



'Worship at home' January 7th 2024



As you come to worship you might like to bring a **small bowl of water** to reflect on during this time of worship.

This is the first Sunday of **Epiphany** in the church's liturgical calendar, a time when we might recognise the many ways in which God is revealed in our world.

Although the celebration of Christmas is just once a year, the coming of Christ is for all times and all people, as God continues to be present with us, found in the ordinary things of life.

Opening

We come to worship God
who gathers us together in love.

We come to follow the ways of Christ
who shines light in our world.

We come to be anointed by the Spirit of grace
enabling us to grow in faith.

We come to know ourselves as God's beloved children,
forgiven, loved, and set free. Amen



Water is one of the basics of life:
all living things depend on water in some way.

**Reflect on your bowl of water
and consider its many uses...**

to drink; to wash with; to cook with;
to grow our gardens; to feed stock;
to fish from; to stand in awe of;
to meditate beside;
to baptise...



The story of Jesus' birth, which we have celebrated at Christmas, is only told in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Both Mark and John begin with the baptism of Jesus, with the heavens tearing open and God's spirit coming upon him. Jesus Christ is indeed 'Emmanuel', God present with us.

Mark 1:4-11

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I,

the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

New International Version

The Jewish church had a number of rituals for worship, with sacrifices, fasting, feast days and ritual washings for purification. However, John the Baptist seems to be the first to baptise by immersion in water "for the forgiveness of sins." In doing so he was pointing the way to Jesus and preparing for the coming kingdom of God.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow Psalm 51

Water has long been seen as a way of representing God's action. Water washes us clean. Water brings forth new life from the ground. Water refreshes and renews us. Water symbolises God's goodness and love, as the river of life which brings hope and the promise of new possibilities.



Reflect on your experience of baptism.

Have you been baptised?

Was it as an infant, a young person, or an older adult?

How significant has it been for your faith journey? 2

Baptism is Christ's gift. It is the sign by which the Spirit of God joins people to Jesus Christ and incorporates them into his body, the Church. In his own baptism in the Jordan by John, Jesus identified himself with humanity in its brokenness and sin; that baptism was completed in his death and resurrection. By God's grace, baptism plunges us into the faith of Jesus Christ, so that whatever is his may be called ours. By water and the Spirit we are claimed as God's own and set free from the power of sin and death. Thus, claimed by God we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit that we may live as witnesses to Jesus Christ, share his ministry in the world and grow to maturity, awaiting with hope the day of our Lord Jesus.

'The Meaning of Baptism'

*'The Sacrament of Baptism and the Reaffirmation of Baptism called Confirmation'
Uniting in Worship 2, © 2005 The Uniting Church in Australia, p. 74*

In this season of Epiphany, we see God manifest in the ordinary things of life. The story of Jesus' baptism reveals the fullness of God in Christ, divine yet human. It marks the beginning of his public ministry and empowers him with the Holy Spirit in order to bring to fulfillment the kingdom of God.



“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

God calls each of us into relationship as God's children. We too are challenged to make our response, to be washed clean, refreshed and renewed, and empowered with the Holy Spirit in order to play our part in bringing to fulfillment the kingdom of God in our times.

Reflect again on your own commitment to God.

The following comes from a Uniting Church liturgy which invites people to affirm their baptism.

Commitment to Mission:

Will you continue in the community of faith,
the apostle's teaching, the breaking of bread and the prayers?

With God's help, we will.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news
of God in Christ?

With God's help, we will.

Will you seek Christ in all people,
and love your neighbour as yourself?

With God's help, we will.

Will you strive for justice and peace,
and respect the dignity of every human being?

With God's help, we will.



May almighty God, who has given us new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, keep us steadfast in the faith, and bring us to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** *Uniting in Worship 2*

In baptism we become one in Christ with God and with each other. You are invited to **dip your fingers in the water in your bowl, then trace the sign of the cross on your forehead.**

As you do so, say to yourself,
"I belong to Christ; I am a child of God."



*By your Spirit, Almighty God, grant us
Love for others,
Joy in serving you,
Peace in disagreement,
Patience in suffering,
Kindness toward all people,
Goodness in evil times,
Faithfulness in temptation,
Gentleness in the face of opposition,
Self-control in all things.*

Then strengthen us for ministry in your name. Amen.

Closing

God of grace and glory, you call us with your voice of flame to be your people, faithful and courageous. As your beloved Son embraced his mission in the waters of baptism, inspire us with the fire of your Spirit to join in his transforming work. We ask this in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

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