

**Collects, Readings and Reflection for The First Sunday of Epiphany Baptism of Christ  
10<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

*You can use this sheet in conjunction with our recorded service  
which you can find here <https://youtu.be/kyax3EKpf6k>,  
on the Christ Church Shamley Green YouTube channel  
or via the link provided on our website [www.shamleygreen.net](http://www.shamleygreen.net).*



**COLLECT**

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,. Amen.

**FIRST READING**

**Acts 19:1-7**

1 While Apollos was in Corinth,  
Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples.  
2 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.'  
3 Then he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?'  
They answered, 'Into John's baptism.'  
4 Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance,  
telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.'  
5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.  
6 When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them,  
and they spoke in tongues and prophesied –  
7 altogether there were about twelve of them.

**GOSPEL**

**Mark 1:4-11**

John the baptizer 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 baptized 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 baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'  
In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized 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.'

**REFLECTION** *The Reverend Sally Davies*

Once upon a time there was a man who had spent his life trying to tell people about God and, more than that, to introduce them to God so that they could get to know him for themselves. You

see, he knew that God loved them, very much indeed, and that God wanted them to know it too. But over the years of telling people about God and showing them God's love by caring for them and trying to help them when they were in trouble, the man grew tired and realised that he had spent so much time and energy on other people's relationship with God that his own relationship had begun to dry up. After twenty years, he was offered a time of rest and refreshment and he thought how wonderful; he would have plenty of time to listen to God again, to nourish their friendship and to see that relationship grow. So each day he set aside a special time for this and he listened and listened.

On the first day, he heard – silence.

On the second day, he heard – silence.

On the third day, he heard – silence.

On the fourth day, he heard – silence.

And so it went on for a week and another and then another. Eight, nine weeks went past and the man knew he would soon have to return to work. Then, finally, the silence was broken. God spoke to the man again. He spoke just one word:

“Beloved.”

All the questions the man had been asking, all the decisions he had to make about the future, all the longing in his heart: all was caught up and answered and healed and enlivened in that one word. (See *'Exploring God's Mercy', by Stephen Croft.*)

That man was Stephen Croft, now the Bishop of Oxford, but really I didn't need to name him because his story is also your story and my story, it is the stories and songs in the Bible, the story of any who seek God and long to hear his voice speaking to them. You see all these intersect because that word, “Beloved”, is spoken down the ages to all who are looking and listening for the truth about themselves. It breaks the silence of our fears and inadequacies; it breaks the silence of neglect or betrayal; it breaks the silence of failure, damage, hurt, confusion, powerlessness. And it breaks the silence and isolation brought upon many by COVID-19.

“Beloved”. The word spoken in our gospel reading today to Jesus at *his* baptism and the truest word ever spoken. If you believe nothing else about yourself, believe this: that you are known and loved by God. If you believe or understand nothing else about God, believe and know this: that at the core of his nature is his love for you and nothing and no-one has the power to change that. Nothing you do or say, nothing anyone else does or says, nothing that happens to you, good or bad, can ever separate you from the love of God.

“Beloved”. Not “I'll love you if or when you do this or that, or stop doing this or that...”. Not “I love you now but who knows what the future holds” or “I used to love you but people and circumstances change”. Not “I really did love you but now I've found someone else.” God's love is not the same as our human forms of love which may be wonderful but may also be conditional, provisional and fallible.

So if you take nothing else away from this reflection, take that one word “Beloved” which is as true of you today as it was of Jesus 2000 years ago. It is a word which will never go out of fashion, never *not* be needed to be spoken and heard. And if we are ever to grow and become the people God has created us to be, we need to hear that word loud and clear for it is not only a truth about ourselves we need to learn *but also* a truth about other people we need to practise if we are to live at peace and with kindness in the world God has given us.

The Baptism of Christ is kept as a special feast day in the season of Epiphany, the season of God's revelation, because for those who have been neglected or abused, exploited or marginalised, it is a total and wondrous revelation that they are loved, that they belong to God and are precious to him. God's love is indeed a revelation for any who have suffered hurt and rejection. For some it may even seem too good to be true but that's exactly how we know that it *is*, for, as Jesus once said, ‘What is impossible for human beings, is possible for God.’ We have a

habit of warning the gullible: 'if something seems too good to be true, then it probably isn't true' but with God the opposite applies: 'if something seems too good to be true, then it could be God'. And *this* is God: God telling you the truth about yourself: "Beloved". Jesus, you and me: God's beloved children with whom he is well pleased. Believe it, celebrate it, *live it*.

### **FINAL PRAYER**

Heavenly Father,  
at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son:  
may we recognize him as our Lord  
and know ourselves to be your beloved children;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(*Common Worship: Additional Collects*)



### **BLESSING**

Christ the Son of God, perfect in you the image of his glory  
and gladden your hearts with the good news of his kingdom;  
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
rest upon you this day and remain with you until we meet again. Amen.

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