

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
WILLMAR, MN
January 10, 2020
Baptism of Our Lord**



Prelude

Welcome to Worship

Friends, out of an abundance of caution, we have returned to online only services. We welcome all of you who are joining us on the internet. It is not the same as being together in our sanctuary for worship. But, for now, this online community is our sacred space. And God meets us wherever we are.

Announcements:

Now, let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship.

Preparing Our Hearts

“The River Is Here”

words and music by Andy Park
©1994 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing
CCLI License # 3272690

Down the mountain the river flows
And it brings refreshing wherever it goes.
Through the valleys and over the fields
The river is rushing and the river is here.

The river of God sets our feet to dancing,
The river of God fills our hearts with cheer.
The river of God fills our mouths with laughter,
And we rejoice for the river is here.

The river of God is teeming with life,
And all who touch it can be revived.
And those who linger on this river's shore
Will come back thirsting for more of the Lord.

The river of God sets our feet to dancing,
The river of God fills our hearts with cheer.
The river of God fills our mouths with laughter,
And we rejoice for the river is here.

Up to the mountain we love to go
To find the presence of the Lord.
Along the banks of the river we run,
We dance with laughter giving praise to the Son.

The river of God sets our feet to dancing,
The river of God fills our hearts with cheer.
The river of God fills our mouths with laughter,
And we rejoice for the river is here.

Down the mountain the river flows
And it brings refreshing wherever it goes.
Through the valleys and over the fields
The river is rushing and the river is here.

The river of God sets our feet to dancing,
The river of God fills our hearts with cheer.
The river of God fills our mouths with laughter,
And we rejoice for the river is here.
Yes, we rejoice for the river is here.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
Your Spirit swept over the waters of creation;

You are sweeping over us now, creating something new.
Call us away from the distractions of the world
to experience what You are doing now, in us,
and through us, and in our world.
Open us to a new awakening, a new beginning,
where we look through the lens of the goodness of Your creation,
experiencing all possibilities in You.
Turn us away from the negative lens,
and lead us to the light.
In the name of Jesus, who leads us into life, we pray.
Amen.

Hymn

“Come Thou Fount”

Permission to print lyrics obtained from One License with license #A-723596

Come, thou Fount of every blessing; tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above;
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it, mount of God's unchanging love!

Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by thy help I'm come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart; O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.

Scripture Lesson

Genesis 1:1-5

1 In the beginning when God created[a] the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light

from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Mark 1:4-11

4 John the baptizer appeared[a] in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **6** Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. **8** I have baptized you with[b] water; but he will baptize you with[c] the Holy Spirit." **9** In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. **11** And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved;[d] with you I am well pleased."

Message

"Water and Wilderness" Rev. Leanne Thompson

I encourage you to think for a moment of a time you were swept up in the flow of something.

Have you ever been carried by water? Maybe you were whitewater rafting or buckled into a giant raft rushing down a water flume at a theme park, bracing yourself for the water to splash you. Maybe you were stretched out, hands over your chest, stomach in your throat as you dropped down a water slide. Not a particularly safe feeling but thrilling! We human beings tend to like our thrilling experiences - the ones that frighten us just enough to release a tidal wave of adrenaline, dopamine, and endorphins in our brain. But we also like those thrilling experiences to be in safe, controlled environments where the danger is only suggested, not reality. But it can be so exhilarating to flirt with the danger of rushing waters.

I ask you to consider these experiences because I want you to consider, just for a moment what watery chaos feels like. What it feels like to be riding something that is even just a little bit out of your control. Here in the *Land of 10,000 Lakes* we are familiar with calm waters, restful waters, idyllic scenes that sooth our spirits. But

that is not the water we are talking about today. We are talking about rushing waters. Waters that move and carry us. And it might be fun, exhilarating even, to be carried away on that rush of water moving down a river, or through the shoot of a water slide. But water can be terrifying if you are being swept away without your consent: a current that carries you, bouncing off rocks and debris if you happen to fall out of that raft or tube; a riptide that pulls you away from the safety of the shoreline; a car caught and carried by flood waters; a tsunami that rushes in to pour out destruction. I want you to think of the most terrifying image of water you have experienced or watched on the television, because that is where our story begins: in the watery chaos of the primordial ocean that predated creation.

Kathryn Schifferdecker of Luther Seminary offers a beautiful translation of the Genesis text I read this morning. She says it this way: “When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was wild and waste, utter darkness covered the deep, and the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters.” Wild and waste. We can’t, I don’t believe, even begin to imagine the chaos of that wild and waste. But God spoke, “Let there be light.” And there was light that began to shine in the darkness. And by the glow of that light, that watery chaos began to take shape. The rising of the earth gave shape to watersheds, that fed creeks, that fed into rivers, that flowed in particular directions to meet oceans. Oceans which were harnessed by tides. The Word of God spoke first to bring light into darkness and then continued to speak order out of chaos. Order out of Chaos.

Perhaps water isn’t the only experience you have had with chaos or being carried along by a current just outside of your control.

Perhaps you have found yourself swept up in the flow of people: pressed forward as you move together through airport security; caught up in the crush of dancing bodies on the floor at a concert of your favorite band, being pressed ever closer to the stage; moving shoulder to shoulder, sometimes with the crowd and sometimes attempting to weave yourself against the crowd as you make your way down the main arteries at the Minnesota State Fair. Again, thrilling experiences (or a means to a thrilling experience) but not a particularly safe feeling, for me at least.

Or maybe what carried you away were ideas. There are marketing specialists that are exceptionally good at selling us products we don’t need by convincing us they will change our lives. There are political spin doctors that are adept at twisting the facts just enough to make falsehoods feel like life-giving truth. There are conspiracy theorists that are so effective at selling their version of reality that they amass cult-like followings. We human beings, curious creatures that we are, stick

our toes in to test the waters and discover we've been swept away to purchase cosmetics that don't miraculously make us look younger, or worse, that we've bought into ideologies that masquerade as good, wholesome values in order to manipulate us into destructive ways of thinking and acting toward our neighbors.

This week we watched a destructive ideology paired with the power of *herd mentality*, sometimes called *mob mentality*, lead to violence in our nation's capital. I was stunned, as I know many of you were, because you have talked to me about it. It wasn't something we thought we would actually see happen. The talk of violence was there, of course. But, like many of you, I believed it would stay just talk (hoped and prayed it would just stay talk), I believed the better qualities of human nature would prevail and people - even angry people, even people with competing political ideologies - wouldn't cross that line. But they did. And even those of us who were watching from a distance, not present amid that chaos, felt the violence and violation of the actions taken by those extremists - those who bought so deeply into the ideology that they were willing to go to war to defend it. I am deeply troubled to discover that this is who we are as a nation. And I am deeply longing for us to be better than we are.

So, just a word about *herd mentality*. Herd mentality "describes how humans adopt behaviors, buy merchandise, and follow trends based on their circle of influence. It explains how one's point of view can be easily altered by those around them." Herd mentality is obvious at something like a sporting event - fans all cheering together for their team, caught up in the energy and excitement that they share, sporting their team colors and swag. Herd mentality isn't inherently bad. It can reinforce a sense of comradery and belonging. But it can also, as we have seen, be dangerous. Herd mentality played a part, after all, in the Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism. And I don't know about you, but I don't want to be part of something that embraces that kind of violence, cruelty, and vindictiveness. I have no tolerance or patience for neighbor spitefully turning against neighbor.

The circumstances were different, but the needs were the same when so many began flocking to John in the wilderness seeking the baptism he offered. The world was in chaos, and people recognized that they were part of that chaos, contributing to that chaos, complicit in that chaos. And they wanted out of the current they were caught up in. They wanted a different life. "Repent and be baptized," John offered. And they came, hungry for wholeness, restoration, and peace - if not in the world, at least in their hearts. They repented and were baptized. *And then Jesus shows up in that wilderness and presents himself to John in order that he might be baptized.*

It seems a strange thing for Jesus to do. Jesus, who is without sin. Jesus, who has nothing for which to repent. And yet, Jesus steps into that water and he offers himself. I believe it is safe to say that the water did not change Jesus; Jesus changed the water. In the Jordan river, the very waters that marked the division between wilderness and the land of milk and honey for the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness after fleeing Egypt, Jesus offers himself to open a pathway between the sinfulness of the world and the abundance of new life. As Jesus steps into the waters of the Jordan, "...that same voice that says 'Let there be light,' now declares, 'You are my son, the Beloved.' And the Spirit who broods over the waters in the same Spirit who descends on Jesus in the waters of the Jordan and names him, 'beloved.' And then the Spirit drives him out into the wild and wasteland to begin his ministry of proclaiming the wildness of the Kingdom of God come near."

Hear the profound thing that just happened here: the same voice that spoke over the watery chaos of the primordial sea to bring order out of chaos so that life might flourish, that same voice speaks again to create a pathway through the wilderness that leads to abundant life.

Hold on to that thought for a minute. We are going to come back to it. But I want to ask you first: how many of you feel like you are drowning in chaos, or wandering in the wilderness? I have been in the wilderness this week – actually, longer than that. But I have really felt the weight of wilderness and chaos this week. We have been wandering in the wilderness of pandemic. We have been wandering in the world of contentious politics. We have been wandering in the wilderness of grief and loss. And let me tell you, when you are dealing with all of those at once it feels like drowning in too much...just too much.

So, friends, own your wilderness right now. Name it; name the chaos that is trying to consume you. And hear this truth: God, who created life out of the watery chaos of the primordial seas, can create life out of this chaos, this wilderness too. God is still creating pathways to abundant life for us. And often those pathways lead through turbulent waters. We don't like to pass through them, but there is no way forward except to step forward into them and keep walking. And we do so in faith because we know that God does not abandon us to those turbulent waters. God meets us in those turbulent waters and leads us through those turbulent waters to new life.

This is the truth we proclaim in Baptism. The waters of Baptism might look placid, but they are the waters in which we die and are reborn. They are fierce waters that

transform us. They are the waters in which we renounce sin in our lives and in the world. They are the waters in which we sacrifice our selfish desires in order to embrace God's desires for the world. They are the waters that draw us into a fellowship of those who share the mind and heart of Christ Jesus, the waters in which we commit to a life of faith, fellowship, and service. And it is from these waters we are sent back out into the wilderness to share the acceptance and hope we encountered in those waters.

These waters are not calm and peaceful! Schifferdecker writes: "Water is a dangerous thing. Water can drown and destroy and wash away all that we cling to for security. Water, especially the water of baptism, is not safe. It is far from safe. But it is neither to a life of safety nor to a life of comfort that God calls us. The God who delights in the whale and the walrus, the sea lion and the squid, and all the wild and dangerous creatures in between, also delights in us. God calls us to new adventures in the waters of baptism. And in those waters of baptism, for the sake of Christ, God calls us Beloved."

Make no mistake, Beloved ones. You have been called, and that calling calls you away from something (sin, brokenness, despair), but it also calls you to something. The waters of baptism are not the destination; they are the point in our journey where the destination changes. And I don't just mean we get to go to heaven. I certainly don't mean that all our suffering and sorrow will miraculously cease. But we do get to become part of something beautiful and life-giving. Jesus leads us through the turbulent waters of Baptism in order that we might join a family of faith *and* join a movement larger than ourselves. We who have passed through the waters of Baptism get to be part of the best kind of *herd mentality*. We become part of a family of faith that encourages us, challenges us, and helps us grow more in the image of Christ. We become part of a movement that embraces love, acceptance, hospitality, and restoration. We are surrounded by brothers and sisters in Christ who are learning together and holding one another accountable. We get to marinate in Kingdom ethics and become repairers of the breach. And we get to do all of that while hearing the voice of our Savior call us *Beloved*.

But we are human, and we are easily led astray, and sometimes we get swept up in visions for the world that are not God's vision for the world. Sometimes we forget to look outside ourselves and sacrifice our own desires to care for our neighbors. It happens. And when it does, the voice of love invites us to step out of the current that has caught us and return to the one who loves us.

So I invite you, on this Sunday when we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord, to reaffirm your own Baptism and return to the way of Jesus.

Beloved people of God, our baptism is the sign and seal of our cleansing from sin, and of our being grafted into Christ. Through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the power of sin was broken and God's kingdom entered the world. Through our baptism we were made citizens of God's kingdom, and freed from the bondage of sin. Let us celebrate that freedom and redemption through the renewal of the promises made at our baptism.

I ask you, therefore, once again to reject sin, to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and to confess the faith of the church, the faith in which we were baptized.

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

I do.

Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his word and showing his love?

I will, with God's help.

Remember your baptism and be thankful, in the name of the Father; and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious Father, you are Lord of our beginnings, and our ending, and all that lies between. We praise you: for how you have poured out upon us blessing after blessing; for how you have reached out to us; for how you have come to us; for how you have spoken to us. Help us to live the faith you have given us. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Loving God - we thank you for how Christ Jesus came among us and identified himself completely with us - going so far as to take upon himself our sin, our suffering, and finally our death. Help us Lord to not hold back ourselves from identifying with him and with the church that he established. May we indeed be

united with him in his death so that we might also share in his resurrection. Help us to commit ourselves to him and to the family he has called us to be a part of - to be members of his visible body here in this place - to be his disciples and his apostles - his evangelists and his teachers - his feet and his hands - his eyes and his ears - his light and his salt - day by day. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Anoint all the people of your church, O God, that your will may be done and your name be glorified. Make us one as you are one... both those who are near and those who are far off. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Anoint the grieving with your comfort, so that they may know your light even in the time of their deepest darkness. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Anoint the broken in body and spirit with your healing, so that they may know you are Lord of all their days and so that they may praise you each day no matter what it may bring. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Anoint, O God, all those for whom we ask now, either spoken aloud or in the silence of our hearts. (Pause for Prayers) **Lord, hear our prayer.**

O God of infinite mercy, pour your love out upon us each day. We pray through Jesus, your Anointed One, he who first taught us to pray to you saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

The earth belongs to God, our creator; every good thing is a gift from the Lord. Let us glorify God through the gift of our lives. Let us bless these gifts to the glory of God praying:

Offering Prayer

We give you thanks, O God,
for every blessing and spiritual gift
you have poured out upon us.
Let the gifts of our lives

be a source of blessing in your world,
all to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.

Hymn of Preparation

“Spirt Song”

words and music by John Wimber
©1979 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing
CCLI License # 3272690

Oh let the Son of God enfold you with His spirit and His love;
Let Him fill your heart and satisfy your soul.
Oh let Him have those things that hold you, and His Spirit like a dove,
Will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Jesus, oh Jesus, come and fill your lambs.
Jesus, oh, Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

Oh come and sing this song with gladness as your hearts are filled with joy;
Lift your hands in sweet surrender to His name.
Oh give Him all your tears and sadness; Give him all your years of pain,
And you'll enter into life in Jesus' name.

Jesus, oh Jesus, come and fill your lambs.
Jesus, oh, Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

Celebration of Holy Communion

Invitation

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, family of faith,
I invite you to place the communion elements you have gathered before you,
these ordinary things made extraordinary by the power of the Holy Spirit.
This is the feast we get to share together today.
This is not a Presbyterian Table; this is the Lord's table.
All who trust in him are invited to share in this feast
which is both humble and mysterious.

The bread and wine we're about to share
joins us to the people throughout history and across the world

who have come to this meal in search of life.

Just as Jesus' birth was for the whole world
this bread and wine is for everyone
for the hungry
for the lost
for those who search
and those who are found
for those who question
and those who know peace
this is bread and wine for everyone.

Let us pray
Holy God, we praise you.
Let the heavens be joyful,
and the earth be glad.
We bless you for creating the whole world,
for your promises to your people,
and for the life we know in Jesus Christ your son.
Born of Mary, he shares our life.
Eating with sinners, he welcomes us.
Leading his followers, he guides us.
Dying on the cross, he loves us.
Risen from the dead, he gives new life.

On the night before Jesus died,
he had supper with his friends.
He took bread,
thanked you, as we have thanked you,
broke the bread,
and gave it to his friends, saying:
this is my body, given for you.
Each time you do this, remember me.
After supper he took the wine,
thanked you for it,
and passed it to his friends, saying:
This cup is the new promise God has made with you
in my blood.
Each time you do this, remember me.

*I invite you to hold up the elements you have gathered for Communion today
and receive this blessing:*

We pray, God of love, that you will
send your Holy Spirit upon us and what we do here:
that we and these signs, touched by your Spirit,
may be signs of life and love to each other
and to all the world. Amen.

Post Communion Blessing

God our Father,
you fill the hungry with good things
and send the self-satisfied away empty.
In this eucharist you have filled us
with the word and the bread of life
of your Son Jesus Christ.
Make us hunger now for his coming
in the hearts and the homes of all.
Fill us with his spirit of service
and self-forgetting love,
that through us, he may become near to people.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

Closing Hymn

“Let It Be Said Of Us”

words and music by Steve Fry

©1994, 1999 Word Music, LLC / Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publishing
CCLI License # 3272690

Let it be said of us that the Lord was our passion,
That with gladness we bore ev'ry cross we were given;
That we fought the good fight, that we finished the course
Knowing within us the pow'r of the risen Lord.

Let the cross be our glory and the Lord be our song,
By mercy made holy, by the Spirit made strong.

Let the cross be our glory and the Lord be our song
'Til the likeness of Jesus be through us made known.
Let the cross be our glory and the Lord be our song.

Let it be said of us: We were marked by forgiveness,
We were known by our love, and delighted in meekness,
We were ruled by His peace, heeding unity's call;
Joined as one body that Christ would be seen by all.

Let the cross be our glory and the Lord be our song,
By mercy made holy, by the Spirit made strong.
Let the cross be our glory and the Lord be our song
'Til the likeness of Jesus be through us made known.
Let the cross be our glory and the Lord be our song.

Charge and Benediction

Go forth in the light and love of God,
giving glory to God in all that you do.

Beloved children of God
(Spirit, Son, and Father)
all the blessings of heaven are yours.
Alleluia!

Postlude

Permission to podcast/stream the music in this service obtained from One License
with license # A-723596.

