

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay – Liturgy
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
Baptism of the Lord. 1st Sunday After Epiphany. January 12, 2025

Call to Worship

Beloved, God chooses us and calls us by name.

We belong to God. Alleluia!

Our lives have purpose because we belong to God.

We are called to be like Christ and follow him.

We will find joy, peace, and restoration through God's amazing grace.

Let us worship God who claims us and loves us! Praise be to God!

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Baptism of the Lord. 1st Sunday After Epiphany. January 12, 2025. Year C.

Hymn

Breathe on me, breath of God

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| 1. Breathe on me, breath of God;
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love
and do what thou wouldst do. | 2. Breathe on me, breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will
to do and to endure. |
| 3. Breathe on me, breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine. | 4. Breathe on me, breath of God,
so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life
of thine eternity. |

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Creator of the sun and moon and stars, you stir in our midst to reveal your light.

By the work of your Spirit, you lead us in new directions.

Your beloved Son has called us to new life and by his grace,
reconciles the divisions among us.

Holy One, we praise you for the blessings you give us in our baptism into Christ,
and through your love that surrounds us day by day.

To you we give all praise, glory and honor, through Jesus Christ,
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and always.

Merciful God,

**in baptism you promise forgiveness and new life,
but we confess that we prefer our old, familiar ways.**

**We cling to destructive habits, we harbor grudges,
and we are reluctant to welcome a stranger or forgive one another.
Nostalgia for the past prevents us from exploring new possibilities.**

In your loving kindness, forgive us.

Have mercy upon us and move among us

so that we might pursue new life in Christ together. Amen

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Assurance of Forgiveness

Do not be afraid, for Christ has redeemed you.

Baptized in the deep waters of death, he has washed away your sins.

Risen from death, he invites you to be washed in the cleansing tide of God's mercy.

Your sins are forgiven; be at peace with God, with yourself, and with each other.

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Scripture Readings

❖ Acts 8:14-17

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

❖ Luke 3:15-22

¹⁵⁻¹⁷ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 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. 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.'

¹⁸⁻²² So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. 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, added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

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

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Message Receiving the Holy Spirit

I have a book called *Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffy Dictionary of Theological Terms* edited by Rolf Jacobson. He is also a professor at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis and a podcaster who I find rather entertaining. Let me give you a taste of his humor. Rolf defines baptism as "The cosmic dunk-tank (or if you're scared, the spiritual sprinkler); the Big Bath; a dip in the deep end of the sacral pool; the only rinsing your soul will ever need."¹

¹ Jacobson, Rolf A., Editor. *Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffy Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Augsburg Books. Minneapolis. 2008. Page 25

It is a poke at the many and various ways different churches baptize people. In the Presbyterian tradition we tend to be the spiritual sprinkling type. We don't immerse people head to toe in a bath of any kind. We also tend to baptize more infants than adults but certainly I will sprinkle anyone of any age who desires to be baptized.

There are a few things that I do ask people to think about whether they are asking for their child to be baptized or themselves. First off, I particularly let parents know that baptism is not about whether or not God loves your child and whether or not your child will make it into heaven if something terrible happened. God's love is there from the time of conception and throughout our lives. So if baptism isn't about just getting "it" done, what is it about?

Well, baptism is a whole lot about what God is doing through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not simply a Christian initiation project but rather a visible expression of the Good News...the Gospel. In baptism, water signifies forgiveness and new life. As I try to explain this, it is like so many other things about our faith, it is mystery, and trying to give a mystery words can be complicated.

You see, baptism is a promise of the Holy Spirit at work in one's life and yet the Holy Spirit is always at work in the world whether or not we are paying attention. And the Holy Spirit isn't just a New Testament Jesus thing. The Holy Spirit was at work when the world was created. We hear of it as the breath of God bringing life. Which is still the case. And the Spirit is complex, just like God. It is not something we can fully understand or comprehend. I have a pamphlet that gives thirty-two different names for the Holy Spirit with the scripture references as to where to find those different ways of naming the Spirit so there is a lot going on with the Spirit.

Just to name a few of ways the Holy Spirit is at work...the Spirit is the life-giving breath of God. The Spirit comforts, counsels, and gives strength, continually teaching us as we grow in Christ. The Holy Spirit is eternal God, God's generous and willing spirit, the Spirit of holiness. It is the Spirit by which we are made God's children. I could go on, but hopefully you have figured out that the Holy Spirit is part of God and at work within us and the world.

And yet the Holy Spirit is often the part of God that we talk the least about. It is like we are afraid that someone will think we have gone off the deep end if we begin to speak of things of the Spirit. God the Father, well people seem as comfortable as they can be with that. Jesus the Son...at least he was human so we can get our minds wrapped around some of that, but the Holy Spirit, well that seems to be akin to trying to nail Jello to a wall.

Yet...yet...here we have two of many scriptures that speak directly about the work of the Holy Spirit. In Luke, John the Baptist addresses the crowds gathering around him. They had so many questions and these were not just head questions, the scripture says they were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John. You

see people knew their scriptures then. Their scriptures being what we now call the Old Testament. And they knew there was a promised Messiah. John was busy telling them the truth about their condition as people who were hurting and in need of a relationship with God and so they wondered whether or not he was the guy the nation had been waiting for. He lets them know in no uncertain terms, that he is not even worthy to untie the sandals of the one that they are waiting for. The one that they are waiting for will baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Okay, fire as we are witnessing on our new feeds right now as we watch parts of LA burn can be pretty frightening and destructive. We like to think of Jesus as tender, meek and mild. But the person John the baptizer is talking about has a ton of power, the power of fire and it is with fire and the Holy Spirit that we will be baptized.

Holy Crap! Thank goodness we use water. But water also can be dangerous. We can drown in water. It can be a place of murky death, but also a refreshing reboot. Hence why water makes a wonderful symbol for dying to life that is not life-giving and rising to a life that is.

Luke's story of Jesus baptism is different from the other gospels as well as in it we don't know whether or not John baptized Jesus. All we are told, with little to know detail is that "when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

So still a pretty amazing moment to witness. The heavens opening up. The space between heaven and earth so thin that heaven breaks open onto the earth. This is God. Though God is a formidable force, God is not a force that wreaks havoc or toys with us. God is personal and communal, present, with us, for us, and wants relationship with us.

Baptism is one of those ways to signify how important that relationship is to us. Baptism is personal but usually done in the presence of a faith community as we do not grow in faith and understanding all by ourselves. We do this in community and then share it with those who may not yet know that there is a redeeming, loving presence called God who longs to give each person and the world abundant life.

The scripture reading from Acts also speaks to the Apostles Peter and John journeying to Samaria to witness the Holy Spirit in action with people they never would have thought God was willing to work with. "The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:15-17).

They are other biblical stories I could share of baptism and the Holy Spirit at work in that, but all that needs saying at this time is that baptism is a sign of the Holy Spirit at work in people. It happens in different ways but always at some point include God sending the

Holy Spirit. This is in part why it can be said that God is always with us. The ever-present Spirit is at work before during and after baptism. The Holy Spirit is at work even without baptism. And though baptism is something God does, it is also our response to the invitation of God to be in relationship. To recognize that God has a place for us, in us, and with us.

Today, if you have been baptized, may it be a day to remember your baptism and consider what it has meant for you and how you will continue to grow in faith because of your baptism. If you would like to be baptized, well...come have a chat with me. And even if you choose not to be baptized, know that you are a beloved child of God and God is still at work in you. Baptism is just one more visible way to remember that we are on a Christian pilgrimage throughout our lives, a pilgrimage of faith and community.

Thanks be to God for the amazing gift of baptism and the Holy Spirit!

Prayers of the People

God of time and eternity:
as the new year stretches before us,
we thank you for the time you give us
and for all those things that are still possible and precious in this gift.

We thank you for each new day and its possibilities;
for each night, its rest and reflection.

We thank you for words of forgiveness and the chance to make a new start,
for words of invitation to explore new opportunities.

Give us the courage to try something new
and the conviction to finish things leftover from last year.
Make time spent this year your time, O God.
Bless our time with you.

God of moments and memories
we remember before you people facing difficult times in the months ahead.

We pray for those struggling with illness,
and for those facing treatment or surgery with uncertain results....

We pray for those who are grieving the loss of dear ones
and for all who remember what used to be but can no longer be...

Make time spent this year your time, O God.
Bless our time with you.

God of hopefulness and helpfulness,
we remember those who are seeking new opportunities this year:

Those training for new employments and those looking for work;

Those developing new businesses and seeking the right employees;

And those who provide services to improve life in our communities
amid the uncertainties around us...

Give us wisdom and perseverance in what we undertake as a congregation
in the face of all the changes in our community.

Make time spent this year your time, O God.

Bless our time with you.

As we work together with the vision of your kingdom before us this year,
fill us with love and generosity that can change the world because of your blessing.

We pray we can make a difference in even the most challenging situations

because we are the people of your beloved Son who taught us to pray together:

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Lord's Prayer

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 the offering

In the season of Epiphany, God's gift to us in Christ is revealed to the world. Our gifts to God in Christ's name reveal our commitment to the love and mercy, the forgiveness and hope we have received. Our gifts proclaim that we are beloved to God and God is beloved to us.

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We gather our gifts together and present them as an offering of gratitude and praise.

You can find ways to support this ministry by checking out our website at

standrewspres-tbay.ca

Hymn

She comes sailing on the wind

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Refrain

*She comes sailing on the wind,
her wings flashing in the sun;
on a journey just begun, she flies on.*

*And in the passage of her flight,
her song rings out through the night,
full of laughter, full of light, she flies on.*

1. Silent waters rocking on the morning of our birth,
like an empty cradle waiting to be filled.
And from the heart of God the Spirit moved
upon the earth, like a mother breathing life into her child.

2. Many were the dreamers whose eyes were given sight
when the Spirit filled their dreams with life and form.
Deserts grew to gardens, broken hearts found new delights
and then down the ages still she flew on.

Refrain

3. To a gentle girl in Galilee, a gentle breeze she came,
a whisper softly calling in the dark,
the promise of a child of peace whose reign would never end,
Mary sang the Spirit song within her heart.

4. Flying to the river, she waited circling high
above the child now grown so full of grace.
As he rose up from the water, she swept down from the sky,
and she carried him away in her embrace.

Refrain

5. Long after the deep darkness that fell upon the world,
after dawn returned in flame of rising sun,
the Spirit touched the earth again, again her wings unfurled,
bringing life in wind and fire as she flew on.

Refrain

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Benediction

Go now, confident that you are God's precious and pleasing children.
Trust in God and do not fear.

Accept the Word of God

and point others to the one who baptizes with Spirit and fire.

And may God be your protection and your strength;

May Christ baptize you with his Holy Spirit.

And may the Spirit be with you

to empower you and give you peace.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

[The Feast of the Baptism of our Lord – Year C – LaughingBird](#)

Postlude