

Worship at Home—10 January 2021

Rev Easter Smart

Opening Call To Worship .

Breanna has been reading a lot in lockdown and one story was by F Scott Fitzgerald called The Curious Case of Benjamin Button. Having finished the book, she wanted to watch the film—maybe you've seen it with Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchet. The premise is that Benjamin Button is born into the world as an old man who ages backwards, so that unlike the rest of us, he gets younger as the years go by. Early on he meets Daisy. Initially she is a young girl and he is an old man and they become best of friends.

The story weaves in and out between the encounters between Daisy and Benjamin as they go through different stages and ages and it is clear they have become soul mates. Frequently the timing isn't right for them to be together—but each time they meet is special and their lives do intersect again when they are around the same age and their love blossoms—but Benjamin knows it cannot last. He often pauses with her to savour the moment, to record her beauty and to appreciate the present experience together. He doesn't want to take the special moments of life for granted because, as he knows, "things don't stay the same, they change."

It is good to pause to savour the significant moments of our lives. Maybe if you were to list the significant events or positive experiences of your life you might think of the day you got married or the day you met, or a graduation, some special award or the birth of a child. I wonder how many of you would include the event of your baptism amongst your significant happenings. I imagine you might not remember it if you were young, but that your parents will. Baptism is sometimes regarded as something that just happens that we can forget about- but it is one of the most special events that can ever happen to human beings. When we are born we begin our earthly life and we belong to our immediate family.

But after baptism, every child belongs to a great Holy family, the family of God. This is the family we call the church in heaven and on earth. From the point of baptism we are claimed and blessed by God's love and we are invited to participate in a life-long, soul-satisfying relationship with God who wants to supply us with love and care and abounding grace throughout our lives. In the sacrament of baptism, we begin our heavenly life.

This week is the last week that the Moderator Right Reverend Martin Fair has offered to lead worship for all the churches in Scotland. You will hear once again the familiar story of the baptism of Jesus and I do invite us all to reflect on the significance of baptism. Jesus grew up in Nazareth as a carpenter and student of scripture. But at the age of thirty everything changed. Baptism was the point where Jesus ministry began. It was a sign that God was calling him and that God was going to equip him for his ministry. The Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove, was the empowerment Jesus needed to

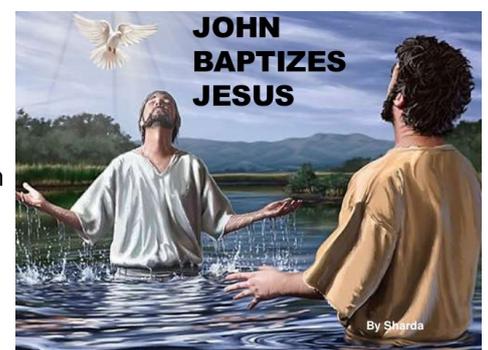


It is with great sadness that we have to intimate the death of

Mrs Margaret Cole
25 Riccarton Mains Road

Margaret's funeral will take place on Friday 15 January at Mortonhall Crematorium at 15.00 hrs

Please pray for the family



show that God's wisdom is deeper than any human understanding. God's power of goodness is stronger than hatred, God's goodness stronger than evil and love stronger than death.

This week, Moderator's worship is introduced by Ruth Harvey, leader of the Iona Community. I've read some helpful books she has written on reconciliation and healing. In one she quotes, Margaret Silf, who suggests that we might:

"reflect on 'the givens' in our lives, those things that we cannot change: perhaps our genetics, the place and time of our birth ... After reflecting on these, then try to set them to one side. Next, she invites us to reflect on those areas of life over which we have choice: maybe work, location, use of time ... and then to set these aside. Finally, she invites us to reflect on what remains: the core, the inner identity, who we are at root once the outer layers of happenstance and choice have been set aside for a while. She suggests that it is out of this inner 'I am' that we encounter the immanent God, the God who dwells within."

Remembering that we are baptised is a constant encouragement that we belong to God and God never stops believing in us and our possibilities in each moment. It is a reminder that God is present in every circumstance from birth through to death because our baptism is our rebirth—our point where everything important begins—it is our heavenly reference point for the great question, who am I and why am I here? We are here because we are born of God. God can supply us with the grace, the confidence and courage we need each and every day and that we are not alone—we are surrounded not only by Divine love but by a great family.

Adapted from Poem by Joan Brockeslby

Here is a day, a golden day
Be lavish as you spend it;
New and bright shining after rain
Immaculate with promise
Yours for the taking
Rare with gold it will not come again

Spend it in ecstasy of worship
Sailing the wind, with sunshine, sea and rain;
By great hills, gorse and heather mantled
Patterned with racing cloud, then sun again.

Pour out with boldness water in its splendour
Let flower, mountain, friend an altar be
For every moment holds a joy for your beholding
Each tear of dead a light for you to see

This is a day for you prepared
Be reckless as you spend it
Let no exalted moment pass you by
For every fallen leaf bears your appointed pattern
And lo, not one but seven rainbows span the sky.

Sunday 10th January 2021—The Moderator's Service

Worship curated by The Moderator of the General Assembly with contributions from:

Moderator's Chaplain, Gregor McIntyre
Leader of the Iona Community, Ruth Harvey
Writer and Poet, Retired Minister, Tom Gordon
Banchory West Youth Group member,
Music from New Scottish Hymns, Alan Campbell and Ashton Lane

Call to Worship

Leader: God of light, light of light true God of true God
ALL: We bless You
Leader: God of new beginnings, hope of hope, as we reach for this new year
ALL: We bless You
Leader: God of joy, delight of delight, as we give thanks for all that is good
ALL: We bless You

Opening Praise

Infant holy, infant lowly,
for his bed a cattle stall;
oxen lowing,
little knowing
Christ the babe is Lord of all.
Swift are winging angels singing,
nowells ringing, tidings bringing;
Christ the babe is Lord of all;
Christ the babe is Lord of all!

Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping
vigil till the morning new;
saw the glory, heard the story –
tidings of a gospel true.
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,
praises voicing, greet the morrow:
Christ the babe was born for you;
Christ the babe was born for you!

High above us, God who loves us
Sends His son to save us all
Stature growing, wisdom knowing
Full obedience to his call
Born in weakness, wondrous mystery
God eternal enters history
Christ the babe is Lord of all!
Christ the babe is Lord of all!

Welcome from the Moderator

Hi everybody. These have been the most trying times; not least over Christmas and into the new year. And so as Moderator, I have simply sought to assist and support ministers and congregations—all those who are responsible for leading worship—by providing some material that will allow others to take a break; those who have been hard at it throughout.

So welcome to this morning's worship. I know we are now well into January but we are travelling forwards in the light that the Christ-child sheds. So some of our worship today will still have that Christmassy feel to it! Is that such a bad thing? Let's continue to rejoice in the coming of Jesus.

Welcome to worship.

Prayer

Here we express our gratitude to God: for life, for goodness in our communities, in our world, in all of creation – acknowledging our responsibilities and stewardship role.

Lord of Hope
we give You thanks for a new day.
We arise today to a horizon guiding our eye beyond the everyday;
to a dawn gently lighting up the wonders of Your creation;
to a whispered dew rooting us firmly to this precious earth.
For this and more we thank You.

Lord of Hope
we give You thanks for a new year.
We arise today
to the knowledge that Your Son, our Lord, goes before us;
to the hope that through His presence all people will be transformed;
to the promise of salvation for all.
For this and more we thank You.

Lord of Hope
we give You thanks for a new start.
We arise today
turning our backs on the ways of judgement and criticism;
sloughing off narrow-minded assumptions;
reaching out to enemy and friend with generous compassionate hearts.

For the promise of a new start, a new year, a new day, for these gifts and for so much more we thank You. Amen

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he 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.

Reflection on 'Let there be light'

When my first child, Mairi, was a few months old, as a "modern father" I learned how to share the bathing, burping, feeding and dressing for the baby. Best of all, I became a dab-hand at nappy-changing.

These were the days of "terry nappies", of course – we didn't use disposable ones then. One evening, following well-practiced steps, I was changing Mairi's nappy on the bed in the spare room. She was gurgling, gooing and grinning as babies do, and, with the jerky, uncoordinated actions of a child, was moving her hands in front of her face. I thought it was random at first, the spasmodic twitching of limbs we've all seen with babies. But then I realised there was a pattern to it. There was a light in the centre of the room, and this wee baby was recognising the light above her. She was finding out, for the first time, what was shining up there, and, if she moved her hands across it, she could make the light come and go. Right in front of my eyes, a child was learning to recognise the light.

The 19th century Scottish minister, Horatius Bonar, was a prolific writer of poetry and hymns. He, too, knew a light above him, and in a profoundly spiritual form. Perhaps with his bible open at the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, he wrote these words:

Light of the world! forever, ever shining,
There is no change in Thee;
True light of life, all joy and health enshrining,
Thou canst not fade nor flee.

“Let there be light”, God said. Bonar had appreciated that light, forever, ever shining. He had found a light that would not change, a true light of life that would bring him joy and fullness. Horatius Bonar had recognised the light above him. To you and me, different people in changed circumstances, but with the same purpose, God says again, “Let there be light”. There it is! It’s still shining. My light will not change.

So today, in our jerky, uncoordinated way, let’s stretch out our hands and look up at it again. And with the wondrous discovery of a little child – and a man of faith – give thanks for our Light that will not fade nor flee.

Praise

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father.
There is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not.
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow;
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
[Refrain]

New Testament Reading: Mark 1:4-11 (The Message version)

John the Baptist appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins. People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, were baptised by him in the Jordan River into a changed life. John wore a camel-hair habit, tied at the waist with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild field honey.

As he preached he said, “The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will change your life. I’m baptising you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out.”

At this time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. The moment he came out of the water, he saw the sky split open and God’s Spirit, looking like a dove, come down on him. Along with the Spirit, a voice: “You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.”

The Message

When I was completing my training and preparation for ministry, I felt absolutely open to where God would have me serve. And so I well remember a prayer that went something like this: 'Lord, I'll go anywhere you would have me go and I'll serve anywhere you would have me serve. As long as it's in Glasgow!'

Well I was from Glasgow and it seemed natural enough to me that I would minister there. But we all come to learn at one time or another that when it comes to offering ourselves in service to the Almighty, we don't get to put down conditions. Rather, if we are going to say 'I am ready to serve,' we leave the rest to God.

Maybe I had to learn that lesson or maybe God has a wry sense of humour! Either way, I found myself serving in a very different place, called to the East coast of Scotland and to the lovely county of Angus and to the town of Arbroath. Not even nearly Glasgow!

Despite the surprise, we've never been disappointed about coming to the East coast. Angus really does have everything; stunning coastline, beautiful mountains and glens and lovely towns and villages. And of course for us Arbroath has been at the heart of that.

You know, when the sun is shining Arbroath really is as nice as anywhere. The old harbour has been turned into a marina and it's a lovely place to spend some time. I have to say before coming here I really didn't know much about Arbroath. I knew about the Abbey and, yes, that the football team has the world record highest score, 36-0, and of course I knew about the famous smokie - the Arbroath Smokie!

But most of all it's the folk we've come to love; not least the folks of the fishing community. Of course there's not so much fishing going on here nowadays but living by the sea, you really can't escape the history and tradition.

And I think the interesting thing is this; in getting to know the fishing folk here, it has helped me to better understand those first disciples who were, of course, fisherman themselves on the Sea of Galilee. In Mark's Gospel we hear of their calling; that Jesus came to them - Simon, Andrew, James and John - and asked them to leave their nets and to follow him that they might become fishers of people. And doesn't that remain our calling - his followers today, to speak of Jesus and his kingdom, to be fishers for people, and to reach out with that net of God's love?

I wonder if any of you have seen the new Disney Pixar animation, Soul? The action focuses on one particular character, known simply as 22. 22 has lost all sense of passion for life; no spark and no purpose. I wonder if there is a sense in which the church might have lost something of its sense of purpose? Certainly those first disciples, those fisherman, new absolutely that they were there to make known the name of Jesus. That was their passion, their purpose.

But even before those first disciples, there was one whose very existence was defined by that purpose of making Jesus known. John the Baptist, of whom we read this morning, established himself by the River Jordan and there, he told people to prepare themselves, by a baptism of repentance to ready themselves for the One who was to come. And of that One, John said this: 'the One who is more powerful than I is coming after me. I am not worthy even to stoop down and untie the thongs of his sandals.' And further, as we find it in the Gospel according to Saint John, John the Baptist declares; 'I must decrease, he must increase.'

John knew that his purpose was to point to Christ. Of course a lesser person might have struggled with that. The evidence makes clear that John had become very popular. Many people came to him from far and wide and became his followers.

And yet he pointed them to Jesus.

Friends, this account of the Ministry of John the Baptist—pointing people to Jesus—is so right for us now. And the same goes for the account of those first disciples, those fisherman, those first followers of Jesus. Here at the start of a new year, might it be that we can recommit ourselves to this whole business of pointing towards Jesus, of sharing the love of Jesus, and of encouraging others to become his followers?

You see it's not about us! Always it's about Jesus. If the church becomes so concerned with its own survival, with its own life, that it loses sight of that business of pointing to Jesus then it loses the right to be called 'church' at all. We

exist to point towards Jesus. Just as John the Baptist so long ago. Let it be true of us in this new year and in all that will follow. We point to Jesus.

Amen.

Closing Praise

Oh, come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant!
Oh, come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold him,
Born the King of angels;

*Oh, come, let us adore him;
Oh, come, let us adore him;
Oh, come, let us adore him,
Christ, the Lord.*

Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation;
— Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above!
Glory to God,
Glory in the highest;

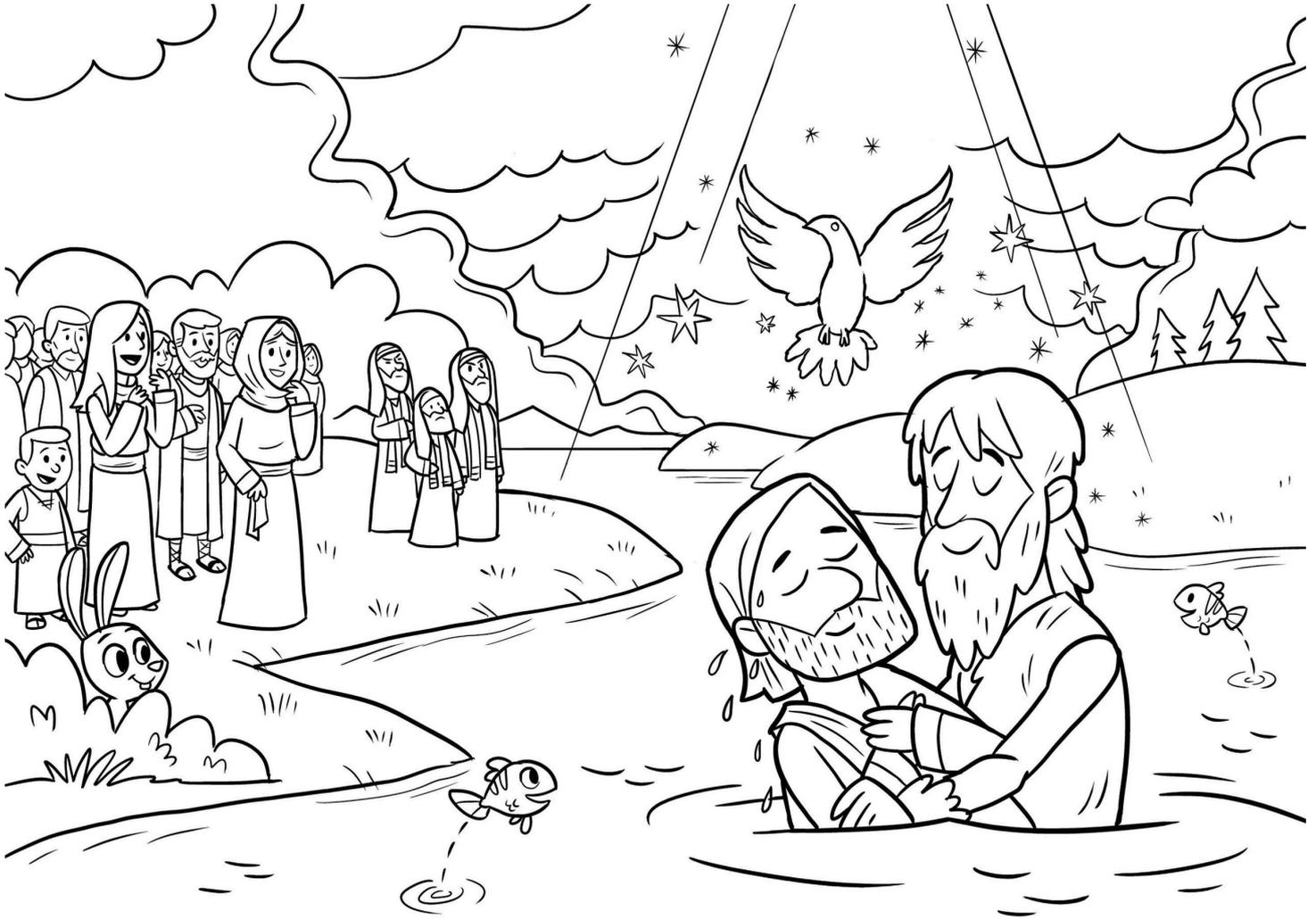
Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
Born this happy morning;
— Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n.
Son of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing:

Closing and Benediction

And now, go in peace and may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you, and remain with you, now and forever more.

Amen.

.... And to help with the lockdown—colour in the picture below of Jesus being baptised by John.



Photographed by Easter

