

Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit
9th January 2022 The first Sunday after
Epiphany

Hello, my name is Joan Bailey and I'm a Local Preacher in this circuit. Welcome to worship wherever or whenever you are following this service.

As I was preparing, I found this hymn which was new to me and I wanted to use the words to lead us into worship. It helps us to reflect on our relationship with God in every area of our lives.

So let us pray

StF 45

Earth's creator,
everyday God,
Loving Maker,
O Jesus,
you who shaped us,
O Spirit,
recreate us,
come, be with us.

In your presence,
everyday God,
we are gathered,
O Jesus,
you have called us,
O Spirit,
to restore us,
come, be with us.

Life of all lives,
everyday God,
love of all loves,
O Jesus,
hope of all hopes,
O Spirit,
light of all lights,
come, be with us.

In our resting,
everyday God,
in our rising,
O Jesus,
in our hoping,
O Spirit,
in our waiting,
come, be with us.

In our dreaming,
everyday God,
in our daring,
O Jesus,
in our searching,
O Spirit,
in our sharing,
come, be with us.

God of laughter,
everyday God
God of sorrow,
O Jesus,
home and shelter,
O Spirit,
strong and patient,
come, be with us.

Way of freedom,
everyday God,
star of morning,
O Jesus,
timeless healer,
O Spirit,
flame eternal,
come, be with us.

Word of gladness,
everyday God,
word of mercy,
O Jesus,
word of friendship,
O Spirit,
word of challenge,
come, be with us.

Gentle father,
everyday God,
faithful brother,
O Jesus,
tender sister,
O Spirit,
loving mother,
come, be with us.

Our beginning,
everyday God,
our unfolding,
O Jesus,
our enduring,
O Spirit,
journey's ending,
come, be with us.

Alleluia,
everyday God,
now and always,
O Jesus,
alleluia,
O Spirit,
through all ages,
come, be with us.

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)

And now please join in with the **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

Old Testament reading
Isaiah 43:1, 6-7 New International Version

But now, this is what the Lord says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
Do not be afraid, for I am with you;
I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.
⁶I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’
and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’
Bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the ends of the earth—
⁷everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.”

StF 228

Hail to the Lord's Anointed,
great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed,
his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
to set the captive free,
to take away transgression,
and rule in equity.

2 He comes, with succour speedy,
to those who suffer wrong;
to help the poor and needy,
and bid the weak be strong;
to give them songs for sighing,
their darkness turn to light,
whose souls, condemned and dying,
are precious in his sight.

3 He shall come down like showers
upon the fruitful earth;
love, joy, and hope, like flowers,
spring in his path to birth;
before him, on the mountains,
shall peace the herald go;
and righteousness, in fountains,
from hill to valley flow.

4 Kings shall fall down before him,
and gold and incense bring;
all nations shall adore him,
his praise all people sing;
to him shall prayer unceasing
and daily vows ascend,
his kingdom still increasing,
a kingdom without end.

5 O'er every foe victorious,
he on his throne shall rest;
from age to age more glorious,
all-blessing and all-blest.
The tide of time shall never
his covenant remove;
his name shall stand for ever,
his changeless name of Love.

James Montgomery (1771-1854)

Some thoughts

Isaiah reminds us of God's constant care for all his people, calling on us to not be afraid and to remember that care stretches to encompass the whole world, north, south, east and west. We are constantly reminded of this and yet sometimes we find it difficult to remember and understand and so we seek for reassurance for ourselves.

Have you ever had one of those lightbulb moments when something you'd found it hard to understand was suddenly made clear? Or when you couldn't decide which direction to take but suddenly it was revealed?

Thursday was the beginning of the feast of Epiphany. We remember the arrival of the wise men who, having searched, set off on a journey but took a wrong turn, had to be redirected by the same Scriptures that we read and were finally surprised but overjoyed to reach the end of their journey in an unexpected way. They had searched and they had found their epiphany. Today is the first Sunday in Epiphany but what does that word mean? I searched on Google.

'An epiphany is an experience of sudden and striking realization. Generally, the term is used to describe scientific breakthrough, religious or philosophical discoveries, but it can apply in any situation in which an enlightening realization allows a problem or situation to be understood from a new and deeper perspective.

Epiphanies are relatively rare occurrences and generally follow a process of significant thought about a problem.'

What are our epiphany moments, those moments of dawning realisation which really make a difference to our thinking and our actions? For example

- as when we wait through Advent, hear and re-enact the Christmas story and have the chance each year to understand again just what it really means, that God should be prepared to live among us, now as well as then.
- as when the magi having studied for many years, had enough of a revelation and enough faith in the results of their study to undertake a long journey and then to arrive at their own moment of epiphany as they saw something new in a small baby,
- as when Jesus, at his baptism, came up from the water and a dove descended and a voice said, 'This is my Son whom I love; with you I am well pleased,'
- as with the Jewish nation who had studied and prayed for centuries and looked for the promised Messiah. Was a recognition of Jesus as that Messiah an epiphany moment for some of them?

Simply put, the meaning of Epiphany is to show, to make known, to reveal – to understand and to know.

Today we, too, on our own spiritual journeys, will be invited to explore our own 'epiphany moment' recognising Jesus and his mission and making our responses.

We move on some 30 years from the birth of Jesus to the beginning of his ministry.

First a reading from Luke and a short one from Acts

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 New International Version

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Acts 8:14-17 New International Version

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy

Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

StF 233

When Jesus came to Jordan
to be baptised by John,
he did not come for pardon,
but as his Father's Son.
He came to share repentance
with all who mourn their sins,
to speak the vital sentence
with which good news begins.

2 He came to share temptation,
our utmost woe and loss,
for us and our salvation
to die upon the cross.
So when the Dove descended
on him, the Son of Man,
the hidden years had ended,
the age of grace began.

3 Come, Holy Spirit, aid us
to keep the vows we make;
this very day invade us,
and every bondage break.
Come, give our lives direction,
the gift we covet most:
to share the resurrection
that leads to Pentecost.

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

Now in company with those who came to Jordan for the baptism of repentance let us confess our own shortcomings to God and ask for forgiveness.

Let us pray

Forgiving God, we come confessing our wrongdoing.

As part of a wider community, we ask you to forgive -

For the times we have been blind to large issues, when injustices have been practised because we did nothing, thinking we were too small and lacking in influence.

For the times we have turned away from those in need because to serve them was inconvenient. For the times we have damaged your created world using resources extravagantly and for our own ends.

We ask forgiveness for ourselves
When we have failed to listen to the voice of your Holy Spirit within us prompting us to do right.

When we have actively hurt others simply because they were different or inconvenient, uttering thoughtless words with no regard to the consequences.

We come to you now, repentant, asking for forgiveness and resolved to turn and live differently according to the ways you teach us.

God forgives all who sincerely repent and gives us all the grace, through the promptings of his Spirit, to live life as Jesus taught us, life in all its fullness. Amen

Some thoughts

The people who came to Jordan to hear John had many reasons to pity themselves. They lived under an often-cruel occupying power and a puppet king. Life was often harsh, brutish and short. They could feel justified in their bitterness and in their questioning of their God who for a long time had seemed to be absent. And yet something still drew them to listen to John and then to examine themselves recognising their own shortcomings. Many at that time expressed a longing to come back to a full relationship with God and to repent by being symbolically washed in the Jordan. They remembered the promises and their hope for a Messiah but first they had to prepare themselves.

In Samaria, in the days of the young church, some had also taken that step of repentance and commitment and been baptised into a new way of living.

We, too, are finding life difficult and can be tempted to blame others for pandemics, global warming and rising prices - to blame anyone but ourselves. It's true that many of the wrongs of society may have been brought on us without our being fully aware of the potential for harm of our actions. Now we have been forced, reluctantly, to face up to our own responsibilities and to find ways of turning round, repenting and, difficult as it is, to find new ways of living with concern for all with whom we share this planet lent to us. We have found comfort and hope, as did the Jews at Jordan in the promises of Scripture and our experience of God's love.

Both then and now, in our seeking, we need, before our epiphanies, the moment of realisation, to journey into ourselves and be prepared to make the changes we need to live the new life.

As they stood by the Jordan people questioned whether John was the promised Messiah and were pointed beyond to another figure, the one

we now recognise as Jesus, who would fulfil that role.

Jesus, too, came to Jordan, not looking very different from anyone else who was there. He was simply one of the crowd, one of us. He, too, as one of us, stepped into the water to be baptised but then something more happened. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove descended on him and a voice proclaimed him to be God's son. Jesus' baptism had a second stage to it. Those who followed Jesus closely also reached that second stage when, after all their learning from Jesus, after the pain of his death and the separation from him, received the empowering Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Those same apostles, overseeing the growth of the early church recognised, in the people of Samaria, a commitment, growing understanding and a willingness to follow Jesus, but they knew that more was needed and prayed that they might also receive the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who had enabled those hesitant, fear-filled early disciples to move on from their established beliefs and develop something new, accepting converts from outside the Jewish faith and wanting, through the Spirit, to share equal gifts with them. As Isaiah had said,

Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.

⁶ I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'
and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'

Bring my sons from afar

and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

⁷ everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."

That includes us today.

The moment of realisation, our own epiphanies, follow that recognition that, in Jesus, God is incarnate, the promised Messiah and, as we will shortly sing, is,

"Our God contracted to a span,
incomprehensibly made man."

That is when, often without being able to put it into words, we suddenly know and that transforms our relationships with God, with others and with the world.

Prayers

Let us now take a quiet time to think about and bring to God the many distressing images we have seen in recent weeks and months of

refugees, of victims of natural disasters and many more.

Let us pray

Ever present God we come to you with many questions, many needs and so much we don't understand. We want answers. Distracted we often find it hard to pray and to listen. We turn now to you in prayer to share with you all those things which most worry and frustrate us.

We pray for nations of this world suffering in their different ways as this pandemic mutates and returns, limiting freedoms, creating fear and damaging economies. We thank you for the work of scientists and medical staff who have done so much to see us through these difficult times. We know that that all nations are not equal and that many are suffering more than we are. Ever present God, in their struggles, you know each sufferer, each tired worker and each decision maker. Give them patience, courage and strength.

At this time and in this space, Lord, we ask
Hear our prayer

As we struggle to stabilise the finances of this nation give us the charity as a nation to still give aid to the poor, to offer hospitality to the homeless and to continually review the world's needs as well as our own.

At this time and in this space, Lord, we ask
Hear our prayer

In quietness now we each bring to you all those we know who are in difficulty.

(pause)

At this time and in this space, Lord, we ask
Hear our prayer

We bring these prayers to you in confidence for you are always with us, always acting for good and calling us to be your partners in your kingdom.

At this time and in this space, Lord, we ask
Hear our prayer. Amen

StF 208

Let earth and heaven combine
angels and all agree,
to praise in songs divine
the incarnate Deity,
our God contracted to a span,
incomprehensibly made man.

He laid his glory by,
he wrapped him in our clay;
unmarked by human eye,
the latent Godhead lay;
infant of days he here became,
and bore the mild Immanuel's name.

Unsearchable the love
that has the Saviour brought;
the grace is far above
both earth's and angels' thought:
suffice for us that God, we know,
our God, is manifest below.

He deigns in flesh to appear,
widest extremes to join;
to bring our vileness near,
and make us all divine:
and we the life of God shall know,
for God is manifest below.

Made perfect first in love,
and sanctified by grace,
we shall from earth remove,
and see his glorious face:
his love shall then be fully showed,
and we shall all be lost in God.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing

May the blessed presence of God fill our hearts with the assurances of God's love. May the gracious arms of Jesus Christ embrace us as part of the community of believers. May the Holy Spirit baptise us afresh and lead us into newness of life. And may we always live in trust, knowing that we are God's always and forever. Amen