

## Surprising voices

### Notes on the Bible readings

- The word Epiphany – the current season of the church calendar – comes from a Greek word meaning 'to be revealed'. It marks a period of revelation when Jesus, God's Son, was revealed to the world.
- Although, in terms of the passage of time, it seems a big jump from Jesus being worshipped as a baby to being baptized as an adult, Luke, like Matthew, sees Jesus' baptism as a continuation of the epiphany of his birth. The revelation continues with the declaration from God that 'You are my Son, the Beloved, (v.22b). This is a moment of personal affirmation for Jesus and a public anointing of him as the promised Messiah.
- In Isaiah 43, water and fire are used as symbols of national liberation (v.2). The Gospel reading illustrates the qualities of God's Spirit through symbols. The Holy Spirit is described as fire, a powerful symbol of God's presence, burning up what is not holy (vv.16b-17), but also bringing renewal as new growth emerges from the ashes. The water of baptism symbolises the cleansing and forgiveness that the Spirit brings. The Spirit also descends on Jesus like a gentle dove, bringing peace and assurance (v.22).
- Revelation is the key to this passage. The people gathered for baptism discover who Jesus is, with all the implications of what that means for them. We, like them, are left with the choice of what we do with this revelation.

### Questions for reflection

- ▶ What can you identify in this painting?
- ▶ What other symbols might represent the Holy Spirit for you?
- ▶ What is revealed at the moment of Jesus' baptism?



### A prayer of approach

*From the clash and confusion of life,  
we hear the unexpected call of the Divine.  
Seekers after truth,  
treading wilderness paths in a bewildering world,  
we wade into the waters of your wisdom,  
and immerse ourselves in you, God-with-us. Amen.*

### A prayer for others

*Lord, we pray today for all who seek your voice,  
but find it drowned by the clamour of the world.  
May they hear you clearly.  
We pray for all who choose to close their eyes and ears to you.  
Startle them from their complacency.  
We pray for all who need to hear your call to repentance.  
Speak to them, Lord.  
We pray for the blessings of the Holy Spirit upon all  
who suffer in any way this day.  
Alight upon them gently and bring peace, Lord.  
And may your grace be with us – sinners all,  
and in need of your mercy.  
Open the heavens and descend in love.  
Amen.*

### A personal prayer

*Cleanse me in the depths of your love, O Lord,  
that I might emerge to glimpse heaven.  
Brush me with the wings of your grace,  
and lead me from the wilderness to fullness of life.  
Amen.*

For reflection and comment linking this week's Bible reading to the news, current issues and events, go to [www.rootsontheweb.com](http://www.rootsontheweb.com) and click on PostScript.



### Live your faith

Look for an opportunity to encourage or confirm someone else in their Christian journey.