

**Welcome to the YouTube worship service of
St. Andrew's United Church in Chalk River ON
On this Epiphany/Baptism of Jesus Sunday**

Jan. 9, 2022

Kindly enter this time centering on God, prepared to meet God.

GATHERING IN COMMUNITY

SCRIPTURE GREETING/WELCOME

Psalm 29:1,2,11

Welcome to this time apart. Time apart from each other as Covid again encourages us to think of our neighbor and ourselves and stay safe. Time apart from scrolling the internet. Time apart from the latest news stories. Welcome to this time of worship and prayer and I encourage you to take some time today to read over and contemplate all of Psalm 29.

For today's service I ask that you have a small bowl of water ready for the Renewal of our Baptism, later in the service.

I am SD, minister at St. Andrew's United Church in Chalk River Ontario, situated on the unceded and unsurrendered lands of the Algonquin/Anishinabek peoples whose stewardship of the lands is recognized and honored here.

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE:

From the words of the prophet Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine, for your light has come; and over you the glory of God has dawned.

May this light be a constant reminder of the light of Christ, the light which has come. Amen

GATHERING HYMN: VU 238 "How Great Thou Art"

CALL TO WORSHIP

All who thirst, come to the water and drink deeply of these living streams.

Come, all who are weary; come, all who yearn for forgiveness.

As the waters of the Jordan washed over Jesus, so the Holy Spirit washes over you and me.

Our gracious God beckons and blesses us.

Let us give praise for new life in Christ.

OPENING PRAYER:

Creator God, today is a reminder of the excitement felt when we first begin a new journey, a new group, a new project. Today is also a reminder of the excitement the magi must have felt as their journey to find the infant King led them to kneel to a Jewish toddler whose family had been displaced. Today, may the reminder of baptism stir in us that same excitement. Even though many of us were very young, we have been celebrating baptisms with families since this congregation was established, welcoming those who chose to join us in this family of faith. Hope, peace, joy, and love have led us here today. We hear your call today, O Lord in living water and whispers of the Spirit as we come together in prayer and praise. Amen.

HEARING AND CONTEMPLATING THE WORD OF GOD

GOSPEL READING (EPIPHANY): Matthew 2:1-12

MINISTRY OF MUSIC

GOSPEL READING (BAPTISM OF JESUS): Luke 3:15-17, 21-23

Message: "Baptism, Commitment and God's Mercy"

I have included the magi story here today because even though we often include it in our Christmas Eve service, it really has a day of its own on January 6th which as you know falls on a Sunday only every 7 years or so. But the story of the travellers from the east that we hear in Matthew's gospel is worth more than a passing mention and speaks to us of searching, searching for meaning and finding it in the most unexpected of places. These travellers (who from all indications were educated) were welcomed into King Herod's court (so they were people of influence) and from the gifts given they were more than likely wealthy. Educated, influential and wealthy and yet they find in this child (the light that Isaiah talks about). Even though Jesus was not the child in a palace they expected, they still, on bended knee, presented their gifts and praised God. They still give us hope that all people will be welcomed into community no matter their circumstances.

So, why would, Jesus, the child of light, the Son of God, want so badly to be baptized? Why would he submit to a baptism of repentance? In other words, what does it all mean? The story of Jesus baptism is in all three synoptic gospels, Matthew (points out that John himself was uneasy and hesitant). Luke (makes as little of the event as possible, casually mentioning that Jesus was baptized after mentioning that John is in prison). Mark (only allows Jesus' baptism three verses).

This story is difficult, in part, because John the Baptist is difficult. John storms out of the wilderness, eating locusts and honey, proclaiming a new kingdom coming in water and fire, and warning—especially the religious people—of the wrath to come. John’s baptism is revolutionary. He treats Jews like Jews treated pagan converts, requiring them to be baptized, calling them to repentance.

Surprisingly, crowds flock to John to be baptized; but he knows his work is just the beginning. After him someone will come who will baptize not in water but in Spirit. The day soon comes when Jesus wades out into the muddy Jordan (and it is muddy). When Jesus comes up out of the water, he sees heaven split wide open and the Spirit descending like a dove. He hears the voice of God saying, “This is my child.” The people gathered on the shore have no idea what it all means. They probably assume that Jesus is now one of John’s disciples. Without the rest of Jesus’ life his baptism is difficult to understand. But, the purpose of Jesus’ baptism is seen in the days and years that follow that afternoon in the Jordan. It’s when we see Jesus take his place with hurting people that his baptism starts to make sense. Jesus’ baptism is his commissioning for ministry.

During the week before Jesus’ death, the leaders of the temple challenged him, “By what authority do you do these things?” Jesus answered with a reference to his baptism, “Was the baptism of John from heaven or not? I was baptized. That’s how all this started.” In the waters of baptism, Jesus heard the Spirit calling him to speak the truth and live with grace. Jesus was true to the voice. Jesus gave everything—his days and nights, his hopes and dreams, his work and his life itself to God’s people—sharing, listening, and ministering. When Jesus cried on the cross, “It is finished,” it was his baptism that was complete.

Baptisms, like all beginnings, find their meaning after the event. Beginning is easy. Living and finishing are hard. The significance of any decision takes a while to be fully understood. The first draft doesn’t look like the final copy. The moments of initiation take on meaning when we’re true to the promise of that beginning. Ask anyone who has made a New Years Resolution which has already been broken. Ask anyone who has been married for 52 or so years. It sure doesn’t look like the party of their wedding day.

Brett Younger says, “Baptism is a beginning, the introduction to a book waiting to be written. Beginnings by themselves lack meaning, so our baptisms wait for fulfillment. We are handed a map, but we have to take the trip. It takes our whole life to finish our baptism.”

“Why were you baptized?” It may be easy to look back to that day, the why is a little more difficult to answer. Most of us were infants, some of us would have pictures, we were baptized because that is what our parents decided. We may have been part of many baptisms since then as family or community of faith. The true meaning of your baptism however is not a sentimental memory, it is more likely to be seen today in your decisions and actions. Is there anything you did today that you would not have done if you were “not” baptised? Then ask yourself that question every day and this one, “Are you grateful for the grace of God?” Baptism, it is life changing, just ask Jesus. Amen

HYMN: VU 644 “I Was There”

OUR RESPONSE TO THE WORD OF GOD

RENEWAL OF OUR BAPTISMAL FAITH (written by Gord Dunbar, Kincardine P.C., Kincardine, ON. *Gathering A/C/E* 2021-22, pg. 72)

Remembering the blessing of baptism we are reminded that we are not alone.

We are part of a greater whole, enlivened by Christ.

In our living , the risen Christ reminds us how and to what we are called.

We open ourselves today to God, renewing our commitment to being followers of the Way of Jesus. We choose to turn away from the forces of evil and renounce their power. We choose to turn to Jesus, the Christ, as our Savior, Friend and Lord. We choose to commit ourselves to the mission and ministry of Christ’s church.

Sprinkling of Water/Sign of the Cross

Remember the gift of baptism and be thankful.

(You are invited to dip your finger into the water you prepared, making a cross on your forehead with the water. If there are more than 1 in your household you may wish to do each other.)

You are God’s beloved, filled by the Spirit and blessed by abundant grace.

We remember and commit to our ongoing journey of faith.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS/WE GIVE THANKS

To all celebrating birthdays or anniversaries, may your day be a happy one and the coming year be filled with blessings.

As we recognize our blessings may we also see where we may be a blessing to others, sharing our time, talents and treasure is one way to create a new and better world for all. Let us pray together:

Prayer of dedication: In baptism, we become part of your greater whole - the Body of Christ. We offer to you, O God, our time, our talent, our treasure, dedicating all we have and all we are becoming to your mission of love. May our gifts and our giving be a blessing, by the power of the Spirit. Amen

VU 400 “Lord, Listen to your Children Praying”

PASTORAL PRAYER and LORD’S PRAYER (based on a prayer by Philip Desenis in *When We Pray* (Year C) pg 25.)

Creator God, our Mother/Father, Living Water, River of Mercy, Source of Life, in whom we live and move and have our being, who quenches thirst, refreshes our weariness, bathes, washes and cleanses our wounds, be for us always a fountain of life, and for all the world a river of hope springing up in the midst of despair.

Keep us ever mindful that we are all part of the same body, one family of faith, sharing together in your blessings and promises. We are grateful that , by your grace, we now have access to you through confidence and trust in Christ, the light of the world.

May we, like the magi, follow your star, your light in life’s shadowy places. Teach us to sing your songs no matter where we may be. May we reflect your light to all, no matter their circumstances. Let our lives mirror your love to everyone we meet. Send the light of your truth among all who have given up or given in to the lusts of this world.

If saints are those through whom your light shines yet then make saints of each of us. May the guiding light of your star radiate through the stained glass of our lives in a rainbow of hope, peace, joy, and love. Hear now our petitions for hurting, sick, lonely, isolated and oppressed sisters and brothers of the world.

We ask all this in Christ’s name, who is the light of the world and we pray together our Lord’s prayer ... Our Father ...

CLOSING HYMN: VU 660 “How Firm a Foundation”

BLESSING

Threefold Amen

VU 964 “Go Now in Peace”