

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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◆ Sunday January 10, 2021 ◆

Baptism of the Lord Sunday

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

* indicates a time to stand, if you are able
congregational responses are in **boldface type**

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE

* OPENING HYMN – *O Radiant Christ, Incarnate Word* VU 84
*O Radiant Christ, incarnate Word,
eternal love revealed in time:
come, make your home with-in our hearts,
that we may dwell in light sublime.*

*Our bartered, busy lives burn dim,
too tired to are, too numb to feel.
Come, shine upon our shadowed world:
your radiance bathes with power to heal.*

*Your glory shone at Jordan's stream,
the font where we were born anew.
Attune your church to know your near;
illumine all we say and do.*

*O Light of Nations,
fill the earth;
our faith and hope and love renew.
Come, lead the peoples to your peace,
as stars once led the way to you.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: A New Year; same perpetual light.

All: When we wake, you are there Lord Jesus; when we lay our heads down and go to sleep, you are still there, filling us with your Holy light.

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

One: Every second of every minute, every minute of every hour, every hour of every day...

All: is God's.

One: Every breath we take, every heart that beats, every laugh lived, every tear dropped...

All: is God's.

One: We come with all that we are to worship God.

All: Let us bring our very being into the presence of God.

HYMN – *Christ, When for Us You Were Baptized*

VU 99

*Christ, when for us you were baptized,
God's Spirit on you came,
as peaceful as a dove and yet
as urgent as a flame.*

*God called you, "My beloved One,"
declared delight in you,
anointed you to preach and heal,
God's holy will to do.*

*Straightway and steadfast until death,
you then obeyed God's call,
freely as Son of God to serve
and give your life for all.*

*Baptize us with your Spirit, God,
your cross on us be signed,*

*that, likewise in God's service, we
may perfect freedom find.*

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

**Every time we answer your call, O God, we meet you again as if
for the first time.**

**Each moment is a revelation, each meeting leads to our hearts
opening wider to you and to others.**

**Each encounter shines light onto the strength of relationships
fostered while following Jesus the Christ -**

**The one who invites and equips, the one who is companion and
guide,**

**The one who is Giver and Gift. This is our prayer to you, O
God. Amen.**

A TIME FOR CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

Story: Happy New Year

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

Reader: Ralph Moulton

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

One: We think back to Advent, how it was filled with wonder -
the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, the heavenly host
dazzling the shepherds,

The star guiding the magi to Jesus. Today, we remember the
baptism of Jesus and Your energy descending upon him.

We pray that your Spirit will envelop and energize us, so
that we may follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

THE WISDOM OF ISRAEL: Genesis 1:1-5

(The first days of Creation)

One: 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.

One: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God!

REFLECTION: A Renewed Look at Creation! - Genesis 1:1-5
God spoke creation into being. From the darkness, an emptiness, a void of, nothingness, He first formed the thought, took time, mulled it over, and then, fashioned, light. This was the first act of creation. Illumination burst forth by God's command. Darkness was separated by light. God made, transformed, moved and separated what already existed so that all life was possible. One might expect that God had been readying the cosmos for some time before Genesis starts. This was not a one-day affair. Jewish lore tells of God practicing, experimenting and recycling 974 creations before settling upon one (ours). This is a God who could not wait to finally get started. Only, then, could the subsequent steps be put in place. God established the beginning of time. Light, as the basis of life and order, He judged to be morally good. One would surmise that God felt delight. "Yes, that's just right!"

This light would have profound implications for the later God shattering inbreaking in the “light” of the world, the birth of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, too, follows God’s pattern. He was involved in years of preparation, learning wisdom and readying himself for his ministry. After all that preparation, it was then time to act decisively.

In subsequent verses, we learn that each time God created something new, God perceived it to be good. However, we are given a clue in commanding humans to “subdue” the earth, there is the assumption that the earth was not fully developed at the end of the seventh day. There was work for humans to do in continuing and co-creating. This creation was a long-term project that required our intervention and action. It implies an ongoing process within which improvement was considered possible.

Our text today does not progress naturally into the six days of creation. It settles on the first day, highlighting the uniqueness and supremacy of God as a God of action. God creates, not out of obligation, but out of freedom. In this initial action, harmony is set in place between light and darkness and overall unity within creation.

There are many brilliant scholars who dispute our Biblical record of Creation; many who cannot fathom a Divinely inspired beginning, and prefer to believe that the Universe came into being through some random chance combination of just the right factors at the right moment in time. Humans have been endowed with reasoning power, the ability to question everything. Significant strides have been made throughout time in our understanding of the totality of the intricate life supporting systems; systems that

interconnect and are interwoven through plant, animal and human life.

We live a far distance away from this stunning act of creation, but we are an essential part of it. How do we restore reverence for Creation and allow it to be part of our daily living? We tend to take it for granted and only in moments of exquisite awe do we realize its holiness.

Our DNA comes from the original act of light. We were part of the original plan. Everything had to first be set in place for our survival and comfort. When we contemplate the intelligence in the design of our universe, there is no other option than to be held in awe.

This creation story is a way of holding onto hope, when all signs of order in our lives have been destroyed and we must look for signs of the creative work of God beyond our control. If God is still creating order out of chaos in the succession of day and night, maybe God will one day create order once more out of chaos in the lives of God's people. We are to hold on and not lose hope.

Our Creation story begins without preamble or prologue. The scene begins with God's activity. God is the main actor. In the beginning, God. We marvel at God's great and vast creation. From the Mind of God, we came into existence. As we start into Genesis, the house lights come up, struggles occur all around us, and we share them as co-creators with God. It is God, however, who brings the healing of the all that is. In the beginning, God. Amen.

PSALM: Psalm 29

One:

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; worship the LORD in holy splendor.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters.

The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, "Glory!"

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

THE GOSPEL: Mark 1:4-11 (*Jesus is baptized by John*)

One: 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."

One: The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ

All: Praise to you, O Christ!

REFLECTION: The Rites and Responsibilities of Baptism!

Mark 1:4-11

Mark begins not with the birth of Jesus, nor a recount of his lineage. He jumps right in with the period preceding his active ministry. For Mark, the pivotal point involves Jesus' baptism by John in the River Jordan. We are given an account of the wild, natural appearance of John, one of the most colourful characters in the Bible. It seems God does not go to the A list celebrity status to find His messengers. Sometimes, it appears as if he is scraping

the bottom of the barrel. I find that reassuring. It suggests to me that it is the nerd, the loner, the bullied, in school, that is the preferred choice over the most popular crowd-pleasing stars.

Baptism is given a dramatic place in Christian theology through God's acknowledgement of Jesus as the "Beloved Son." His words are further emphasized by the tearing open of the heavens. God is forcefully claiming Jesus' entry into humanity in order for the Godhead to be seen and heard. This is not the last time Mark will record God's claim of Jesus as the "Beloved Son." It will occur three times: here at baptism, at the Transformation, and again at the cross. The prophet's prayer that God would tear open the heavens and come down (Isaiah 43:19) is now fulfilled.

John makes the link of Jesus through past, present, and future promises of God. The setting in the wilderness brings us back to the preparation for the people of Israel to enter the promised land. The incarnation leads us to God's imminent intervention in human history which brings a new hope to humanity. We are joined in this ritual from out of our broken lives through the promise of a baptism into new life.

Jesus voluntarily offers himself for baptism. He joins with countless other repentant sinners, yet we do not believe he was a sinner in need of forgiveness. The act of baptism is accompanied by the receipt of the Holy Spirit which will prominently feature in his ministry in his power over demons, sin, the law and even nature. We are to understand that our baptism involves a participation with Jesus in acceptance of self-denial and obedience. Jesus' baptism did not confer a new identity, rather it merely manifested his already-existing identity. This statement

was made to settle a point that early Christian theologians argued as to whether Jesus was “adopted” by God at baptism.

Calvin was to clarify that the church, like John employs physical water, a visible sign, in a public ceremony, while the hidden work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul imbues that ritual with spiritual effect. One scholar suggests that our baptisms may be so nice that we neglect to mention the uncomfortable implications of inviting God’s spirit to invade our lives. When you have some time, ponder that thought for awhile.

The text describes a ritual of confession, repentance and forgiveness. The laying on of hands and the feel of water make it all real. Baptism should be a powerful and memorable experience for both participants and observers. There is a tangible sense of love and blessing when congregations lay hands on people who are facing life’s challenges, or being confirmed or consecrated.

In this Scripture, we see the interaction between Jesus’ authority and his humility. John makes the declaration of Jesus’ authority. Jesus lives out that authority in subsequent teaching, healing, and casting out demons. He then passed on this authority to his disciples and followers. We enact this ministry through pastoral care by humbling listening to the needs of others. We are given the authority to proclaim, announce reconciliation, require fidelity and demand justice and to declare and embody God’s reign.

An interesting footnote reminds us that God did not wake up one day and decide that Jesus would do a new thing. All divine activity up to that moment were not negated, they were relegated

to acts of preparation. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob Moses, Miriam, King David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and John all prepared the way. Jesus walked into that well prepared scene and then moved on ahead of us to show us the way.

We are the recipients of this traditional rite of Christian followers. Through baptism we are transformed into God's beloved children. With this promotion comes the responsibility to commit ourselves to completing Christ's work on earth, despite any cost. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: We are invited to bring our gifts to God in response to God's gracious love. We are called to serve others as a response to Christ's discipleship.

Melrose continues to answer this call with their generous donations. And we thank you for your support.

*OFFERING HYMN - *Grant Us, God, the Grace*

VU 540

*Grant us, God, the grace of giving,
with a spirit large and free,
that ourselves and all our living
we may offer faithfully*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

All: John's baptism led to new life for Jesus. New life is God's promise for people worldwide.

One: The poor recognized, encouraged, and supported. We pray for our homeless, who live on cold streets, whose meals are meagre, and whose fear is intense.

The domination by the economically strong no longer acceptable. We pray for just political and economic systems that bring relief to the poor.

Discrimination on the grounds of racial origin at an end. To our indigenous population, who are unequally treated in our health and police systems, who go without safe clean drinking water; and to our people who are non-white in their unfair treatment in all aspects of life.

Conflicts between nations ended through peaceful negotiations. We pray for our neighbours to the south as they face the outcome of a political change, that they may work together in harmony and mend their divisive and hate filled ways.

All: John's baptism led to a new life for Jesus. New life is God's promise for suffering people.

One: The determination to face the reality of financial troubles.

The current Pandemic has forced hardships on many through loss of jobs and declining income.

A will to persist after months or years without work.

The ability to cope while balancing home and work responsibilities.

A sense of hope during an illness that goes on and on.

Deep peace for those who are dying, and a thorough time of grieving for the bereaved.

All: We the baptized will nurture and encourage new life.

John's baptism led to a new life for Jesus. New life is a promise for each one of us.

One: Caution before we rush into uncertain ventures. Calm amid life's struggles.

Determination when apathy saps our will to act.

Perseverance in the face of obstacles and problems.

Joy within the humdrum of daily of life. Fearless faith when facing the challenges of life.

All: We have been baptized, and we will experience the new life God offers us.

One: We pray for our community of Melrose, for Loretta, for Vic, and all our shut ins, for those who are still grieving loss of their loved ones, for those whose incomes have been reduced through the pandemic, for those who are afraid or unable to go out, for those who are feeling the isolation of separation from family and friends.

We pray for those in our circle who are recovering from illnesses, who are struggling with imperfect relationships, who are filled with anxiety and despair.

for those that we are not even aware that there is a concern, and for all those that we hold in our hearts we raise up to you for their safekeeping.

Lord, we ask that you be with them in the ways that each one needs.

(quiet reflection)

Followed by The Lord's Prayer (said together)

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that

Trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory,

For ever and ever. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN - *O Love, How Deep*

VU 348, v 1,2,3,7

*1 O Love, how deep, how broad, how high!
It fills the heart with ecstasy,
that God, in Jesus Christ, should take
our mortal form for mortals' sake.*

*2 God sent no angel to our race
of higher or of lower place,
but wore the robe of human frame,
and freely to this lost world came.*

*3 For us he was baptized, and bore
a holy fast, and hungered sore;
for us temptations sharply knew;
for us the tempter overthrew.*

*7 To God whose boundless love has won
salvation for us through the Son,
to God all praise and glory be
both now and through eternity.*

COMMISSIONING

One: You have been called to follow Christ and to lead change in this community and this world; to accept Christ's protection and to offer protection to others. Go from this moment to live out good news, with God's tender blessing.

BENEDICTION

One: May God keep us in our going out and our coming in,
In our lying down and our rising up,
In our work and in our leisure,
In our laughter and in our tears,
Until we meet again. Amen.

POSTLUDE