

10th January, 2021

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use while you are unable to attend worship in a church building

Opening prayer

Glory be to you great bearer of light
All things came into being through you
You made the sun to warm us and bring light by day
And the moon and the stars to shine at night
You created the cycles of our seasons through which every living being is sustained.
Your works your ways are beyond our capacity to comprehend
Yet despite their magnitude you are closer to us than is our own breathing.
Glory be to you great bearer of light

Now in a time of silence let us bring before God those things for which we seek forgiveness.

Lord, in that illusory sense of separation from you we fail to trust in your ways. We allow the smallness of our minds to act and think and feel and in so doing we hurt and harm and seek only to serve ourselves. Forgive us Lord. Remind us of who we are **in you** and help us to restore our sense of oneness with you, the living God.

Amen

Hymn - Be still for the presence of the Lord

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
The holy One, is here;
Come bow before him now
With reverence and fear
In him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
The holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire,
With splendour he is crowned:
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant king of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place:
He comes to cleanse and heal,
To minister his grace -
No work too hard for him.
In faith receive from him.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place. David J. Evans

Reading Mark 1: 4-11

4 John the baptizer appeared[a] in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** 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. **6** Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** 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. **8** I have baptized you with[b] water; but he will baptize you with[c] the Holy Spirit."**9** In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** 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. **11** And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved;[d] with you I am well pleased."

Reflection

In the Church's liturgical calendar, this particular Sunday is the first Sunday after epiphany and so I want to reflect upon this through our gospel reading for today - and in particular verses 9-11 of that reading.

Epiphany means "manifestation" or "showing forth". It is also, particularly in the Eastern Church, called Theophany, (the manifestation of God). The feast of the Epiphany commemorates the first two occasions on which Jesus' divinity, was manifested:

The first being when the three wise men visited the infant Jesus in Bethlehem, and the second when John the Baptist baptized him in the River Jordan. The Roman Catholic and Protestant churches tend to emphasize the visit of the wise men when they celebrate the Epiphany, whilst the Eastern Orthodox churches focus on Jesus' baptism.

Our passage from Mark's gospel is said to contain a theophany in that the world was granted a revelation of the Holy Trinity. All three Persons were made manifest together: the Father testified from on high to the divine Sonship of Jesus; the Son received His Father's testimony; and the Spirit was seen in the form of a dove, descending from the Father and resting upon the Son.

But what does it really mean to us that this occurred two millennia ago?

One of the great Christian mystics, Meister Eckhart famously asks precisely this question of the birth of Christ...

"What does it avail me that Mary birthed Christ long ago if I do not also birth Him in my soul?"

This idea of an interior birthing of Christ in the innermost ground of the soul is at the heart of the Christian contemplative tradition. Another metaphor might be an awakening to the Christ who dwells within; either way it gives rise to a sense of Christ as a palpable inner presence rather than merely an historic or external event. Over time, as we learn to be present to this inner presence, it grows within us, indeed Paul once declared 'it is not I who lives but Christ who lives in me'. That is *not to say* that we become Christ but that in time Christ becomes a full expression within us.

This birthing or awakening, is in itself a personal theophany, the moment when God's presence is revealed in the innermost part of the human soul and brings us to the experience of God as being 'closer to us than we are to ourselves - to quote Augustine. It is an epiphany as we realise that any separation we may have felt previously was merely an illusion.

In the christian contemplative tradition this awakening is not (as some assume) for a select few but *is* indeed the natural trajectory of the human soul - though precisely when and how each soul comes to this fullness in Christ remains a part of the great *eternal mystery of being* which may not always be evident given our temporal limitations.

So having explored a contemplative view of the birth of Christ in the soul what about that moment of theophany at the baptism of Jesus? Again, we might ask what does it avail us that this event took place some 2 millennia ago if it does not touch our own soul?

Well here is the thing, as we understand Christ to be an indwelling presence (as opposed to a mere historic or external teaching) so we come to realise that the words of verse 11 speak as true to us today as they did to Jesus back then. That is, God says to each of us 'You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased' Now mainly we want to reject such an idea, we have generally been taught to be so full of guilt, shame and unworthiness that to imagine God speaking such words to us would seem almost like a blasphemy.

The problem for us is that before we begin to awaken to that inner, precious presence then we are indeed the prodigal child, living life according to the illusion of separation, completely unaware of our heritage and of the presence within us who loves us regardless and will go on loving us regardless; the presence who says to us, each and every moment of our lives, 'You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased'.

To understand the great mystery of who we truly are in Christ then we must learn to understand the mystery as Jesus does, that is, to understand that, 'the Kingdom of God is within you' (luke 17:21). Though the journey home to God may begin with an historic understanding of Jesus' life - though it may develop as a teaching about how to live and what to do in order to be a good christian, there comes a point when the trajectory takes an inward turn to the interior path.

Finding that still, small, innermost place within the soul where God's ground and your ground meet is not about withdrawing from the world but rather about rediscovering who you really are as one who is made in the image of God; as one whose life is transformed from within and not a conformation with a set of oughts and shoulds; as one as one who consciously bears the very presence of God *for the world*; and as one for whom the words of God, (that have always been whispered to you) ... 'You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased' finally ring true. Amen

Time for reflection

Intercessions... in these intercessions a time of silence is observed for each section

Light a candle for - The church... May we be a beacon of light and hope in these challenging times. May we find ways to share the good news of hope and reconciliation that remain the foundational truth despite the difficulties we might face.

Light a candle for - The world...buffeted by these challenging times. May we see the possibilities for change and play our part in the transforming process that is unfolding so that a better world might be realised by all.

Light a candle for - those known to us who need our prayer

Light a candle for - the the needs, desires and the yearnings of our own hearts. Amen

Lords Prayer.

Hymn Great is thy faithfulness

"Great is Thy faithfulness, " O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.
"Great is Thy faithfulness!" "Great is Thy faithfulness!"
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
"Great is Thy faithfulness, " Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.
"Great is Thy faithfulness!" "Great is Thy faithfulness!"
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
"Great is Thy faithfulness, " Lord, unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
"Great is Thy faithfulness!" "Great is Thy faithfulness!"
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
"Great is Thy faithfulness, " Lord, unto me! Thomas O Chisholm

Blessing

May the light of God surround you
The love of God enfold you
The power of God protect you
The presence of God watch over you **Amen**

Prepared by Jayne Webb

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