

10th January 2021

Come, let us honour the powerful glory of our Creator God.

Let us worship God's majesty in the splendour of holiness. **Amen.**

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Before the world began,
one Word was there;
grounded in God he was,
rooted in care;
by him all things were made,
in him was love displayed,
through him God spoke, and said,
'I am for you.'

The Word was in the world
which from him came;
unrecognised he was,
unknown by name;
one with all humankind,
with the unloved aligned,
convincing sight and mind,
'I am for you.'

Life found in him its source,
death found its end;
light found in him its course,
darkness its friend.
For neither death nor doubt
nor darkness can put out
the glow of God, the shout,
'I am for you.'

All who received the Word
by God were blessed;
sisters and brothers they
of earth's fond guest.
So did the Word of grace
proclaim in time and space
and with a human face,
'I am for you.'

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h2n8kqmiQ>

Lord God, how awesome you are.
Your voice is powerful and majestic.
Once, the earth was without shape.
Dark and empty.
Then you spoke, awesome God.
And light shone.
You separated
the light from the darkness.
The whole world changed.
You later sent your Son, Jesus.
To live and walk
among us on the earth.



His ministry heralded by John the Baptist. Who baptized Jesus in the Jordan.
The whole world changed. The sky split open.
And your Holy Spirit came down like a dove.
Then you spoke, awesome God.
And continue to speak today through your Holy Spirit.

All Majestic, awesome, all-powerful God, we adore your holy name. **Amen.**

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Genesis 1:1-5

Mark1:1-11

At the very beginning of the story of God's outpouring of life, we find a powerful account of the dawn of everything, with its description of emptiness and darkness suddenly transformed by the word of God. It is a thrilling moment, as light erupts from the chaos and the life of creation takes off. Instrumental in this process is the 'wind from God' also translated as 'storm from God'; 'breath of God'; 'spirit of God'. Each option enriches our understanding of the dynamic flow of God's life, kindling creation.

Yet, in this moment of new life, there is also separation from God. Creation, summed up so far only in the light, is something that God can look at – there is a critical distance between creation and creator. God evaluates the light and finds it good, but the gap remains, and creation will remain separate until God tears the barrier down and comes to live the life of humanity in Jesus.

Having so recently celebrated the arrival of Jesus in the world as a baby and been reminded of the many stories that surround his birth of different people, rich and poor, good and bad, that were instrumental at the time it seems odd that today we immediately jump to the story of his baptism, not as an infant but as a fully grown man. We are used to combining the stories within the gospels in our minds into some kind of coherent chronological sequence. Yet if we were only to ever read the gospel of Mark, we would know nothing about Jesus's birth or childhood. This is where he begins. Why do you think that is?

Some scholars believe that the gospel writer wasn't aware of the stories surrounding Jesus's birth. There was huge shame and stigma associated with an illegitimate birth. It was, perhaps, a secret, not known to many. Others think that there was simply nothing much to tell about a childhood which was like any other. The most significant event in childhood might have been the celebration of its ending as that child came of age and adulthood began.

If you were to tell someone who knew nothing of Jesus where would you begin? When you tell people your life story where do you begin? Which bits of your story would you choose to omit? Why?

Mark's gospel is certainly full of new beginnings of a different kind. The first sentence of the Gospel spells out the way in which the world is entirely changed, now that Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, is present. Mark goes on to describe the ways in which this new life is made real. People



are offered the opportunity for a fresh start. The Greek word usually translated 'repentance' (v.4) carries the sense of 'a change of mind' or 'a change of heart'. It relates far more to the promise of a new future than to mulling over the sins of the past. But this is only stage one of the new life into which God invites us.

The baptism of Jesus is new beginning for him. Though there is nothing for Jesus to repent of (see Matthew 3.14), yet this is a new stage in his life too, as he moves away from the hidden years in Nazareth and begins his active ministry.

I wonder what new beginnings have taken place in your life. How significant have they been? How significant have they been for the people who know and love you? Have they had a wider impact?

And the baptism of Jesus signals a new beginning for countless other people too. God does something amazing. People of Jesus' time tended to imagine a rigid, unbreakable barrier dividing earth and heaven, one that made it impossible for humanity to reach God. Now this barrier is torn apart (v.10) and God's Spirit comes powering through, like a descending dove. The world is indeed changed and those who experience Jesus' baptism in the Spirit will begin to discover what that means.

What experiences have you had of significant barriers being broken or removed? What experiences have you had of the meeting of heaven and earth, of heaven coming to earth, of the presence of God with you in the here and now?



Thin places are where the veil between this world and the eternal, the physical and the spiritual, the mortal and the immortal, is almost transparent and the two become one. Do you know any?

This tearing apart of another significant barrier also took place at the end of the life of Jesus. At the moment when Jesus took his last breath the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-54). Jesus's death opened up the way for heaven and earth to meet, giving ordinary fallible human beings direct access to almighty God. Here was another new beginning of epic proportions and universal significance. The way is open to all. **Thanks be to God.**

Lord, when you came into the world, things changed. When we came into a relationship with you, things changed. Life became filled with a new sense of purpose and peace. But, Lord, sometimes we let you down by doing wrong things or failing to do right things. **We are sorry, Lord.**

Sometimes, Lord, through pride, stubbornness or fear we build barriers and keep others at arm's length – even you, Lord. **We are sorry, Lord.**

At times we give in to our weaknesses and temptations, failing to draw on your strength. At times we are troubled by difficult situations and find it hard to trust you. **We are sorry, Lord.**

Help us to turn such things around and turn to you. Help us to learn from the past and, drawing on your strength and peace, make a better future.

O God, when Jesus was baptised, you spoke of your love for him. You showed your love for us through Jesus' death and resurrection. By the power of the cross, the darkness of our wrongdoing is banished by the light of your loving forgiveness.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

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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.

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.

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)
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London N3 1DZ www.stainer.co.uk
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4zYxQ6jYeU>



Lord, who created order from the chaos, **bring light to darkness.**

In places of war and conflict, where there is famine and suffering,
where we struggle to see how we can make a difference, **bring light to darkness.**

In our own communities, for those who are poor,
for the homeless and hungry, for the lonely and the prisoner,
bring light to darkness.

In those whose lives are made harder by illness ...,
and those who search for peace and cannot find it, **bring light to darkness.**

In the lives of those who are grieving ..., **bring light to darkness**

In the lives of those we live with,
those we work with and those we play with,
and for ourselves, **bring light to darkness. Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.**

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