



**ACT OF WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2021**

*Introduction and Explanations*

Dear friend,

The beginning. Well, I suppose, not quite the beginning of the year – we are ten days in after all! But the beginning of Jesus’s ministry: launched at His baptism. What does the baptism of Jesus say to us about new beginnings? Today is an invitation to explore exactly that!

Blessings-

*David*

Revd David Hinchliffe,  
Chair of the South East District of the Methodist Church.

**Preparing to Worship**

*You may like to be still, light a candle as we continue to celebrate Jesus, the Light of the World;  
and listen to a calming piece of music as we gather in worship*



“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” (Isaiah 60.1)  
Photograph © David Hinchliffe, January 2020

## Preparing to Worship<sup>i</sup>

“Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” (Isaiah 60.1)

This the day that the Lord has made.

**Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

We are the family of God.

**And are called by God’s name.**

We are heirs of Christ’s kingdom.

**And born of the Spirit.**

Come, let us honour the powerful glory of our Creator God.

Let us worship God’s majesty in the splendour of holiness.

## Hymn (Singing the Faith) 134 – Christ, whose glory fills the skies<sup>ii</sup>

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,  
Christ, the true, the only Light,  
Sun of Righteousness, arise,  
Triumph o'er the shades of night ;  
Day-spring from on high, be near ;  
Day-star, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn  
Unaccompanied by thee ;  
Joyless is the day's return,  
Till thy mercy's beams I see,  
Till they inward light impart,  
Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine ;  
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief ;  
Fill me, radiancy divine ;  
Scatter all my unbelief ;  
More and more thyself display,  
Shining to the perfect day.

## A Prayer of Adoration<sup>iii</sup>

Loving God,  
we thank you for John the Baptist  
whose voice spoke truth;  
for the voice at Jesus’ baptism  
which spoke of delight;  
and for Jesus himself  
whose voice calls us to follow him to new beginnings.

God of all the world,  
we come to your Word to be changed,  
to be challenged  
and to feel cherished  
by your Son, Jesus, who is the Word made flesh.

## A Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness<sup>iv</sup>

Lord, when you came into the world, things changed. When we came into a relationship with you, things changed. Life became filled with a new sense of purpose and peace. But, Lord, sometimes we let you down by doing wrong things or failing to do right things.  
**We are sorry, Lord.**

Sometimes, Lord, through pride, stubbornness or fear we build barriers and keep others at arm's length – even you, Lord.  
**We are sorry, Lord.**

At times we give in to our weaknesses and temptations, failing to draw on your strength. At times we are troubled by difficult situations and find it hard to trust you.  
**We are sorry, Lord.**

Help us to turn such things around and turn to you. Help us to learn from the past and, drawing on your strength and peace, make a better future.

*Pause for silent reflection*

O God, when Jesus was baptized, you spoke of your love for him. You showed your love for us through Jesus' death and resurrection. By the power of the cross, the darkness of our wrongdoing is banished by the light of your loving forgiveness.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**BIBLE READINGS:**        **Genesis 1.1-5;**  
                                      **Acts 19.1-7**

**Hymn (Singing the Faith) 397 – The Spirit lives to set us free<sup>v</sup>**

The Spirit lives to set us free,  
Walk, walk in the light ;  
He binds us all in unity,  
Walk, walk in the light.  
*Walk in the light, walk in the light,*  
*Walk in the light, walk in the light of the Lord.*

Jesus promised life to all,  
Walk, walk in the light ;  
The dead were wakened by his call,  
Walk, walk in the light.  
*Walk in the light, walk in the light,...*

He died in pain on Calvary,  
Walk, walk in the light ;  
To save the lost like you and me,  
Walk, walk in the light.  
*Walk in the light, walk in the light,...*

We know his death was not the end,  
Walk, walk in the light ;

He gave his Spirit to be our friend,  
Walk, walk in the light.  
*Walk in the light, walk in the light,  
Walk in the light, walk in the light of the Lord.*

By Jesus' love our wounds are healed,  
Walk, walk in the light ;  
The Father's kindness is revealed,  
Walk, walk in the light.  
*Walk in the light, walk in the light,...*

The Spirit lives in you and me,  
Walk, walk in the light ;  
His light will shine for all to see,  
Walk, walk in the light.  
*Walk in the light, walk in the light,...*

**GOSPEL READING: Mark 1.4-11**

Sermon: "The Beloved" *Revd Dr David Hinchliffe*

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One of the greatest privileges I have as a District Chair is to be asked to share in welcome services for presbyters and deacons as they begin a new phase in their and the circuit's ministry. This year I had a moment of amused panic when I read in the order of service that the Chair of District would extend "the right hand of fellowship" to the newly welcomed minister. "How do I do that?" I wondered – given that this was a newly re-opening church after the first lockdown, and not only was social distancing required, but physical contact like hand-shaking was expressly to be avoided. Offering the "right elbow of fellowship" seemed quite the opposite of a welcome! However, we laughed, and publically elbow-bumped! I am pleased to say, the minister is still in post.

Showing others that they we are welcomed, honoured, loved are vital expressions of our humanity. Displaying physical Signs that someone is "beloved" is one of the things that the Covid-19 pandemic has made so difficult. Not being able to hug someone, or even shake their hands, has been something which many of us have found to be some of the greatest privations of the restrictions the pandemic. I have seen my Mum and Dad only once in a year, then for only around an hour, and rather than giving each other a hug, we could only elbow bump. It didn't seem to say we were beloved – though risking passing on the coronavirus would have said it even less.

Jesus bursts onto the scene in Mark's gospel practically without introduction, save Mark 1:1 – "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." There is none of the birth stories we've just been reading in Matthew or Luke's gospel, or the great theological description of who Jesus is which begins John's gospel. Just one verse, followed by describing John's ministry of baptising people in water for the forgiveness of their sins. John tells his hearers (and Mark his

readers) that the one who comes after him will be so great that he will baptize people with the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus arrives on the scene. He is baptised – causing theologians a lot of head-scratching: why did Jesus of all people need to be baptised for the forgiveness of sins? Did that make Jesus less than John? (Though John the Baptist had made it clear that Jesus was greater than John).<sup>vi</sup> What catches my attention is what happens at the end of the baptism: Jesus arises from the water, and heaven is torn apart and the Spirit of God descends on Jesus like a dove. Then Jesus hears a voice from heaven saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

If there was any doubt about the significance of Jesus for the would-be reader of John’s gospel, this should dispel it. The Spirit of God is at work. God’s voice is heard declaring that Jesus is truly beloved. If you hadn’t been too intrigued by Mark’s gospel so far, you should be now! God is at work in Jesus. Jesus is truly beloved!

I was utterly horrified to see on the news on Wednesday the truly shocking scenes being beamed from Washington, DC, of the storming of the United States Capitol Building, the supreme symbol of the American system of government and its democratic way of operating. Yet what was more shocking still was that the crowd which perpetrated the violence had been actively stoked up by the *President* of the United States, who by his oath was sworn to “the best of my ability, [to] preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.”<sup>vii</sup> I, like so many, were bewildered, and frightened to see what had happened.

To be honest, this seemed to be a logical (if terrifying) conclusion to the presidency. The presidency of Donald Trump I had found a terrifying prospect from before his election. I was therefore challenged deeply by a candidate for the ministry, who in the early days of President’s Trump’s presidency said that instead of despising or despairing of him, Christians were called to pray for him. I was shocked, and clearly called to account by the spiritual wisdom of the candidate for ministry, who offered a maturity I had not found.

Who knows what the consequences of Wednesday’s violence will bring – except to undermine the status of the USA as a beacon of democracy. But what it is a call to do, is to pray – not least to pray for President Trump.

“You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” These are the words Jesus hears as the heavens are broken open. They are words of a Father’s love for His Son. They are accompanied by empowering of the Holy Spirit. They are a sign of the presence and nature of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You can read these words of an act of commissioning as Jesus begins His ministry – and I think they are. But they are also a sign of God’s love for His Son. “You are mine. You are

beloved. I am so pleased with you son!” Here is a Father so thrilled by His Son, not even heaven can contain the Father’s joy!

John’s gospel reminds us that God so loved the world that He gave us His Only Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life, for God didn’t send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through Him.<sup>viii</sup> Or to put it another way, God loves us so much – sinful, broken, messed up as we might be – that it is as if heaven is torn apart, and we can hear God’s voice speaking to us and saying: “You are mine. You are beloved. You are so precious to me.” How does that make you feel? Excited, privileged, with a tingle down your spine? How does it make you feel? Precious, special, accepted, loved. You are so precious. You are beloved by God too!!

That’s the easy part! Though for many of us accepting that we *are* loved by God and precious is not easy at all. Can God really love me? Yet the answer is ‘Yes!’ The harder job is learning to see other people around us in the same way. How do we see our neighbour? How do we see those we disagree with? How do we see our politicians? How do we see President Trump? The adjectives we *might* use to respond to those questions might not include precious, or special or beloved. But God’s love is for the whole world. It is for every person. Everyone is beloved of God, precious, uniquely made in God’s image. Can we learn to see our neighbours through the lens of God’s eyes? Can we see our neighbours with the same love – even those we struggle with?

When we watch the rioting in the US Capitol Building it is not only a scene of political violence, it is a breakdown of love. It is a failure to love your enemy. It is a denial that in God’s eyes everyone is precious. Including Donald Trump. Including Joe Biden. Including Boris Johnson. Including Kier Starmer. Including you. Including me. We may be starved of hugs and hand-shakes. But we are not and never will be starved of God’s love. God’s love us for you, for now and for ever.

As His baptism launched Jesus into the beginning of His public ministry, so may God’s love help us to begin again in this New Year, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and filled with God’s love for ourselves and our neighbour, and so echoing the words of the hymn:

The Spirit lives in you and me,  
Walk, walk in the light;  
His light will shine for all to see,  
Walk, walk in the light.<sup>ix</sup>

Amen

### Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God as we celebrate the baptism of our Lord Jesus, we thank you that not only is Jesus beloved in your eyes and heart, but so are we. And so are our neighbours – those we love and those we struggle with.

Gracious God, after witnessing the scenes of violence and hatred in the United States this week, we pray for the people of the United States, for President Trump and President-elect Biden, for members of the Congress, that all might work for healing and wholeness, and see in each other the beloved.

God of the nations we pray the nations and governments of our District: for the United Kingdom government, county and local authorities, for the governments of Malta and Gibraltar. We pray for politicians and officials as they seek to deal with the coronavirus, and for the wise use of resources.

We pray for the National Health Service, and for medical teams physically, emotionally and spiritually worn out by the pressure upon hospitals caused by the coronavirus. Be with them as they care for those entrusted to their skill; for the roll-out of the vaccination programme. For those who are sick as a result of the virus, for those isolating in fear, for those recovering.

We pray loving God for our communities and our churches as we endure a third period of lockdown, for strength to endure, for love to sustain and encourage us, for the means to offer you our worship and thanksgiving even if we cannot worship together in church as we would want.

Lord Jesus, when people are frazzled and afraid, break open our hearts and minds that we might hear anew the good news: "You are mine, the beloved, with you I am well pleased." Hold us and those who love us and care for us deep in your heart, O loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in whose name and power we pray. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

### **HYMN (Singing the Faith) 564 – O Thou who camest from above<sup>x</sup>**

O thou who camest from above  
The pure celestial fire to impart,  
Kindle a flame of sacred love  
On the mean altar of my heart !

There let it for thy glory burn  
With inextinguishable blaze,  
And trembling to its source return,  
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire  
To work, and speak, and Think for thee ;  
Still let me guard the holy fire,  
And still stir up thy gift in me —

Ready for all thy perfect will,  
My acts of faith and love repeat,  
Till death thy endless mercies seal,  
And make the sacrifice complete.

### **The Blessing<sup>xi</sup>**

May the God of new beginnings  
give you courage to face each new challenge,

joy in each new day,  
and the strength and comfort of the Holy Spirit journey with you through this new week.

And so may the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and all whom you love, today and for evermore. Amen



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<sup>ii</sup> Charles Wesley (1707–1788). Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 134.

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<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Damian Lundy (1944–1996). Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 397. Words and Music: © 1978, Kevin Mayhew Ltd, Buxhall, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 3BW. Used by permission.

<sup>vi</sup> See C. Clifton Black, *Mark* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 57.

<sup>vii</sup> [https://www.usa.gov/inauguration#:~:text=the%20U.S.%20Constitution%3A-%22I%20do%20solemnly%20swear%20\(or%20affirm\)%20that%20I%20will,Constitution%20of%20the%20United%20States.%22](https://www.usa.gov/inauguration#:~:text=the%20U.S.%20Constitution%3A-%22I%20do%20solemnly%20swear%20(or%20affirm)%20that%20I%20will,Constitution%20of%20the%20United%20States.%22) Accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

<sup>viii</sup> John 3.16-17 paraphrased.

<sup>ix</sup> Damian Lundy (1944–1996). Op. cit.

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