

Worship for 10 January 2021

Introduction

Welcome to worship on this 2nd Sunday of 2021. The theme today is based on Mark's version of Jesus' baptism by his cousin John. It marks the beginning of Jesus ministry and from then on, the world changed.

Call to worship

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.

Let us, therefore, come together in thanksgiving.

Amen.

Hymn From heaven you came helpless babe

Opening prayers

Everlasting God, we celebrate your coming to our world in Jesus Christ, your light that continues to shine in the darkness of our world. We praise you for the way your love shone in so many lives during his ministry; through the healing he brought to the sick, comfort to the distressed, promise to the poor, and forgiveness to the lost.

Receive our worship, and shine in our lives today.

We praise you for the light that has shone in so many lives since, the faith you have nurtured in innumerable hearts; new beginnings, new purpose, new life born within them. We rejoice that you are at work in our lives here and now, inviting us to bring our hopes, fears and concerns before you in the knowledge that you will always meet our needs, no situation is beyond your power to transform and redeem.

Receive our worship, and shine in our lives today.

We praise you for the assurance that evil will be overcome; that hope will replace despair, joy come after sorrow, and life triumph over death - that even the deepest darkness shall be turned to light! Fill us now with the light of Christ. May it illumine our worship and guide our footsteps, so that we may live as a lamp for others, to the glory of your name.

Receive our worship, and shine in our lives today.

In his name we ask it.
Amen.

Readings

Genesis 1.1-5; Mark 1.4-11

Reflection

I started to prepare for this service, on 23 December – early thinking! But it was in an ever-changing world then when the government-imposed tiers, etc at short notice and whether we would have new arrangements or not with the EU it was certainly a time when the world was changing at least the UK world.

Since I wrote that it is now 30 December, we now have an agreement with the EU over trade and travel among other things. We have just now moved into tier 4 along with most of England. It is now 5 January as we have gone into lockdown 3 and we have decided to cease worshipping in church for the time being. Change, change, change all within 2 weeks! Life has changed so much during 2020 with COVID 19 that it is difficult to see if we will ever be back to any sort of normal as we knew. When will we be able to see our families? Will we be able to have holidays abroad again? We have a new normal- keeping our distance, wearing masks, washing or sanitising our hands frequently and staying at home as much as possible. When we can worship in church and so those of us who feel comfortable enough do and we keep the time together as short as possible and limit the amount of time we talk together before or after worship. The list of changes seems endless and we must not forget climate change and its consequences.

The first change we encounter in the Bible is the reading we heard just now about the beginning of creation. God said, ‘let there be light, and there was light’. Light came out of darkness and as light is such an important factor for all life or at least almost all as I expect there are creatures who thrive in the dark. It was a major change and the start of creation which led to humanity. We made a mess of the created world and God sent his son to shed new light in the world – Jesus said I am the light of the world.

The whole passage from Mark centres on new beginnings. The first sentence of the Gospel spells out the way in which the world is entirely changed, now that Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, is present.

This passage is the first appearance of Jesus as an adult and comes at the beginning of his ministry. His baptism is a new beginning and a

transformation. John the baptizer says that he is not worthy to untie Jesus' shoes. He recognises that Jesus will be able to do much greater things by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mark goes on to describe the ways in which this new life is made real. People are offered the opportunity for a fresh start. The Greek word, *metanoia* is usually translated as 'repentance' (v.4) but it carries the sense of 'a change of mind' or 'a change of heart'. It relates far more to the promise of a new future than to mulling over the sins of the past. But this is only stage one of the new life into which God invites us.

The baptism of Jesus is also a moment of new beginning. Though there is nothing for Jesus to repent of (see Matthew 3.14), this is a new stage in his life too, as he moves away from the hidden years in Nazareth and begins his active ministry. At his baptism, God does something amazing. People of Jesus' time tended to imagine a rigid, unbreakable barrier dividing earth and heaven, one that made it impossible for humanity to reach God. Now this barrier is torn apart (v.10) and God's Spirit comes powering through, like a descending dove. The world is indeed changed and those who experience Jesus' baptism in the Spirit will begin to discover what that means.

New beginnings mean a change and we are still coping with changes at the moment, our new beginnings come through the forgiveness God offers, which is not just the once in a lifetime event of our baptism, but all the forward-looking opportunities that God offers us each and every day. So let God continue to change us for the better and help us to cope with the changes around us.

Amen

Hymn Breathe on me, breath of God

Prayers for the people

Loving God, there are times when we look at people's lives and find it hard to believe things can ever change for the better – we see them racked by illness, weighed down by anxiety, tormented by depression, crippled by debt, broken by alcohol, destroyed by drugs, scarred by bereavement. Shattered through unemployment, and we wonder what their prospects really are, what hope we can realistically offer them, what help we can possibly give.

We pray for people known to us now- family, friends, members of our fellowship, colleagues at work, neighbours, acquaintances; as well as

countless people unknown to us, each struggling under their own burdens.

We pray for our world – for those many people who face suffering, injustice, hardship, and death. Reach out to all who are in despair, we pray, all who long for change, but see only hopelessness stretching before them. Touch their lives and bring help, hope, healing and wholeness.

Loving God, it is hard sometimes to believe those around us, still less the world around, can ever change for the better. We see countries broken by war, people consumed by hatred, thousands living in fear, nations turned against nation, multitudes made homeless by disaster, continents facing famine, and again we wonder what the prospects really are. What hope can anyone offer, what help can possibly be given. Transforming God, may your light shine where there is darkness. Let us bring to God all our concerns ...

Help us to see beneath the surface, recognising you are at work and that things can change. Help us to see beyond appearances, recognising you are a God able to transform even the most hopeless situations. Give to us and to all people the assurance that there is no one and no situation unable to be transformed by your power.

Transforming God, may your light shine where there is darkness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Offertory prayer

Blessed Lord, we give you thanks that we are able, by whatever means we can, give to you and your church. Let these contributions and our service enable your mission to continue in our changing world. Amen

Hymn The kingdom of God is justice and joy

Blessing

Lord, help us to be open to your prompting as we seek to discover what you would have us be and do. Remind us again and again that you have promised to be our guide and companion on our journey. Help us to look forward with renewed commitment and bless our thinking and speaking and doing. In your name.

Amen.