



Birchcliff Bluffs United Church

Ministers: All the People – wherever and however they gather

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Baptism of Jesus

WE GATHER AS GOD'S PEOPLE

Prelude

Welcome

Lighting the Christ Candle

At the heart of our faith is a light that does not flicker out—a light born in love, a light that has learned the shape of human life, a light that calls us forward, even when the way is unclear. Our Christ Candle serves as a reminder that the light of Christ shines not behind us in the past, but ahead of us, guiding our every step. *Candle is lit.*

Lighting the Rainbow Candle

We also light the Rainbow Candle—a symbol of God's covenant love, reminding us that our diversity is not an obstacle to God, but a reflection of God's creativity and joy. *Candle is lit.*

Land Acknowledgement

As we gather in this season of Epiphany—a season of light, revelation, and awakening—we acknowledge the land on which we worship. This land has long been home to Indigenous peoples, including the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, the Wendat, the Chippewa, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. It is a land where wisdom has been shared, relationships tended, and stories carried across generations. We also acknowledge that this land remains home to many diverse Indigenous nations and communities, whose presence, resilience, and leadership continue to shape this place.

May the light of Epiphany guide us toward truth, right relationships, and shared care for this land and for one another.

Opening Hymn

Songs of Thankfulness and Praise

VU 101

- 1 Songs of thankfulness and praise,
Jesus Christ, to you we raise,
manifested by the star
to the sages from afar;
branch of royal David's stem
in your birth at Bethlehem;
anthems be to you addressed,
God in flesh made manifest.

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

- 3 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 you addressed,
God in flesh made manifest.

- 4 Grant us grace to see you, Lord,
mirrored in your holy Word;
with your grace our lives endow,
grace to imitate you now,
that we like to you may be
at your great epiphany,
anthems be to you addressed,
God in flesh made manifest.

Call to Worship

Come to the water—to the river where heaven leans close to earth.

We come, beloved and becoming.

Here, God's Spirit hovers, not with force, but with tenderness.

Here, God speaks delight over creation.

This is the One in whom God delights—and this is the community God calls.

We come to listen, to be named, to be sent.

Come, let us worship the God who calls us beloved and leads us into justice, mercy, and peace.

Let us worship God.

Passing the Peace

The Spirit descends not to divide, but to unite. Before Jesus begins his ministry, peace is spoken over him—a peace rooted in love, not achievement. May that same peace flow among us now. I invite you to share a sign of Christ’s peace with those around you, saying: “You are God’s beloved.”

As we pass the peace, may we offer one another the blessing of welcome, connection, and trust.

The peace of Christ be with you. **And also with you!**

Life and Work

Opening Prayer

Let us pray:

Holy and Hovering God,

you meet us not on mountaintops alone, but in rivers and ordinary places.

**You wade into the waters of our lives—into joy and grief,
certainty and doubt, hope and heartbreak.**

As you named Jesus your beloved, name us again today.

Quiet the voices that tell us we are not enough.

Wash away the fear that keeps us from loving boldly.

Open our ears to hear your delight spoken over us.

**We pray in the name of the One who steps into the water with us
and calls us forward into life.**

Amen.

Hymn

When Jesus Came to Be Baptized

VU 100

1 When Jesus comes to be baptized,
he leaves the hidden years behind,
the years of safety and of peace,
to bear the sins of humankind.

2 The Spirit of the Lord comes down,
anoints the Christ to suffering,
to preach the word, to free the bound,
and to the mourner, comfort bring.

3 He will not quench the dying flame,
and what is bruised he will not break,

but heal the wound injustice dealt,
and out of death his triumph make.

4 O Spirit help us be like Christ:
 to live in love and charity,
 to walk in truth and justice now,
 and grow in Christian dignity.

5 We praise you, God, source of all life,
we praise you, Christ, eternal Word,
we praise you, Spirit, gracious gift;
your triune presence fills our world.

RECEIVING GOD'S WORD

Scripture **Matthew 3:13-17**

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John tried to dissuade Jesus, saying, “I should be baptized by you, and yet you come to me!” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Leave it this way for now. We must do this to completely fulfill God’s justice.” So, John reluctantly agreed. ¹⁶ Immediately after Jesus had been baptized and was coming up out of the water, the sky suddenly opened up, and Jesus saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and hovering over him. ¹⁷ With that, a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Own, my Beloved, on whom my favour rests.”

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn

Like a Healing Stream

MV 144

1. Like a healing stream in a barren desert,
Spirit water bringing life to dusty earth,
 God is trickling through our lives
 as in a dream unfolding,
 promising revival and rebirth
 like a healing stream

2. Like a gentle rain on a thirsty garden,
Spirit water come to nourish tiny seed,
 God is bubbling through the soil
 to coax a new creation
 yearning for an end to want and need
 like a gentle rain.

3. Like a river strong with a restless current,
Spirit water rushing on to distant shore,

God is carving out a channel
in a new direction,
calling for an end to hate and war
like a river strong.

4. Like a mighty sea reaching far horizons,
Spirit water with a love both deep and wide,

God is working in our hearts
to shape a new tomorrow:
God will always challenge and provide!
Like a mighty sea, like a river strong,
like a gentle rain, like a healing stream.

Sermon Beloved Before Anything Else

Remembrance of Baptism

At the Jordan River, Jesus stepped into the water—not to stand above, but to stand among. In baptism, God names us beloved, claims us as God's own, and sends us into the world rooted in grace.

The water before you is a sign of God's promise—a promise spoken before we strive, before we prove, before we are certain. In a few moments, you are invited to come forward, as you are able and as you feel led, to dip your fingers into the water and remember your baptism—or to remember God's love and claim upon you.

There is no right or wrong way to participate. You may come forward, remain seated in prayer, or simply watch and receive the blessing.

As you touch the water, remember these words: "You are my Beloved."

(Soft music plays while folks come forward)

Beloved of God,
you are claimed by grace.
You are held in love.
You are never alone.

**We are God's beloved,
and we will live from love.**

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Hymn

I Was There to Hear Your Burning Cry

VU 644

1 I was there to hear your burning cry,
I'll be there when you are old.

I rejoiced the day you were baptized,
to see your life unfold.

2 I was there when you were but a child,
with a faith to suit you well;
in a blaze of light you wandered off
to find where demons dwell.

3 When you heard the wonder of the word,
I was there to cheer you on;
you were raised to praise the living Lord,
to whom you now belong.

4 If you find someone to share your time
and you join your hearts as one,
I'll be there to make your verses rhyme
from dusk till rising sun.

5 In the middle ages of your life,
not too old, no longer young.
I'll be there to guide you through the night,
complete what I've begun.

6 When the evening gently closes in
and you shut your weary eyes,
I'll be there as I have always been
with just one more surprise.

7 I was there to hear your burning cry,
I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized,
to see your life unfold.

Offering

Before Jesus said a word or did a single thing, God called him *Beloved*. Our giving today is not about earning God's love, but responding to it. As people already claimed by grace, let us offer what we have, trusting that God will use these gifts to share that same love with the world.

As we bless the offerings, let us sing:

Offering Hymn

Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

VU 541

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures high and low;
give thanks to God in love made known:
Creator, Word and Spirit, One.

Prayers of the People

Spirit of God,
you move over the waters of the world—
over rivers polluted and communities displaced,
over places aching for justice and healing.

We pray for a world longing to hear that it is still beloved.
For nations gripped by violence and fear,
for leaders who wield power without compassion,
for all whose voices are silenced or ignored—
may your justice roll like living water.

We pray for all who feel bruised and bent—
those living with illness, grief, or exhaustion;
those navigating uncertainty or loss;
those who feel unseen or forgotten.
May they know your tenderness and care.

We pray for the church—
that we would follow Jesus into the water,
into difficult conversations,
into deep listening and courageous love.

Shape us into a people
who protect fragile hope,
who resist cruelty,
who choose compassion over comfort.

We lift before you the prayers we speak aloud,
and those we carry quietly in our hearts... *(pause)*

Gathering all these prayers—spoken and unspoken—
we pray together in the words Jesus taught us:

**Our Creator, who art in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kin-dom come,
your will be done,**

**on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kin-dom,
the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

Closing Hymn

Shall We Gather at the River

VU 710

1 Shall we gather at the river,
where bright angel feet have trod;
with its crystal tide for ever
flowing by the throne of God?

Yes, we'll gather at the river,
the beautiful, the beautiful river;
gather with the saints at the river
that flows by the throne of God.

2 Ere we reach the shining river,
lay we every burden down;
grace our spirits will deliver,
and provide a robe and crown.

Yes, we'll gather at the river,
the beautiful, the beautiful river;
gather with the saints at the river
that flows by the throne of God.

3 Soon we'll reach the shining river,
soon our pilgrimage will cease,
soon our happy hearts will quiver
with the melody of peace.

Yes, we'll gather at the river,
the beautiful, the beautiful river;
gather with the saints at the river
that flows by the throne of God.

Bread for the Journey

Where in your life do you most need to hear the words, “You are my beloved”?

Commissioning

You have been named beloved by God.

We will live as those who are beloved.

You have been anointed by the Spirit.

We will act with courage and compassion.

You are sent to bring justice gently and love boldly.

We will go where the Spirit leads.

Benediction

May the heavens open over you.

May the Spirit descend upon you—resting, renewing, reminding.

May you go from this place knowing you are God's beloved,

not because of what you do,

but because of who you are.

And may your life be a living river of justice, peace, and hope

for a world still longing to hear that it, too, is loved.

Amen.

Choral Response

Go Now In Peace

Go now in peace, never be afraid
God will go with you each hour of every day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true,
Know God will guide you in all you do.
Go now in love and show you believe
Reach out to others so all the world can see.
God will be there, watching from above
Go now in peace, in faith and in love.
Amen, amen, amen!

Postlude

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