

# Worship-at-home

January 9, 2022

*First Sunday after the Epiphany: The Baptism of the Lord*

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## Do not fear

**Call to worship:** Psalm 29     \*Power point for Zoom and video

**Hymn:**                #811 “Standing at the portal”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoCpsF-kfoQ&t=144s>

### **Prayers of Praise, Confession, and Supplication:<sup>1</sup>**

O Lord our God,  
who by the birth of Thy Son Jesus Christ  
hast given us a great light to dawn on our darkness;  
grant that as we welcome our Redeemer,  
His presence may shed abroad in our hearts and in our homes  
the light of heavenly peace and joy.  
Help us to celebrate this season in humility and gratitude,  
in unselfish love and cheerful service,  
and that it may be a blessing to our souls,  
a benefit to those around us  
and a thanksgiving to Thee;  
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Holy and Merciful Father,  
who sent thy Son to seek and to save the lost;  
we confess that we have not always lived in the light Thou gavest us in Him.  
We have known to do good, but have not done it.  
Thou hast called to us in the needs of our neighbour,  
but we have often passed by on the other side.  
We acknowledge our unworthiness of Thy love incarnate in Jesus,  
yet we beseech Thee to forgive the iniquity of Thy servants.  
Blessed be Thy holy name for the comforting assurance of Thy holy Word  
to all who repent and believe:

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son,  
that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish  
but have everlasting life.

Fulfill in us Thy word,  
and forgive and cleanse us from all our sins;  
through the same Jesus Christ our Saviour,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit  
ever one God. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the prayers for the Sunday after Christmas, *Prayers for the Christian Year*, 1952.

**Assurance of Pardon:**

Do not be afraid, for Christ has redeemed you.  
Baptized in the deep waters of death, he has washed away your sins.  
Risen from death, he invites you to be washed in the cleansing tide of God's mercy.  
In Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven;  
be at peace with God, with yourself, and with each other.

And give thanks to the Lord,  
for He is good;  
his love endures forever.

**Hymn:** #744 "Will your anchor hold"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTfypuXwrMA&t=34s>

**The Word of God:**

Do not fear

In the liturgical cycle, the post-Christmas season is the season of Epiphany which begins on January 6<sup>th</sup>: the day after the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. The name of this season comes from a Greek word that describes the appearance of an ordinarily invisible power. When you have an *epiphany*, something suddenly becomes clear. That which was just beyond your imaginative grasp falls into place; what was unknown becomes known; the invisible becomes visible. In a religious context, it refers to the self-revelation of the divine. The God whom we cannot see makes Himself visible to those who are willing to see with the eyes of faith. In Christian usage, the focus of the season of Epiphany is on the Incarnation and the effects thereof.

The great Epiphany is that the God whom the heavenly beings worship, who spoke creation into being, has made himself visible to all of humanity in the particular man named Jesus of Nazareth. The invisible Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The logical question to ask in this season is, therefore:

So what?

What does the advent of God-in-the-flesh mean to me?

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*How does the life of Jesus influence my own life?*

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That will be our guiding question over the next eight weeks as we move from Christmas to Lent.

To help us in our meditations, we will be looking at the life of Jesus as Luke has recorded it in the first 9 chapters of his gospel. In these chapters we are given an account of Jesus' early years and his quotidian ministry in Galilee before he set his face to go to Jerusalem and the cross. As we become acquainted with the life of the man born in Bethlehem, we'll ask the question: "How does his life impact mine?"

We'll begin with the prelude to Jesus' public ministry: his baptism.

READ LUKE 3:15-18, 21-23a.

Jesus' baptism is a beautiful scene. We can imagine a river bank with crowds coming to stand on the banks and hear John speak. We see Jesus waiting his turn in line and then, after John has gone through the ritual, a dove descending upon him and a Divine Voice.

For those who were standing there and, perhaps more so, for the early Christian community who first read these words in the context of expecting the Messiah, this scene would have given some much needed affirmation. The man to whom they had devoted their lives, at the cost of their relationship with their families, the loss of friends, their social standing, potential persecution, and even death is indeed the Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God – affirmed as such by a heavenly voice! Their faith was not in vain.

Other than the point that the Christian church has continued the baptism tradition and many of us were baptized as either infants or when we became believes, it might not be immediately obvious how Jesus' baptism connects with our life today. It helps to have some context to grasp the significance of this sacrament. To that end, we'll also read from Isaiah 43.

Because of the nature of this passage, I want to read it a little differently than what I usually do. (By the way, this is a useful style of reading scripture in your own times of private worship because it provides the space in which we can be receptive to the Holy Spirit's council through God's Word.)

I will read 1 or 2 verses at a time with silence being observed after each reading. Then those verses will be repeated. Pay attention to what stands out for you. Write it down if you wish. Then, in the silence think on that word, phrase, or image. Assume that the Holy Spirit intends to use it to speak something into your life and consider what that might be.

With that in mind, and as we think on Jesus' baptism and what it means to us, let us now hear the Word of the Lord as preserved in Isaiah 43:1-7

**\*Power point for Zoom and video**

ISAIAH 43:1

*Silence.*

ISAIAH 43:1

*Silence.*

ISAIAH 43:2-3a

*Silence.*

ISAIAH 43:2-3a

*Silence.*

ISAIAH 43:3b-4

*Silence.*

ISAIAH 43:3b-4

*Silence.*

ISAIAH 43:5-7

*Silence.*

ISAIAH 43:5-7

*Silence.*

ISAIAH 43:1-7

This is the Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God.**

The Lord's message to Israel through the prophet Isaiah was one of assurance, of hope: "Do not fear."

Israel was in exile. The community was scattered throughout the Babylonian empire. They were removed from family and friends. They were removed from the temple and the altar. They were removed from the holy mountain of God. And yet, He reminded them that they were still His people. They were precious in His sight and beloved by Him. They had been made by Him, formed into a nation by Him, reclaimed by Him, and given a home by Him. He promised that no matter what storm or trial they

had to endure, He would be with them. Israel's life and well-being was worth more to God than all the other nations combined. He knew them, called them by name, and loved them. The One who can calm the troubled seas or stir up a wind to strip the forests bare promised to be with Israel.

And, having been with them through the storm, He will gather them once more from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and from the end of the earth.

The Lord would be with the faithful during the exile and would reconstitute the nation after.

For us today, who are worried about the future of the church post-COVID; who are anxious about those who have drifted away from the worshipping community amid the various lockdowns and disembodied, online worship that has been happening, these are words of assurance that we can take to heart!

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*“I will bring your offspring from the east and the west.  
Do not fear.  
I have called you by name.  
I have redeemed you.  
You are mine.”*

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This is the same good news with which John tried to encourage the people who came out to the Jordan River with great expectation, seeking the Messiah:

“Do not fear. The Messiah is near – not me, but one who is more powerful than I – who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire; with the seals of the invisible God's presence and power!”

When we are baptized in Christ's name, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are united with Christ in his baptism and, by the adoptive grace of the Father, are made siblings of Christ in the heavenly family.

What the Father speaks to his uniquely divine Son, he speaks to all his adopted children: “You are my child.”

Do not fear: You are precious in God's sight!

Do not fear: The God who overpowers storms has redeemed you; reclaimed you;  
He calls you by name; He calls you His own!

This gospel is what can anchor our thoughts, emotions, and thus actions in the midst of the storms of life.

So, what does Jesus' baptism mean for me?

It means that by God's grace, I too am a child of God in Christ. I am beloved by the Father. Redeemed. Reclaimed. I am precious in His sight. It means that when I stand in the midst of the storms, His voice hovers over me. It means that when I go through the waters, or the fires, He goes there with me. It means that the day will come when all my brothers and sisters in Christ, from the east and the west; from the north and the south, will be gathered in the name of Jesus Christ to rule his kingdom with him on earth as in heaven.

This gospel is what can anchor our thoughts, emotions, and thus actions in the midst of the storms of life.

Now, on Sunday morning when we've prepared our hearts and minds to worship God, we're sitting down, we're calm, we've cleared our thoughts of anything ungodly, it's easy to rest in that gospel. In that good news. It's easy to feel the warmth that comes from that assurance. But what about when you turn this video off/when you sign out of this Zoom meeting and you go to whichever news source you use and you read the most recent headlines? Then where is that warmth? Where is that security? What about Monday afternoon, or Tuesday morning? What does that mean for us then?

I think that is when the work of faith begins. When we are standing in the midst of the storm on Sunday afternoon or on Wednesday night or on Friday morning, disciples of Jesus remember our baptism. We remember that in our baptism, we are united with Christ in his, siblings with Christ in the kingdom. We remember whose we are.

With all those other distractions that come our way, it's easy to lose our focus, to lose sight God's revelation. It's easy to become burdened and weary in our hearts and minds. So, we think back to the messages of Advent, when Jesus said to be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipations (frivolous distractions), or

drunkenness (anything we use to escape from the realities we face that is not of Christ), or the worries of this age. Jesus said, when you're in the midst of the storm; when you're in the midst of the discouraging news, or the floods, or the fires, when you're in the river, be on guard so that your hearts do not become weighed down with the worries of this age. Because the truth is: you are a child of God, redeemed by the cross of Christ – that means you are reclaimed by the God whom the heavenly beings worship, God calls you by name, beloved in Christ, precious in His sight.

The work of faith is to remember, to center our thoughts, to anchor our souls in that truth.

So, in the middle of the week, when you're in the midst of discouragement or fatigue, then it's the time to turn off the news, and remember whose you are. Re-read Isaiah 43 and Luke 3:22. And let the Holy Spirit work those words into your soul:

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*Do not fear, I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine, I will be with you, I will bring back my sons and daughters from the north and the south and the east and the west.*

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For the good of your souls, the health of the nation, and the glory of God,  
Amen.

**Hymn:** #729 "Silence frenzied unclean spirit"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCpmda2x2VY>

## **Prayers of Intercession and Thanksgiving:<sup>2</sup>**

God of time and eternity:

As this new year stretches before us,  
we thank you for the time you give us  
and for all those things that are still possible and precious in this gift.  
We thank you for each new day and its possibilities;  
for each night, its rest and reflection.  
We thank you for words of forgiveness and the chance to make a new start,  
for word of invitation to explore new opportunities.  
Give us the courage to try something new  
and the conviction to finish things leftover from last year.  
Make time spent this year your time, O God.  
Bless our time with you.

God of moments and memories

we remember before you people facing hard times in the months ahead.  
We pray for those struggling with illness,  
and for those facing treatment or surgery with uncertain results....

*A silence is kept.*

We pray for those who are grieving the loss of dear ones  
and for all who remember what used to be but can no longer be...

*A silence is kept.*

Make time spent this year your time, O God.  
Bless our time with you.

God of hopefulness and helpfulness,

we remember those who are seeking new opportunities this year:  
Those training for new employments and those looking for work;  
Those developing new businesses and seeking the right employees;  
And those who provide services to improve life in our communities  
amid the uncertainties around us...

*A time of silence is kept.*

Give us wisdom and perseverance in what we undertake as a congregation  
in the face of all the changes in our community.

Make time spent this year your time, O God.  
Bless our time with you.

As we work together with the vision of your kingdom before us this year,  
fill us with love and generosity that can change the world because of your blessing.  
We pray we can make a difference in even the most challenging situations  
because we are the people of your beloved Son who taught us to pray together:

## **The Lord's Prayer**

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<sup>2</sup> From worship resources for January 9 available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>



**Hymn:** #749 "Be still my soul"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxLV4zRmh8>

**Benediction:**