



## GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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### **Baptism of Our Lord**

**January 10, 2021**

**Tree of Life**

Our re-creation in baptism is an image of the Genesis creation, where the Spirit of God moved over the waters. Both Mark's gospel and the story in Acts make clear that it is the Spirit's movement that distinguishes Jesus' baptism from John's. The Spirit has come upon us as upon Jesus and the Ephesians, calling us God's beloved children and setting us on Jesus' mission to re-create the world in the image of God's vision of justice and peace.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

## GATHERING

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

On this day that we remember the baptism of our Lord, we give thanks not just for our own baptism but for the message that baptism brings: a message of hope, a message of community, a message of love. For baptism isn't the message itself, but a mode through which we can receive this message. We see the purity of God's promise in the water itself. We hear God entering through the splashing sounds it makes. We feel God present as it envelopes our hands and skin with its refreshing coolness.

And so we give thanks. We give thanks for this reminder that we can see, hear, and touch. We give thanks for this gift of baptism that shows us how God reaches out to us, enters into our lives, welcomes us, and recreates us as God's beloved. And as those of you who have water in your homes use that water to make a sign of the cross on your foreheads, may we all be reminded of God's unending love and grace, through Jesus Christ our baptized Lord.

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

**GATHERING HYMN:** Beneath The Tree of Life (TOL p.3)

#### GREETING

The penetrating grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the indwelling love of God, and the very present fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**KYRIE** (TOL p. 4)

**HYMN OF PRAISE** (TOL p. 6)

#### PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of heaven and earth, while apart, we gather in the name of Jesus to hear your Word speak to us and to be immersed in your Spirit. May your grace, truth, and love pour into our hearts and lives, filling us with the joy that praises your name, through Jesus Christ your beloved Son.

**Amen.**

## WORD

#### FIRST READING: Genesis 1:1-5

A reading from Genesis.

*Out of chaos, God brings order. Out of the formless void, God brings light. This familiar story was good news for the Israelites, who experienced much chaos in their history. It remains good news for us. God created and continues to create new life.*

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## PSALM: Psalm 29

- <sup>1</sup>Ascribe to the LORD, you gods,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- <sup>2</sup>**Ascribe to the LORD the glory due God's name;  
worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.**
- <sup>3</sup>The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders;  
the LORD is upon the mighty waters.
- <sup>4</sup>**The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;  
the voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.**
- <sup>5</sup>The voice of the LORD breaks the cedar trees;  
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon;
- <sup>6</sup>**the LORD makes Lebanon skip like a calf,  
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.**
- <sup>7</sup>The voice of the LORD  
bursts forth in lightning flashes.
- <sup>8</sup>**The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;  
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.**
- <sup>9</sup>The voice of the LORD makes the oak trees writhe and strips the forests bare.  
And in the temple of the LORD all are crying, "Glory!"
- <sup>10</sup>**The LORD sits enthroned above the flood;  
the LORD sits enthroned as king forevermore.**
- <sup>11</sup>O LORD, give strength to your people;  
give them, O LORD, the blessings of peace.

## SECOND READING: Acts 19:1-7

A reading from Acts.

*In Ephesus, Paul encounters people who had received John's baptism of repentance but had never heard of the Holy Spirit or of baptism in the name of Jesus. After Paul baptizes them, the Holy Spirit comes upon them and empowers them with gifts of the Spirit.*

<sup>1</sup>While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup>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." <sup>3</sup>Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." <sup>4</sup>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." <sup>5</sup>On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—<sup>7</sup>altogether there were about twelve of them.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (TOL p. 10)

### GOSPEL: Mark 1:4-11

The holy gospel according to Mark.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*Mark's gospel reports the story of Jesus' baptism with some irony: the one on whom the Spirit descends is himself the one who will baptize others with the Holy Spirit.*

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### **SERMON**

O God, send your Spirit upon us, that whatever veil might be hiding you from us be lifted and we see your glory and hear your voice, gently calling us your beloved children, along with Jesus Christ, through whom we pray. Amen.

So this past Wednesday, I sat down at my desk with every intention to write this very sermon. I had in mind already a way to start this sermon with a Star Wars reference and everything. But as I sat down, I made the mistake of checking my phone first and reading the news. And I saw it. The "protest" (which looked more like a riot to me) happening on Capitol Hill in Washington DC, the culmination of all the stuff that has been happening in American politics in the past 4 years, and this (again, to me) blatant insult in the face of democracy.

And whether or not you agree with this protest or not, it is hard to justify breaking into the congress building, occupying the offices of elected officials, and making a mockery of the systems of law and order that have governed the United States for so many years. I don't even like it when my kids sit in my office chair, because they spin around it like crazy and ruin all the angles that I spent so much time perfecting for maximum comfort and efficiency. I can't even imagine seeing images online of strangers rifling through my papers and files in the name of protest. It's hard to justify that kind of action. Actually, I don't think it can be justified at all. Impossible, really.

Conspiracy theories aside, I have never been a fan of protests, peaceful or not, but especially violent ones. I didn't like this so-called protest. I didn't like how the Black Lives Matter movement escalated into violence. I didn't like how Vancouverites rioted the Canucks losing the Stanley Cup not once, but twice in my lifetime. Let me make this very clear though, I'm not saying that people don't have a right to protest, that has been solidified in the American Constitution (as well as the Canadian Charter of Rights for that matter). But when people get violent, I just don't see what that accomplishes. No one, when attacked, just says, "ah, I see your point. Let me change my ways now". So to me, whoever instigates the violence is just wrong and misguided. Whoever encourages the violence is wrong and manipulative. And whoever condones the violence is wrong and in my eyes, evil.

It's this kind of turmoil that makes the world seem so dark to me. It's this kind of nonsensical violence that makes the world seem so lost. It's this kind of evil that makes me feel like the world just isn't deserving of a Saviour.

Because this violence isn't helping anything. This finger-pointing, gas-lighting, and conspiracy theories aren't doing anything but split us apart. All these Facebook and Twitter educations are just making us all dumber on the whole. So while this kind of evil makes me feel like the world doesn't deserve a Saviour, I cry out to God for mercy, I cry out to God for healing, I cry out to God to save us from ourselves.

Today is Baptism of Our Lord Sunday, a day when we get a very familiar story of Jesus being baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptizer. And as I've mentioned before, the Gospel according to Mark wastes no time with frivolous words and details, but rather just gets right to the action and the point of the story. No word is wasted. And the words that struck me this time around are "torn apart," because doesn't it feel like the world has just been torn apart?

This part of the gospel happens right in the beginning, right after that bit that we got way back on the Second Sunday in Advent. Remember that? How it starts with, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ"? Well, this is the Star Wars reference I was talking about earlier but got sidetracked with Wednesday's news. You know how every Star Wars movie starts? "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away." Then, for the main movies at least, comes this iconic opening crawl of text that no one has time to read or if they do, they don't remember it or even understand it. This crawl explains the backdrop of the movie you're about to either really enjoy if it's the original trilogy or suffer through if it is anything else. But every movie, regardless of how the last one ends, starts with some kind of turmoil. Some problem has arisen and it needs to be solved. It is always somehow a dark time for our heroes, and somehow the Force has to play some kind of role to save them.

And this time around, I totally see that in this portion of Mark. Not saying that Jesus is Luke Skywalker or John is Obi-Wan Kenobi or anything, but Mark is written in a time of turmoil. A time of darkness. A time in which good news is not just welcome, but desperately needed. Cried out for, even.

Those just happen to be the times that I feel like we're in now, solidified by the events of this past week. We are still in the middle of this pandemic. We are still in the middle of this political unrest. We are still in the middle of what seems like perpetual darkness that no amount of Zoom calls and meetings can resolve, no amount of mask wearing and spouting out internet stats can quell, and no amount of preaching, sound or not, can brighten it up.

But in the midst of it, we get the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. And the first act of this Jesus as told by Mark isn't a birth, it isn't getting lost as a child in the temple, it isn't even being with God while being God, but it is getting baptised. A full welcome and acceptance into God's family and kingdom. A declaration of who Jesus is and made to be. A tearing apart of the heavens so that God can come in.

Tearing apart.

See in this time of turmoil, this time of darkness, this time of evil in the world, God tears the heavens apart and enters into our lives. God has done this. God is doing this. And God will always do this for as long as we are a people in need of God's mercy and salvation.

The problem is, we haven't been listening. Instead, we stuck to our political agendas, our conspiracy rhetoric, and our insatiable need to be right and on the winning side and effectively disallowed our ears to hear God to speaking to our communities, to our lives, to us. We've disallowed our eyes to see God present in and around us. We've disallowed our hearts to feel God tearing open the veil that we have put over us that covers God's face from us, and we've filled ourselves with anger, hatred, and fear.

And I'm sick of it.

This is a difficult time we're living in for many different reasons. This is a tumultuous time because of the polarizing opinions of those in power and influence. This is a dark time because we have very violently forced God, morality, and basic human decency out of our lives in favour of bigotry, pride, and idolatry disguised as nationality, loyalty, and patriotism.

See, just as God wasn't Rome as much as the Romans wanted the Jews to believe, nor was God Israel as much as the Jews wanted the Romans to believe, nor is God any nation of this earth, be it the United States, Canada, the Vatican, or whatever else people might equate with God. God never has been and never will be a nation. Rather, God is the love between brother and sister, stranger and friend, ally or enemy. God is the compassion found in community and right relationship. God is the peace and joy that we are given in seeing all people, including ourselves and even those whom don't like very much, as God's very own beloved children, full of fault and error but yet full of redemption and forgiveness; full of imperfection and poor decisions but yet full of grace and mercy; full of human nature and sin but yet full of God's unending love and worth.

This isn't easy to see especially in our enemies, but this is God tearing open the expanse that is keeping us in the darkness, opening our eyes to see the light, and physically holding us tight within all of creation, our communities, and the waters of baptism and declaring to us all that we are God's children, dearly beloved, with whom God is well pleased.

Not because of who we are, mind you, nor because of what we do or what kind of power we amass for ourselves, but because God has made us, formed us, and deemed us as worthy. See this is a gift, not something that we earn or call dibs on or elected to, but given freely because God. Is. Love.

God shows us this through the wonders of creation. God reminds us of this through the working of God's Spirit. God reveals this to us through the baptism of Jesus that welcomes us all into this eternal family and kingdom.

In this season we're moving into after the Epiphany, may we continue to see God on the other side of the veil that has been torn apart and can no longer separate us from God, from each other, and the Spirit working in us all. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY:** Christ, Be Our Light (ELW #715)

## **APOSTLES' CREED (TOL p. 11)**

With the whole beloved people of God, let's confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

## **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Led to see God entering and dwelling in our lives, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "Lord, in your ever-present mercy," and you are all invited to respond with hear our prayer. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your glory and strength are above all gods yet you enter the world with grace and love. Give us the eyes to see your hand at work in our lives, that we might feel the blessing that comes from you. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, we worship you and give you the glory due to your name. May the beauty of your holiness rest on us, your children, that our ministry and service to others be infused with your love and grace. We remember in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and for our companion churches of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for St. Peter's Shared Ministry in Hudson's Hope and all the pastors and leaders that serve them; and for Christ Lutheran Church in Kelowna and their pastor Patricia Giannelia. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your might and glory are seen in the mighty waters, skies, and lands of your creation. Continue to reveal your presence with us through the beauty of this planet, that it inspire us to properly care for all that we have been entrusted. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your voice is powerful and full of splendor and authority. Speak your truth to all the nations, that all people might learn to see the value and worth that you give to every individual. We pray especially for Solyana Amanuel, that she might start her journey to our country soon. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you bless us with strength and your peace brings healing. We pray for those among us who are ill, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love for us all be known and relied on for wholeness and wellbeing. Especially we remember Paula; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Beulah; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry; those who have contracted or been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you sit enthroned as king forevermore and you welcome us to live in your kingdom with all the saints forever. May the lives of those we have loved and lost always inspire us to live lives of faith and love, guided by your truth and light. Lord, in your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your presence in our lives, revealed to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## MEAL

### PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

### OFFERING PRAYER

O God, every good and perfect gift comes from you, and this food we have before us is no exception. May it remind us of your very real and tangible presence in our lives as it connects us together and fills us with your truth and love, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

### DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

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

### PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty, and our joy, that we should at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O holy and almighty God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who revealed to us just how present you are in our lives, that we might be joined with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth, in praising your name with this unending hymn:

**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY** (TOL p. 14)

### THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord we ascribe to you the glory and strength due to your name, for we worship you for your beauty and holiness. For your voice is mighty and powerful and full of splendor as it rings throughout the earth, declaring to all creatures, all plants, and all lands that you are our glorious God. You sit enthroned above our transgression, above our shortcomings, above our sin and you redeem and save us through the life and ministry of your Son, Jesus, whom you sent to us to be one of us, and who...

...on the night he was betrayed, sat with his friends for a meal and took some bread, gave you thanks, broke and shared it and said, "take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the cup, gave thanks, and shared that saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is through this breaking and sharing of food that we are given strength and blessings of peace, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

For even in our times of trouble, O God, you rip open the heavens and enter into our lives, manifesting yourself in the world, in our communities, and even in the food we eat, through the teachings and ministry of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, as one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**LORD'S PRAYER** (TOL p. 17)

Gathered into the presence of God, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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.**

**Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.**

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

**INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

Taste and see God with us.

**Thanks be to God.**

**COMMUNION**

**COMMUNION HYMN:** Lamb of God (TOL p. 17)

**POST-COMMUNION HYMN:** By Your Hand You Feed Your People (TOL p. 18)

### **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

We give you thanks, O God, for every blessing and spiritual gift you have poured out upon us, even in this simple food and drink. May we be nourished and empowered to do your work in your kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

### **SENDING**

#### **BLESSING**

May God our Sovereign hold you and keep you,  
God our Saviour bless you and be present with you,  
God who is the Spirit descend upon you wherever you are and declare you beloved  
now and forever.

**Amen.**

**SENDING HYMN:** Light Dawns on a Weary World (ELW #726)

#### **DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, journey in the light and love of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

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