



*\*\*Artwork by Johnny Myers, Greenville, Mississippi who graduated with honors from the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. His philosophy is to produce positive and motivating images of the past, present and future.*

## Order of Worship 🌸 The Baptism of Jesus

January 10, 2021

Church of the Isles/Trinity UCC Indian Rocks Beach/St. Petersburg, Florida

To view the entire service, click on:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLr2IwlWThmmSVsq4KtGwO3HxQKopq\\_5KX](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLr2IwlWThmmSVsq4KtGwO3HxQKopq_5KX)

Welcome & Prayers of the People

Shelly Wilson <https://youtu.be/7POTRqWfYDQ>

Call to Worship

Cate Colgan <https://youtu.be/qb2GCisAl4E>

---

*Sing and bless God's name! Tell the glad news of new life and joy from day to day!*

*Speak of God's welcome to all the people, and worship God through the kindness we share!*

---



Opening Prayer Ever-with-us-God, the old story says that at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan, he understood his true name as you called him, “Beloved!” May it be that we, too, will hear our names and see ourselves as your precious child, called and included in pure love and grace. Amen

## Opening Song: “All Things are Possible”

Performed by Winston Culler, slides by Susan Gilbert

<https://youtu.be/Qy4E2gOSpLw>

Almighty God, my redeemer, My hiding place, my safe refuge.  
No other name like Jesus, no power can stand against You.  
My feet are planted on this rock, And I will not be shaken.

My hope, it comes from You alone my Lord and my salvation.  
Your praise is always on my lips. Your word is living in my heart.  
And I will praise you with a new song, my soul will bless you, Lord.  
All things are possible, all things are possible...

## Time for Children

Tina Allen <https://youtu.be/7PVp-YjwZgA>

## Reading “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”

Written and read by Langston Hughes <https://youtu.be/8cKDOGhghMU>

I’ve known rivers:  
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.  
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.  
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans,  
and I’ve seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.  
I’ve known rivers: Ancient, dusky rivers.  
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

## Music “Pour Out Your Spirit”

Chris Grundy [https://youtu.be/djc888CH\\_Lc](https://youtu.be/djc888CH_Lc)

From the sacred waters of my birth, to the sacred waters of this hour,



I have leaned upon you who knit me in my mother's womb,  
O, pour out your Spirit now.

### Liturgy of Remembering Our Baptisms

*(Often on this Sunday, the Baptism of Christ, members of congregations will engage in a blessing and remembrance of their baptism. Though we are worshipping virtually, we can still observe this renewal of our sense of belonging, God's beloved. To observe this ritual, gather a tree bough and some water, or go out to the beach, and pray, anointing yourself with water, and sharing in these words or a similar prayer.)*

[https://youtu.be/i\\_MpENYVe6k](https://youtu.be/i_MpENYVe6k)

Dear Siblings in Spirit: through the sacrament of baptism  
God's Spirit has been poured out upon water,  
water poured over and immersing us,  
water that flows freely, quenching the thirsts of all who will receive it:  
water from the streams of God's justice and love,  
water that brings hope to all who long for righteousness,  
water that refreshes life, nurtures growth, and offers new birth.  
Today we come to the waters to renew our commitments  
even within this dry virtual landscape and in a hurting world,  
renewing ourselves in hope, to Christ who has raised us,  
to the Spirit who has birthed us,  
and to the Creator who is making all things new.  
We acknowledge that we need the refreshing, forgiving waters,  
And we promise anew to let the Spirit use us as prophets to the powers that be.  
We accept the freedom and power God gives us,  
To resist evil, injustice, and oppression  
In whatever forms they present themselves.  
We promise to be living witnesses to the gospel, individually and together, wherever we are, and in all  
that we do.  
We are dry and thirsty, O God.  
Come, refresh us!  
Come upon us, Holy Spirit!  
Come upon these waters.  
Let these waters be to us drops of your mercy.  
Let these waters remind us of your love and justice.  
Spirit over and within the waters, Spirit of holiness!



## Music “Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness”

<https://youtu.be/Bs6fqvA6s2o>

Spirit, Spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness calling and free,  
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.

1 You moved on the waters, you called to the deep, then you coaxed up the mountains  
from the valleys of sleep; and over the eons you called to each thing:  
"Awake from your slumbers and rise on your wings."

2 You swept through the desert, you stung with the sand, and you goaded your people with a law and a  
land;  
and when they were blinded with idols and lies,  
then you spoke through your prophets to open their eyes.

3 You sang in a stable, you cried from a hill, then you whispered in silence when the whole world was  
still;  
and down in the city you called once again, when you blew through your people on the rush of the  
wind.

4 You call from tomorrow, you break ancient schemes. From the bondage of sorrow all the captives  
dream dreams;  
our women see visions, our men clear their eyes. With bold new decisions your people arise.

Offering: Financial support for our churches is essential, now more than ever. Thank you for your  
faithful giving that keeps our ministries going! Please mail in your offerings to your church:

Church of the Isles  
Att. Barb Templin  
200 24<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Indian Rocks Beach, FL 33785

Trinity UCC  
Att. Marty Seyler  
3155 Featherwood Court  
Clearwater, FL 33759

or give online via Pay Pal— [www.churchoftheisles.org](http://www.churchoftheisles.org)    [www.trinityuccstpete.org](http://www.trinityuccstpete.org)

## Scripture Luke 3:10-22

Jan Kreuger <https://youtu.be/bMvYMDu8pR4>

<sup>10</sup> John lived in the desert, preaching repentance and baptizing the people in the river. And the crowds  
asked him, “What should we do?” <sup>11</sup> In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with  
anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” <sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be



baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” <sup>13</sup> He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

<sup>15</sup> As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

<sup>18</sup> So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. <sup>19</sup> But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, <sup>20</sup> added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

<sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

## Sermon “On Being All Washed Up”

Shelly Wilson [https://youtu.be/FMiSuKY\\_QMA](https://youtu.be/FMiSuKY_QMA)

One of the gifts that the new year brings to us is the opportunity, in a focused, intentional way, to begin anew. And in each usual year as the church's cycle of stories unfolds, this one, the story of Jesus' initiation and baptism, appears just after the story of the Wise ones and the star. But it does not feel like a usual year and we will not embody the rituals together. But even though the remembrances are reimagined for this time, the delicious invitations of new time stretching before us are still fresh and courageously inviting us to open and to taste and see that God, Life, Hope, are indeed, good and trustworthy.

Jesus starting out in life... there are 3 versions of this story in Scripture. Luke begins his version very explicitly with many external details given to set the story of Jesus into its context of everyone and everything around him. His cousin John the Baptizer has just launched, as well, a different sort, apparently from Jesus, finding a home by the river Jordan, his sense of justice making his prophetic voice terse and direct as he presses the people to join Spirit's movement, to clean up their act, to work for reform and the new day, to get ready, to get it right this time, to begin again, to renew the covenant



and the promises, to empty the closets, to come out. Vs. 13 says that the regular people come, and the rich people come, and soldiers come. Spirit speaks; the people are compelled, and they say to John, "And what shall we do? How shall we come out?" And John says, "Turn around if you are going down the destructive way, stop defrauding others, give up your excesses and share: food, clothing, shelter. Become yourselves, stop choosing violence and revenge, do not be afraid." We learn John speaks truth to power, too, for Luke tells us that he'd named the ruler Herod's sins before all the people and called him to change, but as often happens, the powers refuse and do what they do, determined to silence the prophets, deny the truth, and we learn that he had "shut up John in prison" just after Jesus comes on the scene to get baptized himself.

It feels right this year, to emulate Jesus in a ritual that marks for us what his baptism marked for him. It seems significant this year, more than ever, to mark our renewed commitment to an authentic life, to mark the significance of all we have lost, to honor all that the re-creating Spirit is about in this new year and in our own experience.

His baptism is a powerful moment for Jesus. He experiences the divine/human union, enlightenment, nirvana. He knows he is beloved, and that fact has impact on everything about his life that comes after that. For it seems that his entire life's journey--its focus and intentionality begin in that single decision to be himself. As Kayleen Asbo puts it, to "befriend your own soul in its radical particularity." It wasn't the baptism that changed Jesus, but the decisions beforehand--the baptism marks and reminds him of who he intends to become.

You and I have those moments, too, those rites of passage, when, from that moment on, things are different. Sometimes they are small moments of ritual like burning sage in a new home in a tradition of purifying, cleansing, and inviting a new life of peace and joy into the space. Sometimes we mark the beginning of joined lives together in marriage ceremonies or adoption rituals to show that the best intention of our heart and soul, our spirit-self, is to live joyfully and bountifully in the sanctuary of home we will create. Before Covid, it may have felt like we were sleepwalking a little through our "normal" little beginning of the year rituals--New Year's resolutions, epiphany stars, vision boards, journals, joining weight watchers or the gym, going on retreats or vision quests.



This year, life for some may feel bigger than before...even though we are restricted in our interactions and movement. The importance of marking the passages of life and death and our coming together and falling apart feels different. The urgency of living into our own deep truth, intervening when there is evil and injustice, working to bring change that benefits others and the planet, helping new life to be born and nurtured, and strengthening ourselves and others to face death with courage and acceptance is the work of a lifetime, in some ways packed and telescoped into this time we are living through now. And so, it feels right to mark the day of Jesus' baptism by remembering him and honoring our own belonging to God, body and soul, honoring the moment with ritual--acknowledging Spirit-significance. Though, if there is anything this past year has taught us in spades, it is that the unfolding is gradual of exactly what any given experience may involve or come to mean in our experience. I daresay that Jesus did not know in the moment of his baptism what it would cost him, what it would ask of him. We don't know about this new year, either, as we expect it and seek to live into it; we are creating the picture as we go. And so, I ask myself: how do we want to recommit ourselves, body and soul, to the calling we have been given, to the hope and love and blessing that have kept us till this very hour? In this new year, in our lives now, how are we about to come out, to come into ourselves more fully, to decide? How do you dwell in your body, which is, your spirit's house? Smudging in a physical structure does something important--that ritual opens the space to the grace, throws open the windows of possibility, airs out staleness, and creates a womb, a basket, a manger, a dwelling for whatever joyful, positive, productive, re-generative energy there is within and around us to ebb and to flow...flow...that is what remembering our baptism does, too. It affirms for Jesus, for us, the name we are called by the Creator, and that name is "beloved." That name calls him out to be and to do and to live as fully human being...baptism, at its best, does that for us, too.

But the rites, the ritualizing, is not all there is--that is just the beginning. John says to the people: I mark this occasion of your coming out with the sign of water, the ablution, the washing...but there is more to this commitment ceremony than that--the work begins here, the joy, the possibilities, begin here--for one is coming after me! One is coming after me! But wait, there's more! Someone more, something more, is coming. And it will mean that when we partner with God, the waste will be cleaned out, the parts not serving us must be discarded, and be as fuel for a fire! Imagine it--see it ! It is a



powerful image! There is the image of water--flowing, beautiful, peaceful--I baptize you with water—says the story—I invite you to clean up the parts that are not serving you, but washing up is only the first step! For after that comes the roll-up-your-sleeves part, the farmer God with pitchfork in hand, flinging up the harvested plants so that the breath, the wind, the ruach, the Spirit can blow through and warm you, and get rid of the parts that don't serve you and world, and then build a fire for warmth, for life, for celebration, fuel for the fire! Think about this: feng shui and smudging rituals for dwellings involve, interestingly, water, washing, cleaning preparation, and then candles, or smoldering sage--fire, and the invitation to breathe in the clearness as the purifying smoke swirls about. Think of this wonderful new year's mantra with these amazing images: bathe, breathe, burn! Bathe, breathe, burn! “Bathe, breathe, burn” is the story of Jesus' baptism--the spirit observance, the ritual that marks his beginning. John says, I baptize you with water--get all washed up, but it is only the first step! Clean up, clear out, turn around, change, stop the destruction, clear out the cobwebs, and then, and then, prepare for the part that comes after the beginning--the promise, the initiation of the rite! For the One who comes for the harvest is the God who is alive in you and in me and in the creation, who is about all the seasons, about to break forth, and to burn!

And you and I, for our part, we are invited to ritualize this new year's beginning. You are invited to light a candle, reminding you of Spirit's presence, the fire of calling, burning in your soul, burning away the husks, and warming you in love. You are invited to come to the water and remember your water blessing, that from the sacred waters of your birth to the sacred waters of this hour, we have leaned upon God, we have been loved. Breathe in the blessing of this new day. Breathe out the truth of your own beloved nature. Know that you are God's own beloved. Amen.

Benediction

## Closing Song “Bind Us Together”

Performed by Winston Culler [https://youtu.be/EqS9\\_3C7oE](https://youtu.be/EqS9_3C7oE)

Bind us together Lord Bind us together with cords that cannot be broken  
Bind us together Lord Bind us together Lord Bind us together with love  
There is only one God there is only one King There is only one Body that is why we can sing  
Bind us together Lord Bind us together with cords that cannot be broken  
Bind us together Lord Bind us together Lord Bind us together with love



You are the family of God You are the promise divine  
You are God’s chosen desire You are the glorious new wine

+++++

### Prayer concerns

- Guy & Melody H., ongoing health concerns
- Diane G., Shirley H., Janice S-B, recovering from falls
- Don K., treatments for cancer
- Diane B., health concerns
- Steve, Susan G.’s cousin, cancer recurrence
- Larry, Marty K.’s brother, cancer recurrence
- Ron S., health concerns
- Cathy G., death of cousin, injury of aunt, son-in-law—job loss
- Tina A., daughter, son-in-law, grandchildren, recovering from COVID
- Jan K., health concerns
- Colleen H., death of daughter-in-law
- Brian, Marty Sy.’s son and family, COVID
- Marla B.’s sister Ruth, health concerns
- Jamila, Jan & Mark’s friend, recurrence of cancer
- Church members having scans, tests, awaiting surgeries.
- All those grieving losses of loved ones from COVID, other illnesses, accidents, and violence
- Students, parents, teachers, and administrators
- Healthcare and other essential workers
- Those living with mental illness, domestic violence, and addiction challenges.
- Those who have lost loved ones, possessions, homes, and hope.
- Those exhausted and endangered by systemic violence and racism.
- Those affected by food insecurity, war, and oppression.
- The Earth, effects of global climate change.

### Announcements

- Annual Meetings for our Churches will be happening as we look back on the challenging church year, 2020! Look for the yearly reports and proposed budgets to be sent to you in advance.
- Church of the Isles: January 24, 2021 at 3:00 PM. We will meet via Zoom and in person, outside in the parking lot, socially distanced and masked.



- Trinity: January 31, 2021 at 12:00 PM. We will meet via Zoom and in person, outside at Trinity's courtyard, socially distanced and masked.
- Outreach and Missions: The Spirit of the Christ Child was certainly with us over this holiday season, and the generosity of our congregation shone brightly in places that needed that light.
- To all who donated and helped assemble and deliver the gifts to our girls in the Miracles Outreach program, thank you so very much. The gift and food preparation for the residents of Pinellas Hope was heartwarming, and a big thank you to all who gave donations to make it all happen. You all made Christmas special for the girls in safe houses, many of whom were rescued from human trafficking situations, and for the 200+ housing insecure residents of Pinellas Hope.
- Mindy's preschool kids and Alicia's high school students have benefitted from your generous contributions, supplies, and snacks. Since this is an on-going need, we will keep the contributions baskets available outside the office to accept further donations.
- Next lunch prep (following CDC guidelines) for Pinellas Hope is Tuesday, January 12, 10:30 AM. Please let Marty Synnott ([martysynnott@yahoo.com](mailto:martysynnott@yahoo.com)) know if you can help out.

Blessings to you all for Being the Church in this uncertain time.

## COTI Book Group

January 31<sup>st</sup> at 4:00 PM via Zoom

Our January book is *Pushing the Bear: a Novel of the Trail of Tears* by Diane Glancy. There are copies of the book in the church library, but it is also available for Kindle and Audible. "In a novel that retains the complexity, immediacy, and indirection of a poem, Glancy brings to life the Cherokees' 900-mile forced removal to Oklahoma in 1838 and gives us a powerful witness to one of the most shameful episodes in American history."

If you would like to join in this Zoom to be part of the discussion or just to listen, please let Marty know. We will also be putting together our Spring Reading List, so come with some recommendations for fiction or non-fiction selections. We read all genres of literature!