

Readings for the Baptism of the Lord

11th January 2026

First Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

Thus says the LORD: Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.

See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

Second Reading: Acts 10:34-43

Peter began to speak to those assembled in the house of Cornelius. 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem.

They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

Gospel: St Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

A Reflection for the Baptism of the Lord

from Rev'd Anne Macdonald

The Kings have left. The Holy Family has returned from Egypt. Candlemas, the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, is several weeks ahead of us and the Gospel reading for this Sunday leaps forward into the adult life of Christ to the point just before his ministry begins. This can feel too sudden – a huge change of focus from the birth in Bethlehem. I certainly want to stay in the warmth of Christmas, particularly with the weather outside, with CalMac ferries being cancelled, as they have been this past week, and with world affairs being so tense.

The Church calendar is now in the season of Epiphany where the specified Gospel readings are all about how Jesus was revealed to others. The Baptism of the Lord, the subject of the Gospel for this Sunday, is one of those points of revelation.

Here we have a moment from the life of Christ which occurs in all four gospels. Matthew and Luke start with the infancy narratives before telling the story of John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus. Mark and John do not tell us about the early life of Jesus instead they start from a different place and tell us about John the Baptist and the Baptism of the Lord in the first chapter of each gospel. Indeed in John we are given the Testimony of John the Baptist about what happened when Jesus was baptised. An event so significant that it was recognised by the authors of the four gospels and recorded in a very similar way by each of them.

Matthew describes how Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John the Baptist and that John initially refused to baptise Jesus. At this point John was quite well known, he had followers, he had people coming to him, to listen to him and to be baptised. Even Herod, the current ruler from that dynasty, was interested to hear what John the Baptist had to say. In comparison, Jesus was unknown outwith his own community. He had walked from tiny Nazareth in Galilee, had crossed provincial and historical borders, to come to the Jordan to be baptised. The distance would have been approximately sixty miles, so not a journey to be taken on a whim, and when he arrived John said: I will not baptise you. Imagine the shock of those around John: he had called people to repentance and baptism and now he was telling someone who asked to be baptised that he would not do it. Instead John said to Jesus “I need to be baptised by you”.

The passage does not tell us very much about the actual day, the number of people in the vicinity, where they came from, whether any of them, other than John, already knew Jesus, rather it concentrates on the critical points. John refused to baptise Jesus, saying this is the wrong way round to which Jesus replied: “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness”. Notice that Jesus said ‘us’, not ‘me’ or ‘you’ but ‘us’. Jesus is saying to his cousin John, you and I together must do what God requires of us. Of course we know that they both suffer for doing what was asked of them.

So what happened after this discussion? John baptised Jesus and as Jesus came out of the water the heavens opened. He, Jesus, saw the spirit descending on him like a dove and a voice came from heaven: “This is my son the beloved, with whom I am well pleased”. Although Matthew does not make this clear we do know from the other Gospels that this was witnessed by John the Baptist and others who were present.

We can stop at this point. After all the Gospel does not say anything more about it and it would be possible to reflect or meditate on the enormity of this moment for a considerable period. Indeed this brief passage has inspired artists

and others throughout the centuries and, if you search on-line, you will find a wealth of imagery about this moment. God, who very rarely enters directly into world we inhabit, has broken through into his creation to announce Jesus to the world as his son, who is doing what he asked him to do. A fundamental part of Christian belief is encapsulated in this image. Here we have the Trinity present together at the same point in our world. God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. No wonder the Gospels all contain this passage.

However, if instead of considering this Gospel reading in isolation we reflect upon the Advent and Christmas readings which came before this particular reading and those which follow on, it illuminates why this is a pivotal moment in time. In Advent we prepared for the events of Christmas, then we celebrated the birth of Christ, the point at which the son of God became incarnate in this world. We have then read or listened to the stories about the infancy of Jesus. After Candlemas, at the beginning of February, when we commemorate the time when Jesus was revealed to Anna and Simeon in the Temple, we will move towards the forty days of Lent in preparation for the events of Holy Week, Easter and finally Pentecost. The Baptism of the Lord sits like a fulcrum at the middle of these events. God the Father has prepared everything and now Jesus starts his ministry and his walk to Easter.

Helpfully, in the related reading from The Acts of the Apostles Peter pulls all of this together and also explains how the Apostles, and thereby the church, were charged with spreading the message about the Son of God. As far as we know Peter was not present at the Jordan when Jesus was baptised but of course Peter was one of the first people called by Jesus to be a disciple. Peter is quite clear that the baptism was the starting point of Christ's ministry and that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power". In this passage from Acts Peter further explains that 'God shows no partiality'. Yes, he sent Christ to the people of Israel to preach peace but everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Peter, (from the Greek *petros*, meaning rock) referred to by Christ as the rock on which the church will be built, along with the other Apostles, was charged with taking this message to all humanity. Two thousand years later that message of hope for all is still there.