

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

As we gather in the name of Jesus we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather.

➤ *Rise up, rise up*

130 MV (repeat)

Call to Worship

Just this morning, the Creator has drawn forth the sun from below the horizon to give light to a new day.

All praise and thanks to God.

Just this morning, the Christ has come to us wherever we are, for we are many gathered in the name of Jesus.

All praise and thanks to God.

Just this morning, the Spirit has given us breath and a voice to shape into prayer and song.

All praise and thanks to God.

Already this morning God has done great things in our lives.

We lift our hearts in joy and gratitude as we worship our gracious God.

† Prayer

You speak, O God, and the oceans tremble; their waters crest to waves that dash upon the shore. You speak and the heavens open; thunder signals the rains that freshen the earth. You breathe and the leaves shudder, the trees of the forest bow to your majesty. You speak and the Spirit descends on your people.

We come as your baptized believers, O God, confessing our sins. You send forth your Spirit, yet we do not respond to your presence. You set us apart as water is poured over us, yet our behaviour in faith does not match our unique place. Christ calls us to follow, yet we disobey his command. Evidence of your goodness surrounds us, yet we ignore your gracious ways. Have mercy upon us, and in your love uphold us. Above all, teach us the meaning of repentance. We pray together in Jesus' name... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

Words of Hope

Hear the good news! Jesus knows our weaknesses – he was tempted as we are, yet is without sin. In Christ's name we may draw near with confidence to God's grace and there we find mercy and forgiveness.

➤ *Your word, O God, awoke the uncreated*

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† Prayer for Understanding

Mighty God seal your claim upon us with word and water and Spirit. Empower us to respond in faith, even as we live in the mystery of being your beloved children. Open our hearts and minds to your Holy Word this morning. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen

Scripture

Genesis 1: 1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, *"Let there be light"*; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Mark 1: 4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 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. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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. And a voice came from heaven, *"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."*

Acts 19: 1-7

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. 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."*

Then he said, *"Into what then were you baptized?"*

They answered, *"Into John's baptism."*

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."*

On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied – altogether there were about twelve of them.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. That is how our text from Genesis concludes this morning – the first day... What is it about that phrase that sounds so appealing? Maybe it's something we all secretly pine for whether we know it or not. Maybe we sense that the first day – whatever it was or is or could ever be – is the day without regrets, without bad memories, without anything that came before that could sully the moment. Instead "the first day" is loaded simply with promise for what may yet be.

The first day... it is a day of light – pure light. It is a day with no shadows, no things to haunt or clouds to occlude. There is nothing to eclipse the light on the first day. However, the first day ends. The evening comes and soon a new day will arrive and then another and another and before you know it, a history starts to be formed as we begin and begin again.

This is the first Sunday after the Epiphany – not the first Sunday in the Christian year, that happened in November with the beginning of Advent – not the first Sunday in 2021, that was last week – this is the first Sunday after the divine manifestation of Jesus. Today is a Sunday of beginning again as a community of faith and as individual believers.

Today we celebrate the showing forth of Jesus as divine – we celebrate the baptism of Jesus – we recognize that Jesus is God. It is the beginning of our understanding that Jesus is not an ordinary prophet – not just another fine preacher and miracle worker. It is the beginning – the first day – of knowing who Jesus truly is.

Historically baptism has been described as a visible sign of God's grace – making sacred or holy the transitions of our lives – a sacrament. Because God's Spirit is with us always – sacraments make sacred the ordinary, everyday events of our lives. Remembering our baptisms, even if we were infants when that sacrament occurred, reminds us that the God's Spirit can energize and transform our lives.

Baptism is an act of inclusion as well as transformation. While baptism can occur as a result of a mature decision, it can also occur solely as an act of hospitality – welcome – inclusion of the least and most vulnerable into God’s community and our own. Regardless of age, baptism is an act of grace. We don’t earn it – we put ourselves in the position to receive it. Our baptism confirms the unmerited grace and revelation of God.

We remember baptism as a sign of our *original wholeness*¹ in the midst of challenging experiences that fill us with fear and doubt. Baptism reminds us that if God is for us, who can be against us?

The first words of Genesis describe poetically the world-creating movements of divine wisdom. They are theological and spiritual – cosmological. God creates within the womb of chaos to bring forth the order necessary for creativity and evolution. This too is the beginning of our understanding. It is the beginning of our knowing who God is and what God is doing. It is the beginning of knowing our place in creation. This is the beginning – the first day – of our theological concept of the world.

Mark, chapter 1 is the genesis of Jesus public ministry. Genesis, chapter 1 is the genesis of everything. In Mark, the Creator of everything from Genesis, begins the incarnate ministry of saving everything. As we get a sense the majesty and mystery and miracle of Genesis, chapter 1, I believe we will have a much deeper sense of awe at what happened in the beginning verses of Mark’s account.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The Bible begins with God, making no attempt to explain God or argue for God’s existence. It simply assumes that God is and always has been. Before there was anything, there was God. And everything that exists came into being because God created it. *The heavens and the earth* – the entire cosmos. It was not always here. But God was. And God created it all.

Everyone who has ever thought about origins believes that there was never a time when there was nothing or no one. Something has to be eternal – whether mass or energy or a person. The biblical story assumes that the eternal *something* is God.

When God began to create the earth, it was *formless and empty*, and *darkness was over the surface of the deep*. This is hard to imagine – impossible to picture, because if something is formless and empty – if it is pitch dark, there is nothing see.

Before we hear about God’s creative activity in the remaining verses of Genesis chapter 1 – separating and gathering – making and filling, we encounter *a wind from God sweeping over the face of the waters*. The Hebrew word is *ruach* – breath or wind – spirit. Things were without form and empty, dark and deep, but the Spirit of God was there, hovering over the waters, about to join the Word in creating the world of form and order, fullness and beauty.

God's first creative action on this unimaginable world was to flip the light switch. "*Let there be light*"; and there was light. There can be no visibility or viability until and unless there is light. We cannot see and we cannot live without light. So, God spoke light into being.

God simply spoke and a new situation was brought forth. God speaks and it happens! This is such a deeply theological statement – not an argument against the science of evolution but an assertion about the creative power of God. This first day of creation ends with God naming the light and the dark. God in creative love begins to give shape and content to the chaos and darkness.

Once God called light into being – shed divine light in the world – God declared that the light was good. God will say that several more times as a way of asserting that the created world is good, not evil – perfect, not flawed – exactly what God had in mind. About all of creation, God says, "*It is good.*"

Now, let's connect Genesis with Mark. Genesis, chapter 1 is the cosmic backdrop of Jesus baptism. The beginning of his ministry was as earth-shaping as the creation of the world. In the same way as God created the world by divine Word and Spirit, so God sent forth Jesus by divine Word and Spirit. That man walking into the water of the Jordan is the Word by which the waters of creation became the world we know. As Jesus enters that muddy water in Palestine, the forces of emptiness are being tamed and the darkness that is over the deep is being pushed back. Even as God created the heavens and the earth, so the Father, Son and Spirit will create a new heaven and earth. Genesis, chapter 1 was the beginning of everything. Mark, chapter 1 is the beginning of a new everything!

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*²

Our lives are filled with beginnings – the first day of school, work, retirement, marriage – the start of friendships, resolutions, promises, new days, new years. The good news to be found in the biblical witness is that there are beginnings – not just repetitions – there are beginnings invoked by the voice and breath of God. We don't just repeat another year exactly as the past one – this year will be different in many ways and the newness that God makes available each time we begin again is God blessing to us as the beloved – God's gift to us – God's grace.

And there was light. There was a morning – an evening – the first day. God was in that first day and God is in all the days that follow, even to the end of the age and beyond. That is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are beginning again because God has shown us again who Jesus is and through Jesus, God shows us who we are and who we can become – beloved children of God. Thanks be to God. **Amen**

† Prayer

God of all creation, you lighten our darkness, give form to the void within, and send your Spirit as comfort and hope. We thank you for visiting us with mercy. Your goodness overwhelms us. We can look to you in times of need, rely on you to drive away our doubt, depend on your judgment to curb our folly, and live in the hope that one day Jesus shall reign.

There are those in our midst whose days are filled with uncertainty. Invade their gloom with the warmth of your loving care. Give them the sense that you are there. Lift them from feelings of futility and enable them to grasp your abiding concern. Give us a measure of the compassion that Jesus showed. Help us to be open to all in need, that we may become instruments of your mercy.

We pray for those whose days lack lustre, who wander aimlessly. Give to them a sense of your will for their lives, strength to pursue it, and the discipline to do what you would have them do. Erase from us our need to be critical of those who do not conform to our standards. Teach us forbearance as they seek to discern your intentions.

Make this day and all our days a celebration of our baptism. Fill us anew with your Spirit, and cleanse us of past sins, which estrange us from Christ and from one another. Send us forth as Christ's disciples, abounding in the hope of new life and proclaiming good news to aid the afflicted. O God of all creation, give us your blessing we pray. Amen

➤ *Songs of thankfulness and praise (verses 1, 2, 4, 5)* 176

† Offering and Prayer

God has sent Light into the world in Christ, and no darkness can overcome it. Let us offer our gifts, trusting they may bring light into the world in Christ's name.

Gracious God, when we look upon all the things our offerings support, help us to see beyond programs and wages, maintenance, and supplies. Enable us to see Jesus, alive in the work and worship of this church, present in our giving and with each one of us. Amen

Blessing

Remember the common ties that hold us in baptism! Remember the needs that are present around us. Remember the wisdom of those who have gone before us. Remember the Holy Spirit standing with us. Remember God's grace. And through our Lord, Jesus Christ, may you experience the love of God and the nurturing embrace of the Holy Spirit. Amen

➤ *We will go out with joy* 539 (PCUSA)

¹ Thomas Merton

² 2 Corinthians 5:17