

11th January 2026. Baptism of Christ.

Prayer for today: Eternal Father, who at the baptism of Jesus revealed him to be your Son, anointing him with the Holy Spirit: grant to us, who are born by water and the Spirit, that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Among those who are sick we pray for John Gibson, Will Sadler, Brenda Clark, Sue Hanning, Elizabeth Wood, Nigel Baty-Symes, Andrew McKendrick, Graeme Common, Kate Marrs, Maureen Stevens, Prue and Nancy, Ned Ryan, Daniel Bosman, Suzie Dent, Nick Cook, Christina Baldwin, Lorraine Dodd, Kathleen Lee, Carol McKendrick, Stuart Bell, Maggie Bennett, Elizabeth Sambell, and Heather Loughead.

Among those who have died we remember Alec Rastall and Thomas Common, and also Mary Atkinson, Josephine Urwin, Phyllis Duncan, Geoff Brooker, Freda Chalmers, Constance Wood, Syd White, Denise Baxter and Derek Swallow, whose year's mind is about this time.

The funeral of Thomas Common will be here in Church tomorrow, at 1 p.m.

There is a meeting of St. Helen's PCC on Wednesday 14th at 7.30 p.m.

Readings:

Isaiah 42: 1-9

'Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.

² He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.

³ A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.

In his teaching the islands will put their hope.'

⁵ This is what God the Lord says –
the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out,
who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it,
who gives breath to its people,
and life to those who walk on it:

⁶ 'I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.

I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,

⁷ to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

⁸ 'I am the Lord; that is my name!
I will not yield my glory to another
or my praise to idols.

⁹ See, the former things have taken place,
and new things I declare;

before they spring into being
I announce them to you.'

Psalm 29

Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty,
give unto the Lord glory and strength.

² Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name;
worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

³ The voice of the Lord *is* upon the waters:
the God of glory thundereth: the Lord *is* upon many waters.

⁴ The voice of the Lord *is* powerful;
the voice of the Lord *is* full of majesty.

⁵ The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars;
yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶ He maketh them also to skip like a calf;
Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn.

⁷ The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire.

⁸ The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness;
the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.

⁹ The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve,
and discovereth the forests:
and in his temple doth every one speak of *his* glory.

¹⁰ The Lord sitteth upon the flood;
yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever.

¹¹ The Lord will give strength unto his people;
the Lord will bless his people with peace.

Matthew 3: 13-17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?'

¹⁵ Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.' Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'

Thoughts on today's readings

On Tuesday the children from the school will be coming into Church to think about baptism. What will it mean for them? Will it be about the godparents and the baby? About the naming of a child?

Last night in the darkness I walked up the road with a torch to guide me. At my feet the ice crystals reflected the light, sparkling like a million diamonds. 'It's only water,' I thought, but surely that's the point. Only water is the most precious commodity of all for those who have none. The waters of the Jordan river, where Jesus came to be baptized, are fairly murky, yet it is the lifeblood of the surrounding land. You cannot satisfy your thirst with diamonds, or water a field with them, so that crops may grow.

The Old Testament tells the story of Naaman, the Syrian general who had conquered Israel, but was a leper. At his servant girl's prompting he came to Israel and to Elisha the prophet seeking healing, but was disgusted at the prospect of washing in the Jordan.

‘Are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel?’ he protested. Yet at the urging of his servants he did as he was told, and set aside his pride. And having thus humbled himself he found himself made clean of his disease, and the light of faith entered into him, so that from that time he worshipped the God of Elisha, the God of the people he had conquered. And the prophet refused to accept any gifts from Naaman, for his healing came because he obeyed the word of the prophet of God, and healing came not only to his body but into his heart and soul.

Our Gospel reading is set at a time when another prophet, known to us as John the Baptist, appeared, urging the people to come to the river Jordan to be baptized, but now the cleansing was to be from the sin that clung to their lives, to be cleansed as a sign of their desire to follow God unencumbered by sin, to be cleansed as a sign of their readiness to welcome God’s chosen Messiah into their lives and to follow his way. ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,’ John preached. The way not just out there in Judea but within the lives of those who heard and responded in faith and obedience.

And there in the crowd, anonymous and unrecognised, was Jesus. Obedient and humble, he joined his people beside the river, one with them, not on a different plane or in a different sphere. John recognised Jesus for who he is and was thrown by this. His question seems to be, ‘Surely you don’t need this? you’re the reason these people have come for baptism, you’re the reason I have been preaching – to prepare them for your coming. Are you, in other words, acting a role? You surely don’t need baptism like the rest.’

And Jesus does not directly give a reply to the question, and John, despite his misgivings, consents to baptize Jesus. It is in this act of humility and obedience that Jesus’ true authority is revealed. As he

comes out of the water, Jesus receives his anointing, not with oil, as once Samuel anointed his forefather David, but in the living form of a dove, the sacrifice of the poor, from God who declares him to be his Son. Here is the new creation, with which God is well pleased. Here is an image beloved of artists, of God revealed as Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For this is not the adoption of a creature by its creator: here, in Jesus, is true God, yet totally identified as one of us. In the words of the modern hymn: ‘Here is our God, the servant king’ for so the prophet Isaiah foretold many centuries ago.

His anointing as king takes place in a muddy river, as one of his people, and his authority comes down in a humble dove. He will enter into his kingdom on a donkey, a beast of burden. He will command his disciples to proclaim his saving works in bread, for his body offered up for the sin of the world, and wine for his blood shed in order that the power of sin and death may be defeated. Upon the cross he was put to death beside two nameless criminals: he remains God with us, God as one of us.

And so on Tuesday we will think about baptism because Jesus lives in those who have heard his word and believed, and follow in faith. We take water to proclaim God’s saving work, and to welcome and celebrate a new generation of those seeking to follow, a new creation born of water and the Spirit. Today with bread and wine we declare in our words and with our hands what God has done for the world he loves, and living his presence here and now, and in the place of suffering and in the hour of death.

A Christian minister, Edward Shillito, wrote these verses in 1919, in a world ravaged by the savage slaughter of the First World War, and they remain as powerful to me as they were then:

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.
The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.
If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;
We know to-day what wounds are, have no fear,
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.
The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.