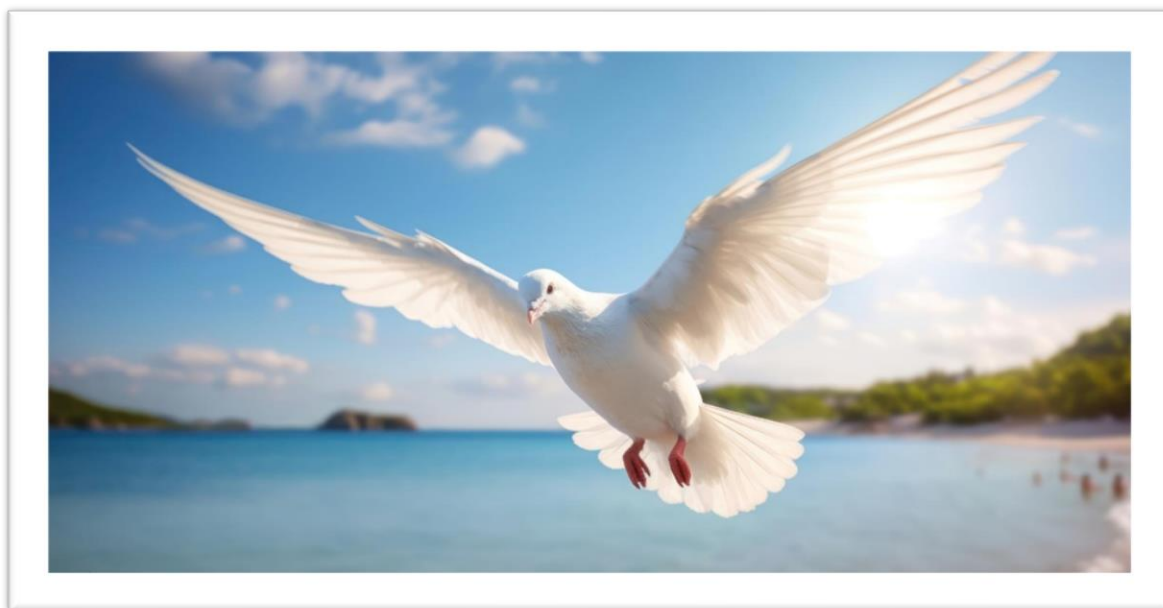


BAPTISM OF THE LORD – 12 JANUARY 2025



COLLECT

O God, whose Only Begotten Son
has appeared in our very flesh,
grant, we pray, that we may be inwardly transformed
through him whom we recognise as outwardly like ourselves.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

The word 'baptism' comes from the Greek word meaning to dip or immerse. John was baptising in the River Jordan and the gospels of Mark and Matthew say that, at his baptism, Jesus came up out from the water. Today's reading from Luke is a bit less explicit. We do not know if there were any words or ritual gestures associated with the immersion in the river. However all the gospels agree about what happened next: the heavens opened, the Spirit descends in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven claims Jesus as *my Son, the Beloved, upon whom my favour rests*.

The feast concludes the Christmas cycle because it is an 'epiphany', a revelation to us of who Christ is. It forms a bridge to Ordinary Time because it marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. In the Synoptic gospels, Jesus is led by the Spirit to a retreat in the desert. Here he considers several possible approaches to his future ministry. Jesus' baptism may have been for him too a realisation of what God was calling him to do. It certainly marks a turning point in Jesus' life.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11

'Console my people, console them' says your God.
'Speak to the heart of Jerusalem
and call to her that her time of service is ended,
that her sin is atoned for, that she has received
from the hand
of the Lord double punishment for all her crimes.'

A voice cries, 'Prepare in the wilderness
a way for the Lord.

Make a straight highway for our God
across the desert.

Let every valley be filled in,
every mountain and hill be laid low,
let every cliff become a plain,
and the ridges a valley;
then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed
and all mankind shall see it; for the mouth of the
Lord has spoken.'

Go up on a high mountain,
joyful messenger to Zion.

Shout with a loud voice,

joyful messenger to Jerusalem.

Shout without fear, say to the towns of Judah,
'Here is your God.'

Here is the Lord coming with power,
his arm subduing all things to him.

The prize of his victory is with him,
his trophies all go before him.

He is like a shepherd feeding his flock,
gathering lambs in his arms,

holding them against his breast

and leading to their rest the mother ewes.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 103:1–2, 3–4, 24–25, 27–30

R. Oh, bless the Lord, my soul!

Lord God, how great you are,
clothed in majesty and glory,
wrapped in light as in a robe!

You stretch out the heavens like a tent. **R.**

Above the rains you build your dwelling.

You make the clouds your chariot,
you walk on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers
and flashing fire your servants. **R.**

How many are your works, O Lord!

In wisdom you have made them all.

The earth is full of your riches.

There is the sea, vast and wide,
with its moving swarms past counting,
living things great and small. **R.**

All of these look to you

to give them their food in due season.

You give it, they gather it up:

you open your hand, they have their fill. **R.**

You take back your spirit, they die,
returning to the dust from which they came.

You send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the earth. **R.**

First Reading

Each of the four gospels first introduce John the Baptist using some of the words from Isaiah 40. We heard them earlier in Advent when John came on the scene, but they do not occur here in the stories of the Baptism of the Lord.

Nevertheless, they serve as an appropriate announcement of the ministry of Jesus which is about to begin. By his words and deeds, he will manifest the power of God and bring consolation. He will be the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep. The joyful messenger who shouts, 'Here is your God!' echoes the voice from heaven which says, 'you are my Son'.

The reader should aim for the solemnity of a formal proclamation. A heightened sense of occasion will be achieved by taking the text in a measured way with good pauses. The warm voice of God in the first stanza needs to be differentiated from that of the messenger in the second by using a different register. Likewise, the contrasting images in the fourth stanza (warrior and shepherd) should be contrasted.

'Mankind' in the second stanza should be read as 'humankind' or simply omitted.

Responsorial Psalm

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God,
exclaimed the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.
...There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods
with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*

That captures the mood of this psalm! Both the psalm and the poem end with the Holy Spirit whose creative power brings both the world and the ministry of Christ into being.

Psalm 103/104 praises God in all creation. God has created all things and, in his providence, sustains them. The psalm evokes a sense of wonder and praise which the reader/cantor will try to share with the assembly.

The text is made up of scattered verses but it reads coherently. The text is quite long, but the images in every line carry it forward and make the psalm vivid and visual. The proclamation should make the most of them.

A reading from the letter of St Paul to Titus
2:11–14; 3:4–7

God's grace has been revealed, and it has made salvation possible for the whole human race and taught us that what we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God, and all our worldly ambitions; we must be self-restrained and live good and religious lives here in this present world, while we are waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the Appearing of the glory of our great God and saviour Christ Jesus. He sacrificed himself for us in order to set us free from all wickedness and to purify a people so that it could be his very own and would have no ambition except to do good.

When the kindness and love of God our saviour for mankind were revealed, it was not because he was concerned with any righteous actions we might have done ourselves; it was for no reason except his own compassion that he saved us, by means of the cleansing water of rebirth and by renewing us with the Holy Spirit which he has so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our saviour. He did this so that we should be justified by his grace, to become heirs looking forward to inheriting eternal life.

A reading from the holy Gospel
according to Luke 3:15–16, 21–22

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'

Now when all the people had been baptised and while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape, like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "you are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.'

Second Reading

We have heard these two paragraphs before – quite recently! They were read separately at the Christmas Masses for night and dawn. So, the Christmas season ends as it began.

In fact, the whole of the Christmas season turns on the theme of revelation. Who is this baby born? Who is the child found by the wise men? Who is the boy with surprising questions in the Temple? Who is this man revealed today as God's son when he was baptised in the Jordan River? Note the opening phrase of today's reading: *God's grace has been revealed.*

Paul unpacks this revelation for Titus – Christ reconciles the whole human race to God, setting them free and purifying them to do good. We are invited to accept God's grace offered to us in the cleansing waters of our baptismal rebirth and by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit over us.

It is in these last lines that we are connected to the baptism of the Lord. The water of rebirth and the anointing with the Holy Spirit led Jesus to engage with his vocation and mission. By our baptism, we join in Jesus' mission to further the Kingdom of God.

It is a difficult reading. Study the text carefully. Identify and underline a few phrases in each paragraph that you would like to highlight. Practise the reading so that you do it well. (Read 'mankind' as 'humankind' or 'the human race').

Gospel

John the Baptist demonstrates his humility before Christ and willingly directs his disciples towards Jesus. His is a baptism in water for repentance; Jesus will take this to a new level, imparting the Holy Spirit. This phrase evokes the Pentecost event.

The verses omitted from this reading refer to John's ongoing preaching of the good news and his imprisonment by Herod before reverting to John's work of baptising people in the Jordan.

Luke then presents Jesus' baptism by John in his own way. As in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, we have the opening of heaven, the descent of the Holy Spirit like a dove, and the voice of the Father's favour, but here in Luke all this occurs after the baptism while Jesus is at prayer. This suggests that it may have been a key moment of revelation for Jesus himself.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Almighty, ever-living God,
when Christ was baptised in the river Jordan
the Holy Spirit came upon him
and your voice proclaimed from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son.'
Grant that we,
who by water and the Holy Spirit are your adopted children,
may continue steadfast in your love.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(Concluding Prayer: Morning and Evening Prayer from Liturgy of the Hours for the Baptism of the Lord)

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her
that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!”

See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (NRSV)

Psalms 104.1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27+28, 29-30 (R.1)

R. O bless the Lord, my soul!

O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent. **R.**

You set the beams of your dwelling place on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers. **R.**

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great. **R.**

Living things all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. **R.**

When you take away their breath,
they die and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the earth. **R.**

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter of Paul to Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7

The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all,
training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions,
and in the present age to live lives
that are self-controlled, upright, and godly,
while we wait for the blessed hope
and the manifestation of the glory
of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

He it is who gave himself for us
that he might redeem us from all iniquity
and purify for himself a people of his own
who are zealous for good deeds.

For when the goodness and loving kindness
of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us,
not because of any works of righteousness
that we had done, but according to his mercy,
through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.
This Spirit he poured out on us richly
through Jesus Christ our Saviour,
so that, having been justified by his grace,
we might become heirs according
to the hope of eternal life.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke 3:2–4, 15–16, 21–22

The word of God came to John
son of Zechariah in the wilderness.
He went into all the region around the Jordan,
proclaiming a baptism of repentance
for the forgiveness of sins.

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.”

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.”