

**Sunday 7 January 2024**

**The Baptism of Christ**

**The First Sunday after Epiphany**

# **Covenant Service**



The idea of a covenant between a Christian and God appears frequently in the Bible. John Wesley, who started the Methodist movement, wrote a 'Covenant Prayer' to be read aloud once a year at a special service. It was meant to help people to open themselves more fully to God.

He developed a custom of holding Covenant Services near the beginning of a New Year. Typically, as here, the Covenant replaces the Creed

Wesley understood Christian discipleship as a Covenant relationship. It was like a marriage between two human beings on the one side and God in Christ on the other. Ephesians 5:21–33 says it all.

**Sermon and prayers of intercession** © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

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**Bible readings** © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

All the hymns are hosted on YouTube. Please click on the links to hear them.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

## **Introduction and welcome**

**HYMN 1 O Jesus I have promised** (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

### **The Welcome**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

**All Amen.**

The Lord be with you

**All And also with you.**

### **The Preparation**

**All Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,

with all your soul, with all your mind,

and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

**All Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

Hear the words of the angel to Joseph:

‘You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’

Therefore, let us seek the forgiveness of God through Jesus the Saviour of the world.

**All** Almighty God, our heavenly Father,  
we have sinned against you  
and against our neighbour  
in thought and word and deed,  
through negligence, through weakness,  
through our own deliberate fault.  
We are truly sorry  
and repent of all our sins.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for us,  
forgive us all that is past  
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life  
to the glory of your name.  
**Amen.**

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,  
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
and keep you in life eternal;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All** Amen.

## **The Gloria**

**All** Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world:  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer.

**For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.**

### **The Collect for the Annual Covenant Service**

God of grace,  
through the mediation of your Son,  
you call us into a new covenant.  
Help us therefore to draw near with faith  
and join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**All Amen.**

### **The Collect for the Baptism of Christ**

Eternal Father,  
who at the baptism of Jesus  
revealed him to be your Son,  
anointing him with the Holy Spirit:  
grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit,  
that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
**All Amen.**

### **First reading**

A reading from the first book of Moses called Genesis

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God 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. *Genesis 1:1-5*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

## **Second reading**

A reading from Acts of the Apostles

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' Then he said, 'Into what then were you baptised?' They answered, 'Into John's baptism.' Paul said, 'John baptised with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—altogether there were about twelve of them. *Acts 19:1-7*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

**HYMN 2 Purify my heart**

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

## **Gospel reading**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark

**All Glory to you O Lord.**

John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' *Mark 1:4-11*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

**All Praise to you O Christ.**

## Sermon

Today fact three possible designations. Today is the first Sunday after Epiphany; we also remember the baptism of Christ; and, thirdly, we also affirm our commitment to the Gospel with the annual covenant. At first sight, these three elements look quite different but, as we'll see, they coincide very clearly.

We have entered the first season after Christmas, of **Epiphany**. It formally started yesterday when the Church remembered the three wise men, magi, 'kings', who followed a star and found the baby Jesus. You'll find the story in the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel. They sought Jesus and found him and in token of recognition they offered costly gifts that signified their recognition of who Jesus really was.

The word 'epiphany' itself means a moment of 'revelation' or 'realisation'. In context, therefore, what today we might call 'a lightbulb moment' qualifies as an epiphany. For the church, an epiphany means a realisation of something about God, or that God has chosen to reveal something about Himself, which is essentially the same thing. That's why we make it a habit to look for God during the season of Epiphany and explore the ways in which He reveals Himself and, indeed, the whole concept of revelation.

Our second title for today in the Church calendar is the **Baptism of Christ** during which we remember the formal start of Jesus' ministry. As we read today's Gospel passage, it suggests a hinge, a fulcrum or pivot, about which Jesus' ministry unfolded. Before his baptism involved a period of listening and preparation while afterward was the more active, visible 'doing part' of his life. And, crucially, his baptism was a moment of profound epiphany—it surely doesn't get bigger than this: we've just heard the story of a voice sounding from heaven itself which said, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'. This epiphany says not only that God exists—if you like, that He's somehow *there*—but also much about His nature: crucially, that He desires a relationship as intimate as that between a parent and their child, with Jesus as Father and Jesus as his dearly loved Son. The rest of the Gospels explore what the Fatherhood of God meant to Jesus and how he

responded to the knowledge. The Gospels, when read as Jesus' response to epiphany, become longer and richer.

Today's third title or theme is **Covenant Sunday**. A covenant is maybe an old-fashioned word, but it means a promise or legally-binding vow, and in token of which something changes hands. A wedding is a vow with a consequence, so we understand the giving of a ring during the service in that light, for example. In the same way, a legal covenant drawn up by a lawyer has a token amount of money attached, or a seal affixed, or a contract that is formally signed with proof of delivery, and so forth. Our covenant with God today is similarly a promise because we commit to serving God come what may. And in token of the covenant we're making during this service, we give of self and at the same time receive something of God in the form of bread and wine during the Eucharist.

So, to recap, we have three separate themes running through today's service: epiphany, baptism, and covenant. I wonder if you remember Venn diagrams at school? They are diagrams with circles each of which represents something slightly different; we then look at the areas of the areas created when these circles intersect, analysing what they have in common. Well, today's three themes certainly overlap: the section in which all three overlap concerns the theme of epiphany and response. All of us as Christians and followers of the Lord Jesus are committed to looking for God, and we do so in order to know Him better. All of us as Christians have received the gift of the Holy Spirit most notably at our baptism, when we were cleansed in a sacramental way, anointed by the Spirit, and accepted more fully as a dearly-loved child of God. And all of us will shortly say the covenant prayer and enact a sacred vow with God.

The overlap is this: as anointed children of God, we look for God to tell us what He wants for us, looking for an epiphany in which He tells us the next step, the next idea or revelation in our own customised journey of pilgrimage and faith. That step will inevitably mean a new anointing, new cleaning, new equipping for that new phase of service. *And we commit to respond.* That response will inevitably differ for you and for me, and will differ because the epiphanies themselves will differ, our life circumstances will differ, and so on. But whatever the epiphany and whatever the incidental detail in our lives, we commit to respond to the love of God as it reveals itself. That's it. That is the substance of our covenant today.

Finally, as rings are given during a wedding and a document or contract during a legal ceremony, so we give our lives to God and He gives them back to us but anointed and now sparkling with spiritual eternity.

Today, then, we make our covenant with God.

## **The Covenant Prayer**

Beloved in Christ, let us again claim for ourselves this covenant which God has made with his people, and take upon us the yoke of Christ. This means that we are content that he appoints us our place and work, and that he himself be our reward. I therefore invite you all to renew your Covenant with God the Almighty.

*It may be wise to say this pray very slowly, maybe line by line and ponder every word.*

**All** I am no longer my own but yours.  
Put me to what you will,  
rank me with whom you will;  
put me to doing,  
put me to suffering;  
let me be employed for you,  
or laid aside for you,  
exalted for you,  
or brought low for you;  
let me be full,  
let me be empty,  
let me have all things,  
let me have nothing:  
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things  
to your pleasure and disposal.  
And now, glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.  
And the covenant now made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven.  
Amen and Amen.



## Prayers of intercession

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, help us to mean it and give us the strength to apply it. In particular [...]

Lord, in your mercy

**All Amen.**

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, help your Church to be new, pure and in complete communion with You. In particular [...]

Lord, in your mercy

**All Amen.**

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, we pray that the structures of the world will be renewed, become cleaner and realigned themselves with You. In particular [...]

Lord, in your mercy

**All Amen.**

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, we ask that you'll remind us to work to alleviate the suffering we see everywhere around us. And we pray for those whose suffering we see. In particular [...]

Lord, in your mercy

**All Amen.**

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, we pray for those who have died —today, during this past year and those whose time in this earth will expire during this coming year. Prepare them to meet with you.

Lord, in your mercy

**All Amen.**

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.**

## **The peace**

Blessed are the peacemakers:  
they shall be called children of God.

We meet in the name of Christ and Share his peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

**All And also with you.**

**HYMN 3 Of the Father's love begotten** [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

## **The Dismissal**

May God the Father keep you in all your days.

**All Amen.**

May God the Son shield you in all your ways.

**All Amen.**

May God the Spirit bring you healing and peace.

**All Amen.**

May God the Holy Trinity drive all darkness from you  
and pour upon you blessing and light.

**All Amen.**

And the blessing of God the Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with you now and remain with you always.

**All Amen.**

**HYMN 4 All I once held dear** [\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**All In the name of Christ. Amen.**

# The Liturgy of the Sacrament

## Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

**All and also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**All We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**All It is right to give thanks and praise.**

Father, you made the world and love your creation.

You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.

His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.

And so we gladly thank you,

with saints and angels praising you, and saying,

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,

through Jesus Christ, our Lord;

and as we obey his command,

send your Holy Spirit,

that broken bread and wine outpoured

may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends  
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:

Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;

do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.  
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:  
Drink this, all of you;  
this is my blood of the new covenant,  
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,  
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,  
we proclaim his death and resurrection  
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

**All Christ has died.**  
**Christ is risen.**  
**Christ will come again.**

Lord of all life,  
help us to work together for that day  
when your kingdom comes  
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,  
gather us in your loving arms  
and bring us with all the saints  
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,  
for ever and ever.

**All Amen.**

## **The Lord's Prayer**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

## **Breaking of the Bread**

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,  
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ

which he gave for you,

and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,

and feed on him in your hearts

by faith with thanksgiving.

**All** We do not presume  
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,  
trusting in our own righteousness,  
but in your manifold and great mercies.  
We are not worthy  
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.  
But you are the same Lord  
whose nature is always to have mercy.  
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,  
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ  
and to drink his blood,  
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body  
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,  
and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.  
**Amen.**

Communion is distributed.

### **Prayer after Communion**

All praise to you,  
almighty God and heavenly king,  
who sent your Son into the world  
to take our nature upon him  
and to be born of a pure virgin:  
grant that, as we are born again in him,  
so he may continually dwell in us  
and reign on earth as he reigns in heaven,  
now and for ever.

**All** **Amen**

**All** **Almighty God,**  
**we thank you for feeding us**  
**with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.**  
**Through him we offer you our souls and bodies**  
**to be a living sacrifice.**  
**Send us out**  
**in the power of your Spirit**  
**to live and work**  
**to your praise and glory.**  
**Amen.**