he was at that point, based on what he had learned so far about the nature of his relationship with God and what he understood about the nature of his Ministry which would be pleasing so to God.

As the dove reminded us earlier this is Good News for the world, and good news for us because it reminds us that God is with us and loves us and is pleased with us because we are all God's children – beloved sons and daughters, adopted into Christ's family.

And God would do anything for us, just as he did for his people in exile, because we're all part of God's great love story and our baptism is an acknowledgement of this.

So, we crash on in time to our own lives, here and now.

In baptism we are reminded that God wants us to have a relationship with him and baptism is about forging that relationship.

Baptism is a moment of grace, an outward sign of the inward grace that God is already working.

In baptism we invite the Holy Spirit to shape our inner being and direct our path, as we entrust our lives to God's open-handed love.

Let the water and the dove remind you of all that is bound up in baptism and the divine embrace of God, whose affirmations are as true for us today; God, whose love story has included us; God who says to you:

You are my child; You are beloved; With you I am well pleased.

We are God's beloved people, a people for whom God has done everything through Christ Jesus.

We live in difficult times, but, like Isaiah we have a message for the nations. That God has opened his hand to welcome all, and Jesus offers us the way to grasp God's open hand and be drawn to him so that all people and all nations will know, if only they can hear – perhaps from you – that they too are God's beloved children.

Amen

*Hymn - R&S 302: MP 488:*

*Elizabeth Porter Head. (1850-1936)*

O Breathe of life, come sweeping through us,  
revive your church with life and power;  
O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,  
and fit your church to meet this hour.

O Wind of God, come, bend us, break us,  
till humbly we confess our need;  
then in your tenderness remake us, revive, restore; for this we plead.

O Breath of love, come, breathe within us,  
renewing thought and will and heart:  
come, love of Christ, afresh to win us, revive your church in every part.

*Holding the World in Prayer*      *Adapted from 'Gathering for Worship' – Baptist Union  
Worship Book. P.275*

Remember this, it was as Jesus was praying that the heavens were  
opened, the Holy Spirit descended and God's love was confirmed.

So, bring the world to God in prayer now - all nations and all peoples -  
asking for God's blessing through our open-handed welcome.

We are your people Lord.

We are marked by your love and glad to rejoice in your family name.

We are baptised by water and the Spirit  
and released into the fullness of life.

All that we have and all that we are we offer in thanks to you Lord,  
because you have saved us.

You have called us by name to be your people at this time.

We believe that nothing in the world is beyond your love and your grace.

So, bless each of us with the gift of your presence upon us now as we  
come to you and bring to you in prayer the needs of the world.

With us come people haunted by their past

    people obsessed by the present

    people dreading the future.

They are poor in spirit: with them may we see your kingdom among us.

With us come people crushed by war and terror

    people bruised by oppression and persecution

    people wounded by bigotry and ignorance.

They mourn: with them may we receive comfort.

With us come people weary of their pain,

    people burdened by their fear,

people worn down by distress

They are meek: with them may we receive the gifts of your goodness.

With us come people frustrated by complacency,

people ground down by manipulation

people hemmed in by despair

They hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so do we: may we be filled.

With us come people caring for the wounded,

people holding the hand of the dying,

people weeping with the grief stricken.

They are merciful, and so are we: may we receive mercy.

With us come people struggling with doubts,

people confused by questions,

people diminished by the certainty of others.

They are the pure in heart, and so are we: may we see you Lord God.

With us come people who have turned the other cheek,

people who have stood in the way of hatred,

people who have absorbed another's violence.

They are peacemakers, and so are we: may we be called the children of God.

With us come people who are excluded because they are different,

people who speak the truth when others do not

people who show peace through justice

They are persecuted for righteousness sake, and so are we

May we receive your Kingdom among us.

With us come people who know the devastating effects of war,

people who walk and walk to find safety from war,

people whose names we don't know...

and people who you have given to our love and care.

I remember them in quiet trust now.

***Keep a silence.....***

May I and may they see signs of your love and mercy working in their lives.

I ask all these and all my prayers in Jesus' name. Amen

### Hymn - R&S 321:

*G. Currie Martin (1865-1937)\**

Your words to me are life and health; put strength into my soul;  
enable, guide, and teach my heart to reach its perfect goal.

Your words to me are light and truth; from day to day I know  
their wisdom, passing human thought, as in their truth I grow.

Your words to me are full of joy, of beauty, peace and grace;  
from them I learn your perfect will, through them I see your face.

Your words are perfected in one, yourself, the living Word;  
print your own image in my heart in clearest lines, my Lord.

### Closing Words and Blessing

Called by God by name, follow Jesus into the lives of the people God  
gives to your care this week.

Follow where Jesus waits for you;  
ahead of you, and yet beside you all the way.

And may the LORD bless you and keep you;  
the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace

Amen

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