

ZOOM Worship for January 9, 2022
Baptism of Jesus

Territorial Acknowledgment and Announcements

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

Centering Music: "Holy Sacred Spirit" MV 15

Holy sacred Spirit, breathe your breathe on us.

Holy sacred Spirit, breathe your life in us.

Holy sacred Spirit, breathe your breathe on us.

Holy sacred Spirit, breathe your life in us.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: Come, if you are thirsty for God's love and God's acceptance -

Two: *You will find refreshment in this virtual space.*

One: Come, if you are weary and need God's hope -

Two: *You will find support and encouragement in community.*

One: Come, if your spirit is parched and dry -

Two: *You will find Living Water in God's Word and our worship.*

One: Come, let us worship and quench our thirsts together -

**All: Source of life,
we stand on the shoreline of faith
waiting to wade into the waters of your love.
Encourage us into the ebb and flow of life with you.
Amen**

(Opening prayer from "Prayers for all seasons" Year C)

Opening Hymn: "Spirit of Gentleness" VU 375 verses 1, 3, 4

Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,
blow thro' the wilderness calling and free,
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,
stir me from placidness,
Wind, Wind on the sea.

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:
wake from your slumbers and rise on your wings. R

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. R

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

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation “Living Water, Source of Life” VU 645

God our Mother,
Living Water,
River of Mercy,
Source of Life,
in whom we live and move
and have our being,
who quenches our thirst,
refreshes our weariness,
bathes
and washes
and cleanses our wounds,
be for us always
a fountain of life,
and for all the world
a river of hope
springing up in the midst
of the deserts of despair.
Honour and blessing,
glory and praise
to you forever.

Sung Response “Spirit Open My Heart” MV 79 Chorus Only

Spirit, open my heart to the joy and pain of living.
As you love may I love, in receiving and in giving,
Spirit, open my heart.

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 3:15-17,21-22

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.’

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.'

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

All: Thanks be to God.

Choir: "I Have Called You by Your Name" MV 161

Reflection: "Drenched in the Spirit"

Hymn: "I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry" VU 644

I was there to hear your borning cry,
I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized,
to see your life unfold.

I was there when you were but a child,
with a faith to suit you well;
in a blaze of light you wandered off
to find where demons dwell.

When you heard the wonder of the word,
I was there to cheer you on;
you were raised to praise the living Lord,
to whom you now belong.

If you find someone to share your time
and you join your hearts as one,
I'll be there to make your verses rhyme
from dusk till rising sun.

In the middle ages of your life,
not too old, no longer young.
I'll be there to guide you through the night,
complete what I've begun.

When the evening gently closes in
and you shut your weary eyes,
I'll be there as I have always been
with just one more surprise.

I was there to hear your borning cry,
I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized,
to see your life unfold.

Virtual Offering:

One: I gratitude for your many gifts to us, we seek to share them, God.

Two: *With our time, our gifts and skills, and our financial resources
we want to make a difference in our community and our world.*

One: Receive all that we offer, God,

Two: *bless our gifts, and bless each one who gives and receives. Amen*

Sung Response: "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

One: Eternal God, our times are held within your hands,
our lives are shaped by your creation from before our birth.

Two: *You carefully hold all of what has happened
and nurture possibility within it, and what you wish we could be.*

One: Like a wise mother, you give us both freedom and guidance.
How wise and caring you are, most blessed God;
we praise you and thank you.

Two: *God eternal, our times are open to your Spirit,
our lives await your touch.*

One: God of mercy, fountain of loving care,
wellspring of blessing and source of our hope:
help us to break through the dry surface of our parched lives
to find the life that flows beneath, quietly, deeply,
cool with refreshment—
that living water for our souls
which is the Spirit of Christ your Son.

Two: *For all in hospital or long term care,
including overburdened staff,
send your healing and encouragement;
for all living with long-term threats
to their health or well-being, send patience and endurance;
for all who are worried, bring ease of heart;
for all who are lonely, bring some human contact;
for all who are anxious about their job,
or who are looking for work, give fortitude;
for all who are wondering what path in life to take,
send a sense of being able to trust that you, God, will guide them.
And give us all a sense of purpose and a call to action
to ease the burdens that so many are carrying right now.*

One: Finally we think of our own individual lives.
We take some moments of silence
to give you our thanks for the blessing you have given us,
and to ask for the needs that weigh most upon us . . .

Two: *God of mercy, eternal source of life renewed and abundant,
rise up and flood with loving care every life that needs nurture*

and every heart that thirsts for you.

We pray in the name of Jesus – Living Water of our lives. Amen.

(Adapted from “Celebrate God’s Presence”)

The Lord’s Prayer (sung) VU 959

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 glory are yours
now and forever. Amen

Closing Hymn: “Spirit God, Be our Breath” MV 150

Spirit God: be our breath, be our song.
Blow through us, bringing strength to move on.
Our world seems inward, defensive, withdrawn...
Spirit God, be our song.

Patient God: soothe our pride, calm our fear.
Comfort us. When we know you are near
grow more certain, our vision is clear.
Patient God, calm our fear.

Loving God: be our voice, be our prayer.
Reaching our, joining hands as we share,
we seek your guidance through friendship and care.
Loving God, be our prayer.

Spirit God: be our breath, be our song.
Blow through us, bringing strength to move on.
Through change, through challenge, we'll greet the new dawn.
Spirit God, be our song.

Commissioning /Blessing

One: May the blessing of God, fountain of living water,
flow within us as a river of life.
Two: *May we drink deeply of her wisdom.*
May we never thirst again.
One: May we go through life refreshing many,
as a sign of healing for all;
through the One who is Life eternal.

Sung Amen: VU 974

Rev. Joanne's Reflection
"Drenched in the Spirit"

The scene at the Jordan River that day was a busy one. A line of people snaked not only along the riverbank but into the water as well – ordinary folk, filled with expectation, filled with hope, and ready to have their sins forgiven. The river itself had turned a silty, murky brown as so many feet disturbed the river bed, but the sun was shining and despite the solemnity of the baptism that John had offered, there was almost a festive mood in the crowd.

With quiet words, or no words at all, each person was led to deeper water and submerged, as was the custom for ritual bathing. And each one rose up drenched but renewed, dripping with water but perhaps filled with God's grace and John's promise of sins forgiven. Any who questioned John about his own identity, and the possibility that he could be their Messiah, was given the same answer – "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."

In the midst of those waiting for John's baptism was one who had perhaps not been a follower, one who would soon be revealed as God's son, the beloved one. But in that moment of drenching, Jesus stands with the people, with those seeking God's love and God's presence, and God's hope. It is not until after all that line of baptism-seekers have been soaked and returned to the shore that Jesus – in a moment of prayer – encounters the Holy Spirit "in bodily form" and is named and affirmed by a voice from heaven. This is the scene I imagine when I read Luke's account of the baptism of Jesus. After pages and pages of description and detail, songs and stories about the birth of both John and Jesus, the words here describing their encounter as adults are very sparse. There is no description of Jesus and John's meeting, no narrative of Jesus' baptism or a recounting of what may have passed between them. This event, this revealing that marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry and includes the Holy Spirit and what we assume is God's voice, takes place not at the moment of Jesus' rising from the water freshly baptized with John close by, but after a little time, when Jesus is praying and John is no longer in the scene. Jesus at prayer, perhaps surrounded by others freshly risen from the water, Jesus in the midst of the people, sopping wet like those around him, this is the Jesus who carries God's Spirit and is acclaimed and proclaimed by that heavenly voice.

Each season of Epiphany begins with the retelling of Jesus' baptism according to Matthew, Mark or Luke. The word "epiphany" comes from the Greek, "*epiphaneia*," meaning "appearing" or "revealing." Each year as we share this story Jesus is once again revealed, once again appears after so many years since the Christmas story – even those it has barely been three weeks since we celebrated that birth. We have barely left the angels and shepherds and wise ones behind and now we are faced with the adult Jesus coming into his own time of revealing, living his own epiphany.

Not many of us in the United Church tradition were baptized as adults, even fewer who were baptized by full immersion. We may not have memories of our own symbolic drenching, but we may have memories of other times we have spent in the water, exercising or playing, with friends or with family. I spent a number of my growing-up years living on the Trent River, and have many fond memories of times spent 'well-soaked' and refreshed. I carry a memories – as many of you do I am sure, of knowing what it feels like to be drenched with water.

There is a promise that is made to us in the story of Jesus' baptism, a promise that we will be baptized not only with ordinary water made sacred, but with the Holy Spirit, as is described in the passage from

Acts. We will be drenched in the Spirit, dripping with Spirit, saturated with - to use an older term - the Holy Ghost.

What does that feel like, to be inundated with God's Spirit?

What does that soaking do for us and to us?

There are some more recent traditions in the Christian church, often named "charismatic" that would have us believe that the only way to know you are thoroughly and completely filled with God's Spirit is to exhibit some extraordinary gift like speaking in tongues. While we generally reject this narrower definition, I think it is important to note that being baptized with the Spirit can change us, if we let it – not just once but over and over again.

If we can acknowledge our own Spirit-filled essence, and our own belovedness, it can bring us calm and perhaps reassurance. It can lead us to prayer, or contemplation – like it did for Jesus on the banks of the Jordan River. It can lead us to action, or to following a path we might otherwise not have taken. When we can accept that the Spirit really does work in and through us, it can energize us and spark both awe and gratitude. In my own experience, feeling the presence of the Spirit has been sometimes joyful, sometimes comforting, sometimes surprising and sometimes even frightening. It has never felt like I did not control my thoughts or actions, but more like a blossoming of possibilities, a warm spreading of certainty.

I have sensed the Spirit strongly as I have laid hands on youth who were being baptized, and could almost see the Spirit shining in their eyes. I have felt surrounded by Spirit's presence when I have shared communion with folk in hospital, or when we share communion over ZOOM. I have felt drenched in the Spirit when I have been able to safely share a hug or a handshake – especially in these pandemic times.

I think our drenching helps us to see the sacred in the ordinary – in the water used at baptism, in bread and juice, in a simple handshake or phone call, in our shared worship and our shared work. When we are immersed in God's love, in the Spirit's possibilities, in the call of Jesus, we can encounter the ordinary and know that it is actually infused with divine mystery. Drenched in the Spirit, baptized with God's presence and essence, we can shine, we can share, we can be enlivened and enlivening for others.

We can *be* good news.

In 2006, the United Church of Canada released its latest statement of faith, called *A Song of Faith*. These stanzas speak of the Holy Spirit:

And so we sing of God the Spirit,
 who from the beginning has swept over the face of creation,
 animating all energy and matter
 and moving in the human heart.

We sing of God the Spirit,
 faithful and untameable,
 who is creatively and redemptively active in the world.

The Spirit challenges us to celebrate the holy
not only in what is familiar,
but also in that which seems foreign.

We sing of the Spirit,
who speaks our prayers of deepest longing
and enfolds our concerns and confessions,
transforming us and the world.