



# WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



***THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST***

**10<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2021**

**BAPTISM OF CHRIST**

<u>READINGS FOR TODAY</u>	PARISH OFFICE: Please phone or use e-mail to make contact TEL:01252 331161; e- mail: <a href="mailto:office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk">office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk</a> BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS & BAPTISMS – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517 or 331161 WEBSITE: <a href="http://www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk">www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk</a>
Genesis 1 v 1 - 5	
Acts 19 v 1 - 7	
Mark 1 v 4 - 11	

## 100 CLUB

It's the time of year when we are inviting you to renew your membership of our 100 Club. As Claire is working remotely at the moment, it would be helpful if as many people as possible renew by e-mailing the parish office rather than through the post. If you would like to join for 2021 as a new member please also contact Claire by phone or e-mail.

Winners for December were:

First (£78 – 00) - Kath Knapman; Second (£32 – 50) - Brian Lunn; Third (£19 – 50) – Linda Tallon

The next draw will be on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> January.

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## BIRTHDAYS

Congratulations to all who are celebrating a birthday at this time, especially: IRENE WOOLHOUSE (3<sup>RD</sup>); MATTY HARRISON (6<sup>TH</sup>); JAMES & JEMMA THOMPSON (7<sup>TH</sup>); JOSHUA SHARP (12<sup>TH</sup>)

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Please pray for the souls of all the recently Departed, among them: PETER ROBERTS; JOHN GAINES

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## KEEPING OUR CHURCH OPEN IN LOCKDOWN

I would like to thank all members of the congregation, who are attending church in person at the moment, for their understanding of all the protocols that we have had to put in place to keep each other safe. I know that it is particularly difficult not to be able to socialise with each other before of after services, but the rules are quite clear that we cannot do this at present. So, we have to continue to maintain social distancing at all times, even when entering and leaving.

The fact that we can still open, at the moment, during Lockdown, is down to our 'good practice' so far, as Bishop Andrew has said in his letter to the clergy this week: *'The reason the Government hasn't asked church buildings to close this time round is that we've done really well in managing risks and sustaining morale in the midst of it. Only a tiny number of outbreaks have been linked with church attendance thus far, though past success on that score shouldn't lead to any kind of complacency moving forward.'*

So, let's keep vigilant, stay safe and pray for those who have contracted the disease and are suffering severely. Fr Keith.

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*A voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'.*

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## READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – EPIPHANY 2

1 Samuel 3 v 1 - 20; Revelation 5 v 1 - 10; John 1 v 43 - end  
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ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN - If you would like prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 This is a confidential service.

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CARE AND SHARE - If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. for the shelves outside church, please leave items on the doorstep of the Rectory. Thank you to all who have contributed so far.

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## ST PETER'S CHURCH CALENDARS

Our calendar for 2021 has pictures of St Peter's and room for appointments. Only £5 – still some available – at the back of church.

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## Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

### The Baptism of Christ

*If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand.*

(L) O Lord, open our lips  
All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

(L) Your light springs up for the righteous  
All: and all the peoples have seen your glory.

*A candle may be lit*

(L) Blessed are you holy Father,  
almighty and eternal God.  
You celebrated your new gift of baptism  
in signs and wonders at the Jordan.  
Your voice was heard from heaven  
to awaken faith in the presence among us  
of your Word made flesh.  
Your Spirit was seen as a dove,  
revealing Jesus as your servant,  
and anointing him with the oil of gladness  
to preach the good news to the poor.  
Therefore, as we celebrate the union of earth and heaven,  
we rejoice to echo the song of the angels in heaven  
for ever praising you and saying:  
Blessed be God forever.

*This hymn is said or sung:*

Songs of thankfulness and praise,  
Jesus, Lord, to thee we raise,  
manifested by the star  
to the sages from afar;  
branch of royal David's stem  
in thy birth at Bethlehem;  
anthems be to thee addressed,  
God in man made manifest.

Manifest at Jordan's stream,  
Prophet, Priest and King supreme;  
and at Cana, wedding guest,  
in thy Godhead manifest;  
manifest in power divine,  
changing water into wine;  
anthems be to thee addressed,  
God in man made manifest.

Manifest in making whole  
palsied limbs and fainting soul;  
manifest in valiant fight,  
quelling all the devil's might;  
manifest in gracious will,  
ever bringing good from ill;  
anthems be to thee addressed,  
God in man made manifest.

Sun and moon shall darkened be,  
stars shall fall, the heavens shall flee;  
Christ will then like lightning shine,  
all will see his glorious sign;  
all will then the trumpet hear,  
all will see the Judge appear;  
thou by all wilt be confessed,  
God in man made manifest.

Grant us grace to see thee, Lord,  
mirrored in thy holy Word;  
may we imitate thee now,  
and be pure, as pure art thou;  
that we like to thee may be  
at thy great Epiphany;  
and may praise thee, ever blest,  
God in man made manifest.

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;  
let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,  
so may the light of your presence, O God,  
set our hearts on fire with love for you;  
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) Because God was merciful,  
he saved us through the water of rebirth  
and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.  
But through sin we have fallen away from our baptism.  
Let us return to the Lord and renew our faith in his  
promises by confessing our sins in penitence.

*We keep a moment of silence:*

(L) Lord Jesus, you are mighty God and Prince of peace:  
Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

(L) Lord Jesus, you are Son of God and Son of Mary:  
Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

(L) Lord Jesus, you are Word made flesh  
and splendour of the Father:  
Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

(L): May God who loved the world so much  
that he sent his Son to be our Saviour  
forgive us our sins  
and make us holy to serve him in the world,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

*We now say The Gloria together:*

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world:  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer.  
For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

*The collect for the Baptism of Christ:*

Eternal Father,  
who at the baptism of Jesus  
revealed him to be your Son,  
anointing him with the Holy Spirit:  
grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit,  
that we may be faithful to our calling  
as your adopted children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*Read Genesis 1 v 1 – 5 followed by Psalm 29 concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

*Read Acts 19 v 1 - 7*

*This Canticle is said:*

*All* I have given you as a light to the nations,  
and I have called you in righteousness.

- 1 Thus says God, who created the heavens, ♦  
who fashioned the earth and all that dwells in it;
- 2 Who gives breath to the people upon it ♦  
and spirit to those who walk in it,
- 3 'I am the Lord and I have called you in  
righteousness, ♦  
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
- 4 'I have given you as a covenant to the people, ♦  
a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are  
blind,
- 5 'To bring out the captives from the dungeon, ♦  
from the prison, those who sit in darkness.
- 6 'I am the Lord, that is my name; ♦  
my glory I give to no other.'

*All* Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

*All* I have given you as a light to the nations,  
and I have called you in righteousness.

*(L)* Alleluia, alleluia.  
This is my Son, the Beloved,  
with whom I am well pleased.

*All:* Alleluia.

*Now read Mark 1 v 4 - 11*

*Here are some thoughts on today's readings from Revd. Carol:*

I know we are already entering the second week of the New Year and for some, you may not feel it's very new at all! However, it is never too late to take stock and reflect on how we'd like our lives to be and potentially decide to make some changes. Now I'm not one for the old New Year's resolution thing, because for me, every day is an opportunity for a new start. We can always make a new beginning in small parts of our lives. Indeed, some of you, like me may have one or two things you have decided to change, like try not to concern myself too much about the future, just get on with each day as it comes, or going back and reading some of the books I looked at whilst studying and haven't picked up since, and most importantly for me, is trying to be more prayerful about things. Of course, the bad news is that inevitably I, like

others, will fail - like most of us, fail somewhere along the line.

Both the readings this morning are about beginnings. Genesis is about the very beginning of the creation of the universe, and the Gospel reading was about the beginning of God's ministry to His creation and promise of a new creation through Jesus. Sometimes new beginnings are heralded so that we know that something is coming in advance, like the birth of Jesus, which was foretold in the Scriptures many, many years ahead of His arrival. John the Baptist was the man who had the news about Jesus starting His ministry. So, before we get on to the new beginning let's take a closer look at the start of it all. To do that we do need to look at John the Baptist.

John's ministry was also heralded as it is prophesied in the Old Testament, in the book of Malachi. Chapter 3v1 says: 'See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight —indeed, He is coming, says the LORD of hosts.' And John in the desert, dressed in camel hair and eating locusts may sound a bit odd to us, but his dress was quite intentional. It was a sign to those who knew the Scriptures of who he was. Camels hair and a leather belt signified that John was the promised return of Elijah, which we can see in 2 Kings 1:8 where it says: They answered him, 'A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist.' He said, 'It is Elijah the Tishbite.' And again, it is also mentioned in the book of Malachi chapter 4 verse 5. But John isn't Elijah you may be thinking! However, Jesus, himself says in Matthew 11v14: 'and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.' So, from this we can take it that prophecy was fulfilled, and that John was indeed the new 'Elijah'.

We should remember that to go and see John was not a simple journey. He was literally in the wilderness in a valley outside Jerusalem, near the river Jordan which is about a day's journey. Yet despite this and the message they would be received would have been all about living sinful lives and needing to seek God's repentance and forgiveness, John still had a lot of visitors. And one of those visitors we know was Jesus, who, by virtue of the location, did not just happen to be passing by in a casual way. Jesus had deliberately gone out to see John with the intention of being baptised by him, despite John's protestations. The baptism took place in front of the crowd that was already there. This was Jesus' public declaration of His ministry. It is a new beginning, a change of lifestyle, time to get started. He has accepted the path that God has laid before Him – that He has come to die for the sins of those who trust in Him.

Now Jesus didn't need to be baptised, but by going through with it in this very public way, He aligned Himself with all of us – those who do need to be baptised and forgiven. The other significant thing about Jesus' baptism is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit – the gift that He gives to each of us too. It is at this point that God speaks directly to all who were present: 'And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'. One could say this is the proud parent moment, the words of encouragement that God's child would need, because encouragement was exactly what was required, as it was immediately after this that the Holy Spirit sends Jesus out into the desert to be tempted for forty days.

So, what can we take from Jesus' Baptism to encourage us? Well, no doubt most of us will have been baptised and for those of us baptised as babies or young children, we will have gone on to claim our faith through the sacrament of confirmation. By doing so we too receive that incredible gift

that was promised through Jesus, the Holy Spirit. This is a sign and seal of His love for us. The Holy Spirit provides us with clarity to see the world as it is and helps us to make the right choices in life, and to enable us to declare our faith to others. The great thing about our faith, which we declare at our baptism or confirmation, is that not only do we receive the Holy Spirit, but we too also receive that proud parent moment from God. We can take encouragement that He loves us and looks upon us in the same way that He looks on Jesus. His child. God, the father, says to us: 'You are my Son or Daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' We only have to be ready and willing to receive it.

So, new beginnings, especially with a God who loves us so much, can happen each and every day, and in many different ways too. Sometimes it can be simply be by showing a new appreciation of what we already know can change our lives and change the lives of others. Let us claim Christ's baptism as our own and let's claim those words that God whispers to each and every one of us. Let us just take a moment, now, and gently say those words to ourselves and feel the encouragement and love that God our/your Father wants us/you to receive. 'You are my son/daughter whom I love; with you I am well pleased', AMEN

*Now pause for your own reflections.*

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown,  
when thou camest to earth for me;  
but in Bethlehem's home was there found no room  
for thy holy nativity.

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,  
there is room in my heart for thee.*

Heaven's arches rang when the angels sang,  
proclaiming thy royal degree;  
but in lowly birth didst thou come to earth,  
and in great humility.

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,  
there is room in my heart for thee.*

The foxes found rest, and the birds their nest  
in the shade of the forest tree;  
yet the world found no bed

For the Saviours head  
in the desert of Galilee.

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,  
there is room in my heart for thee.*

Thou camest, Lord, with the living word  
that should set all thy people free;  
but with mocking scorn and with crown of thorn,  
they bore thee to Calvary.

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,  
there is room in my heart for thee.*

When the heavens shall ring, and the angels sing,  
at thy coming to victory,  
let thy voice call me home, saying "Yet there is room,  
there is room at my side for thee."

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,  
there is room in my heart for thee.*

(L): We now affirm our faith in the words of the Creed:

All I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

(L) O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;  
All: let the whole earth tremble before him.

(L) Tell it out among the nations that the Lord is King.  
All: O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

(L) Tell out his salvation from day to day.  
All: Let the whole earth tremble before him.

(L) Declare his glory among the nations  
and his wonders among all peoples.  
All: O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;  
let the whole earth tremble before him.

*We now say 'The Benedictus' together:*

All: This is the Christ, the Chosen of God,  
the one who will bring healing to the nations.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦  
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦  
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦  
to save us from our enemies,  
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦  
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham  
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦  
holy and righteous in his sight  
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the  
Most High, ♦  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦  
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the  
shadow of death, ♦  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All: This is the Christ, the Chosen of God,  
the one who will bring healing to the nations.

*Now we turn to God in a time of prayer, this week  
adapted from Common Worship by Fr. Keith:*

Jesus calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Washed clean by the waters of baptism,  
let us pray that we may live the life to which  
he has called us, and help bring in His Kingdom of  
righteousness and peace:

Lord Jesus, eternal Word,  
proclaimed as the Christ by John the forerunner,  
hear us as we pray for all who proclaim your word:  
our Bishops Andrew and Jo, all who are involved in  
Religious Education in schools, colleges and  
universities, and all who are engaged in missionary work  
around the world.

Lord of truth,  
*hear our prayer.*

Lord Jesus, baptizing with the Spirit and with fire,  
strengthen us to withstand all the trials of our faith,  
particularly at this time of global pandemic. Help us to  
keep focused on you and to be shining lights of your  
love to those around us – especially those who are  
feeling isolated and fearful.  
Give wisdom to the leaders of the nations as they have to  
make so many difficult decisions to do with health,  
education and the economy. We pray that a spirit of  
neighbourliness, generosity and fairness may prevail  
over prejudice, greed and self-interest.

Lord of truth,  
*hear our prayer.*

Lord Jesus, bringing forgiveness to all who repent,  
teach your Church dependence on your grace. Help us to  
seek your truth in Holy Scripture and the traditions of  
your Church. Open our ears to listen to your voice and  
show us how to be faithful and humble in your service.  
May we be able to put any past failures behind us and  
go forward with honesty and enthusiasm to do better in  
future.

Lord of truth,  
*hear our prayer.*

Lord Jesus, fulfilment of the promises of old,  
give hope to all who suffer or are ignored. As you  
brought healing to the sick and reached out to the  
marginalised, may we, and all working in the caring  
professions, follow your example and be able to  
bring relief to all in need around us at this difficult time.  
Give new strength to the weary, and inner peace to the  
traumatised and downcast, may they know your loving  
presence and guidance with them always.

Lord of truth,  
*hear our prayer.*

Lord Jesus, beloved Son of the Father,  
anoint us with the gifts of your Holy Spirit to be your  
voice and your hands and feet in the world today.  
May we never waste the gifts and talents you have given  
us, and work joyfully with others to make your world a  
better, safer place for all. Help us to keep being positive  
and encourage others to see the opportunities for doing  
good that you give to us, even in the darkest of times.

Lord of truth,  
*hear our prayer.*

Lord Jesus, bringer of hope,  
share with all the faithful the riches of eternal life. We  
pray for those who have died recently, among them Pete  
Roberts and John Gaines, all who have succumbed to  
the Covid virus, and those whose anniversary of death  
occurs at this time. May they find rest and peace with  
you in eternity, and may their families and friends know  
the inner peace and comfort that only you can bring.

Lord of truth,  
*hear our prayer.*

Lord Jesus Christ,  
in you the Father makes us and all things new.  
Transform the poverty of our nature  
by the riches of your grace,  
and in the renewal of our lives  
make known your heavenly glory.

*All:* Merciful Father, accept these prayers, for the sake of  
your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

The light that shines is the light of love,  
lights the darkness from above,  
It shines on me and it shines on you,  
And shows what the power of love can do.  
I'm gonna shine my light both far and near,  
I'm gonna shine my light both bright and clear,  
Where there's a dark corner in this land,  
I'm gonna let my little light shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Monday he gave me the gift of love,  
Tuesday peace came from above,  
Wednesday he told me to have more faith,  
Thursday he gave me a little more grace,  
Friday he told me to watch and pray,  
Saturday he told me just what to say,  
On Sunday he gave me the power divine  
To let my little light shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

*Let us pray:*

*(L)* Lord of all time and eternity,  
you opened the heavens and revealed yourself as Father  
in the baptism of Jesus your beloved Son:  
by the power of your Spirit  
complete the heavenly work of our rebirth  
through the waters of the new creation;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(L) May God, who in Christ gives us a spring of water welling up to eternal life, perfect in us the image of his glory; and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us, and remain with us, today and always. Amen.

(L) Let us bless the Lord.  
All: Thanks be to God.

All: May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory. Amen.

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### Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,  
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.  
O Lord, make haste to help us.

From the rising of the sun to its setting  
your glory is proclaimed in all the world.

*A lamp or candle may be lit.*

Blessed are you, Sovereign God,  
our light and our salvation,  
to you be glory and praise for ever.  
You gave your Christ as a light to the nations,  
and through the anointing of the Spirit  
you established us as a royal priesthood.  
As you call us into your marvellous light,  
may our lives bear witness to your truth  
and our lips never cease to proclaim your praise.  
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Blessed be God for ever.

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;  
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;  
with gold of obedience, and incense of lowliness  
kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.

Low at his feet lay thy burden of carefulness:  
high on his heart he will bear it for thee,  
comfort thy sorrows, and answer thy prayerfulness,  
guiding thy steps as may best for thee be.

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness  
of the poor wealth thou wouldst reckon as thine:  
truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,  
these are the offerings to lay on his shrine.

These, though we bring them in trembling and  
fearfulness,  
he will accept for the name that is dear;  
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,  
trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;  
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;  
with gold of obedience, and incense of lowliness  
kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,  
we pray with one heart and mind:

*Silence is kept.*

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,  
so may your mercy come down upon us  
to cleanse our hearts  
and set us free to sing your praise  
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 34; Tue 45; Wed 47; Thurs 61; Fri 68; Sat 85 ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.  
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between the two readings we say:*

All Christ was believed in throughout the world  
and taken up in glory.

- 1 Christ Jesus was revealed in the flesh ♦  
and vindicated in the spirit.
- 2 He was seen by angels ♦  
and proclaimed among the nations.
- 3 Believed in throughout the world, ♦  
he was taken up in glory.
- 4 This will be made manifest at the proper time ♦  
by the blessed and only Sovereign,
- 5 Who alone has immortality, ♦  
and dwells in unapproachable light.

All To the King of kings and Lord of lords ♦  
be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.

All Christ was believed in throughout the world  
and taken up in glory.

*Readings:*

Monday Genesis 1 v 1 - 19; Matthew 21 v 1 - 17  
Tuesday Genesis 1 v 20 to 2 v 3; Matt. 21 v 18 - 32  
Wednesday: Genesis 2 v 4 - end; Matthew 21 v 33 - end  
Thursday: Genesis 3; Matthew 22 v 1 - 14  
Friday: Genesis 4 v 1 - 16 & 25 - 26; Matt. 22 v 15 - 33  
Saturday: Genesis 6 v 1 - 10; Matthew 22 v 34 - end

*After the second reading we say:*

Arise, shine, for your light has come;  
the glory of the Lord is rising upon you.

All Arise, shine, for your light has come;  
the glory of the Lord is rising upon you.

God's salvation has been openly shown to all people.  
All The glory of the Lord is rising upon you.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.  
All Arise, shine, for your light has come;  
the glory of the Lord is rising upon you.

*Gospel Canticle: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)*

All Behold, my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
the anointed one on whom my Spirit rests.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit  
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on  
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the  
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his  
name.

- 3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation to generation.
- 4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit.
- 5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.
- 6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.
- 7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to remember his promise of mercy.
- 8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

All Behold, my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
the anointed one on whom my Spirit rests.

*Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.*

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect:

Eternal Father,  
who at the baptism of Jesus  
revealed him to be your Son,  
anointing him with the Holy Spirit:  
grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit,  
that we may be faithful to our calling  
as your adopted children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.  
*This hymn may be said or sung:*

The race that long in darkness pined  
have seen a glorious light;  
the people dwell in day, who dwell  
in death's surrounding night.

To hail thy rise, thou better Sun,  
the gathering nations come,  
joyous as when the reapers bear  
the harvest-treasures home.

To us a Child of hope is born,  
to us a Son is given;  
him shall the tribes of earth obey,  
him all the hosts of heaven.

His name shall be the Prince of Peace  
for evermore adored,  
the Wonderful, the Counsellor,  
the great and mighty Lord.

His power increasing still shall spread,  
his reign no end shall know;  
justice shall guard his throne above  
and peace abound below.

Let us pray:

Loving God, at this time of crisis when so many are suffering, we pray for our nation and our world. Give our

leaders wisdom, our Health Service strength, our people hope. Lead us through these parched and difficult days to the fresh springs of joy and comfort that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God,  
in Christ you make all things new:  
transform the poverty of our nature  
by the riches of your grace,  
and in the renewal of our lives  
make known your heavenly glory;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

May Christ, who sends us to the nations,  
give us the power of his Spirit. Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen

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## Who do you think you are?

*Bishop Andrew's Sermon, 10.1.21.  
Genesis 1:1-5, Acts 19:1-7. Mark 1:4-11*

*Who do you think you are?*

It's one of the most successful and longstanding shows on the BBC, having recently come to the end of its 17<sup>th</sup> season. Comedian and bird enthusiast Bill Oddie was its first participant back in 2004, and 148 shows later, Liz Carr, comedian and disability rights activist, was given the full treatment a couple of months' back. And in case you've not watched the show – and I can't pretend to be the most consistent viewer myself - it's all about family trees – about digging up the stories of your ancestors, with plenty of surprises and the odd tear-jerking moment along the way.

*So who do you think you are?*

It's a really important question, because behind the undoubted fascination of tracing our ancestral roots, here is an exercise that relates to our very identity and sense of self. Can I be sure of that identity? Can I be confident in it? To what extent is it fixed or fluid? What has been my inheritance, and what will be my legacy?

They may not be questions that we ask ourselves on a regular basis, though I suspect that the various manifestations of lockdown over the past ten months will have led to deeper levels of introspection than existed before. But in many ways, they're foundational to everything else we are and do, determining whether our whole approach to life is positive and resilient or painful and resigned.

*So who do I think I am?*

I am Andrew Watson, the third son of Alison and the late Angus Watson of the village of Wookey, near

Wells in Somerset. I am 5'9, male, white Caucasian, a little heavier than I should be after Christmas, and 6 months away from my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. I am a husband and the father of four, and shortly to become a grandfather for the first time. I am a graduate in Law and Theology. I am the Bishop of Guildford. I am a row of letters and numbers, or so my national insurance card tells me. I am even a distant descendant of King Alfred and the Emperor Charlemagne, if my cousin Cedric's ancestral studies are to be believed!

Yes, but who do I think I *really* am? And at that point the whole thing gets a whole lot more complicated.

What happens, for example, if my family background is frankly fairly ropey – for let's face it, some parents and grandparents are amazing and awesome, while others are absent or abusive. Or what happens if I haven't achieved a lot – at least I don't feel I have - or if I'm not really satisfied with my height or weight, my age or even gender? Does that then consign me to a low self-image, a fragile sense of our own identity, for the whole of my life?

Or what happens, conversely, if I seem to have it all – a good background, great qualifications, a fabulous career and family life - but then tragedy strikes, say, or illness, or a mid-life crisis, or redundancy – or the onset of severe dementia - leading to a downward slide from significant somebody to insignificant nobody? (When my dad came to stay with us in his last months, he thought our golden Labrador was a cat). Somehow these don't seem the firmest foundations on which to build a robust sense of who I am.

So how's this for a case study? You are the Archbishop of Canterbury. You have reached the very pinnacle of your career. You are the leader of 80 million Anglican Christians around the world. Your actions and pronouncements are regularly reported in the national and international media.

And then a journalist discovers that your father *wasn't* your father: that your mother had a drunken one-night stand just before her wedding day. So Archbishop, who do you think you are? You're illegitimate. You're what they used to call a 'bastard child'.

And here was part of Archbishop Justin's powerful response back in April 2016:

*'This revelation has, of course, been a surprise, but in my life and in our marriage Caroline and I have had far worse. I know that I find who I am in Jesus Christ, not in genetics, and my identity in him never changes.*

And so to our gospel reading today – just the same reading, incidentally, as we had five weeks ago, but this time with our attention switching from an Advent focus on a latter-day prophet to an Epiphany focus on the Galilean carpenter, whose sandals he was not worthy to untie.

There are stories circulating about this young man from Nazareth, and especially about the circumstances that surrounded his birth, with varying reports of angels and shepherds, of stars and wise

men doing the rounds, which provoke awe and scepticism in equal measure. There are lingering questions about his paternity too, and more than a passing interest in his genealogy, which can be traced right back to the mighty King David, with some pretty colourful characters along the way.

So Jesus, who do you think you are? It's a good question, but it's not the *primary* question that concerns Mark the evangelist. For at the heart of his account of Jesus' baptism is a more fundamental question still: Jesus, who does *God* think you are? And here's the answer, given in a similar form in Matthew and Luke's accounts too: *'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'*.

'You are my Son': well, of course, that was remarkable in itself, even if the first readers of Mark's Gospel may not have immediately jumped to the conclusion that Jesus was the second person of the Trinity. 'With you I am well pleased': again, it's a powerful phrase, not least given the distant echoes of this passage with the

epic story of Creation itself in Genesis chapter 1, as the Spirit hovered over the waters of baptism in the form of a fluttering dove, and the word of God spoke into the silence and proclaimed this Jesus as 'very good'. But it's that middle phrase – 'The Beloved', or in the Greek, *'ho agapetos'* - which is especially striking, not least as we embark on all the uncertainties of this new year together.

It's a passive phrase, after all, 'The Beloved'. It doesn't suggest something deserved by intrinsic merit or earned by years of feverish activity. It rather expresses something that simply 'is', a state of being loved. And while I'm quite sure that God's love for Jesus was fully reciprocated all through those unrecorded years of the young man's upbringing, that's not the emphasis here. Before Jesus does anything in Mark's Gospel – before he speaks a single word – we learn that he's already *'ho agapetos'*. And in case we don't get that the first time, or Jesus himself is in danger of forgetting it, there's a kind of booster jab in the story of the Transfiguration some chapters later, where again we have that voice from heaven: 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'; though this time with an additional clause, 'Listen to Him!'

Move forward a decade or so, and St Paul certainly 'listened to him', when the Risen Christ appeared to him on the Road to Damascus and proclaimed 'Let there be light!' into the dark recesses of the apostle's proud and violent heart; and our epistle reading from the Book of Acts also draws together the Genesis elements of water and light and the Wind of the Spirit and the Word of God, as twelve Ephesian disciples became new creations at the apostle's hands.

And Paul in his writings too began to use the language of 'The Beloved' – *'ho agapetos'* – but this time to do so in a radically new way. When the apostle wrote to the Christians in Rome, he described them as 'God's beloved [*agapetois theou*], who are called to be saints'. When he wrote to the Christians in Colossae, he told them they were 'God's chosen ones, holy and

beloved', before challenging them to 'clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience'. So how did that happen, that switch from *Jesus* as God's 'agapetos' to *us* as God's 'agapetos'? Paul put it brilliantly in his letter to the Ephesian Christians, the twelve from our Acts reading no doubt among them: that 'God's glorious grace' has been 'freely bestowed on us' 'in the Beloved'. When God looks at us, in other words, He looks at us in Jesus. We are holy and dearly loved, because He is holy and dearly loved. *'I find who I am in Jesus Christ'*, as Archbishop Justin put it, *'not in genetics, and my identity in him never changes'*.

And what a joy, and what a relief! 'See what great love the Father has lavished on us', as John enthuses in his first letter, *'that we should be called children of God!'* For a day will come when I'm no longer Bishop of Guildford, but retire into obscurity: and when I'm old, incidentally, I won't wear purple! A day will come when I'm no longer 5'9, because my body starts to shrink and wither away. A day will come – quite possibly - when I look at a Golden Labrador and think it's a cat. A day will come – quite certainly – when Andrew Watson becomes the *late* Andrew Watson.

And what possible understanding of my identity can survive all that? What on earth will be the point of my degrees and qualifications then, let alone my dubious hereditary links with King Alfred or the Emperor Charlemagne? I find who I am in Jesus Christ. His grace has been freely bestowed on me in the Beloved. That has to be at the very foundation of my self-understanding if I am truly to build my house upon a rock.

So who do you think you are? Or rather, more fundamentally, who does *God* think you are?

'You are a new creation', St Paul proclaims: 'the old has passed away, behold the new has come'. And then he quietly whispers in our ear: 'Now, live a life worthy of your calling'.

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