

KOGARAH UNITING CHURCH
January 8, 2023
1st Sunday after the Epiphany

The Gathering of the People of God

WELCOME & GREETING

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

And also with you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

We acknowledge that this land is God's land, and God's Spirit dwells here. We pay our respects to the elders, past, present and emerging of the Gweagal people who have cared for this land in time beyond our dreaming. This land on which we live and move was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

CALL TO WORSHIP

In the beginning was the Word

In the beginning, we were created in God's image.

And the word was with God, and the word was God.

Male and female God created us, and God blessed us.

All things came into being through Christ,

and without Christ not one thing has come into being.

God saw everything God had made, and it was very good.

What has come into being in Christ was life, and the life was the light of all people.

We are created in God's image.

We are created to be good.

We are created to be loved.

We are God's light in this world.

Let us worship Christ and be the light. Amen.

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

God is here

God is always here

God is with us

God is always with us

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and loving God –
you call to us across deep waters and dark places.
Yours is the light which guides us and the voice which we follow.
We pray that you would open up your heavens and send your Spirit upon us.

As we worship you let us hear your voice once again.
May those without hope be encouraged and those who are sad be given new joy.
Indeed, O Lord, may all who hunger and thirst receive the bread of life
and the cup of salvation, and may your name be glorified,
both now and forevermore. Amen.

HYMN: Let us sing to the God of salvation TIS 52

Let us sing to the God of salvation,
let us sing to the Lord our rock!
Let us come to his house with thanksgiving,
let us come before the Lord and sing!

(Refrain)

*Praise our Maker, praise our Saviour,
praise the Lord our everlasting King.
Every throne must bow before him,
God is Lord of everything!*

In his hands are the earth's deep places
and the strength of the hills is his;
and the sea is the Lord's for he made it,
by his hands the dry land was formed.

(Refrain)

Let us worship the Lord our Maker,
let us kneel to the Lord our God;
for we all are the sheep of his pasture,
he will guide us by his powerful hand.

(Refrain)

Let today be the time when you hear him!
May our hearts not be hard or cold,
lest we stray from the Lord in rebellion,

as his people did in time of old.

(Refrain)

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

***God of grace,
you have given us Jesus, the light of the world,
but we choose darkness
and cling to things that hide the brightness of your love.
Immersed in ourselves, we have not risen to new life.
Baptize us with your Spirit, that, forgiven and renewed,
we may preach your Word to the nations
and tell of your glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ,
our Lord and our light forever. Amen.***

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

The good news is that God has redeemed us in and through Jesus - who came 'to give his life a ransom for many'. (Mark 10:45)

Friends, believe the gospel:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

HYMN: Jesus, Face of God Seasons 9-22

Jesus, face of God, Holy mystery.
Truth beyond what we've conceived,
bold reality.

Jesus, word of God,
Heaven's poetry, wisdom born beyond our minds,
divine humanity.

Jesus, heart of God,
pierced on Calvary. Love beyond imagining,
Heaven's majesty.
Jesus, song of God,

Spirit's melody sounding deep within our hearts
transforming harmony.
Holy mystery.

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The Service of the Word

BIBLE READINGS

Isaiah 42:1-9

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth, and the coastlands wait for his teaching. Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God's Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from the heavens said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

REFLECTION

"Beloved Children of God"

We are in the season of Epiphany. In this season of Epiphany we look at those special events in Jesus' life where his presence was especially manifested with power. Jesus' baptism is one of those epiphanies. On this second Sunday of the New Year our lesson from the Gospels focuses our attention on the place of baptism in our lives. Jesus came to be baptized by John. It was an interesting act of contrition. John the Baptist

admitted that he wasn't worthy to lace up Jesus' sneakers, and yet Jesus joins the crowd that is being baptized by John. It was a dramatic moment for John and even for Jesus. For there came a voice from heaven, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

I remember many years ago I was working at a Korean church in Korea as a youth worker. One day I was having a meeting with my senior minister in our church office. Jimin who was a 10 year-old boy in our congregation walked into the office and said he needed to talk to the minister. Fresh from soccer practice, and wearing his baseball cap, he had a request for him. "I'd like to be baptized," he said. "We were learning about Jesus' baptism in Sunday School. The teacher asked the class who was baptized, and all the other kids raised their hands. I want to be baptized too." Using his best pastoral care tone of voice, he said, "Jimin, do you really want to be baptized because everyone else is?" He replied, "No. I want to be baptized because it means I belong to God." I was so touched by his understanding.

Baptism has always been at the heart of the Christian faith. It is sign and symbol that a person belongs to Christ. It is a requirement for membership in the church. Why, then, do so many Christians take baptism so lightly? Perhaps we need to consider what baptism says to us. Sometimes when you are watching TV or reading a book or otherwise engaged something happens that grabs your attention - you see something that strikes you as significant or important - and you pause in what you are doing, you focus your attention and take note. This happened to me a few years ago when I was reading a newspaper - it was just before Christmas that year. There, sitting in the paper was a picture of a young man sitting on some school steps. He was bald, and all around him were his classmates, about 25 of them, some wearing school jackets, others in T-Shirts and regular jackets, their heads bowed towards the camera - and they too were bald. The Headline next to the picture read: TRUE BLUE PALS and the caption said: Mark, 16 years old, poses with classmates from his high school. His friends shaved their heads to show support for Mark after his hair fell out following chemotherapy for inoperable lung cancer. His friends said that they didn't want him to stand out in the 180 student high school. That item really touched my heart when I first saw it. It still does.

It is so neat - so precious - so loving and I was struck at the time thinking as I was of the coming Christmas Service that this is so much like what God has done in Christ Jesus - he has come among us - and identified with us - he has taken on our flesh and our blood - our experience - our joys and our concerns, our trials and sufferings so that he might help us, so that we may know that we are not alone, so that we may know that we are loved. The second chapter of Paul's Letter to the Philippians speaks of this identification, this solidarity, this total commitment, this love. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus", Paul writes. Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking

the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!

In his birth and in his death Jesus completely identified himself with us.

Today - in the story of the baptism of Jesus we see another example of totally Jesus identified himself with us. We see the ministry of Jesus begin - with an act - and a sign. An act of love, and a sign of God's compassion.... We remember what Jesus commands his disciples later. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Now he is himself baptized - even though - as scripture states in another place - there was no need for it, just as there was no need for Mark's friends and class mates to shave their heads. But they did. And he did. Jesus is baptized - with water - and with the Spirit - just as we are called to be - And God smiles upon Jesus as he comes out of the waters, saying: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased", much as God smiles upon us when we are baptized and makes us part of his people - part of his family. Indeed in baptism we become the children of God - sons and daughters of the most high in a way that those who are un-baptized cannot know. We are made part of the church - we are made to be children of the promises - participants in the covenant established by Jesus when he went to the cross and was buried in the tomb.

Mark, 16 years old boy in the newspaper, despite his illness, despite the sureness of his approaching death, was a very lucky young man - no - not lucky, blessed. He was blessed because he had the best kind of friends anyone can have - for they, although they were not sick, although they had no reason in the world to shave their heads and experience some of what young Mark experienced - did so anyway. They identified with him. They walked in his shoes. They showed him that he was not alone. They gave to him a sign which he could treasure, a sign that made real to him and to others their love for him. That is what the sacrament of Baptism is all about. It is about making love real - God's love for us, and our love for God.

Just as the baptism of Jesus was an act by which he identified himself with us, so our baptism in his name identifies us with him. Paul writes of baptism these words: (Romans 6:3-5) "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." Our baptism unites us with Christ in his death, and his resurrection. But more yet, just as in a mysterious and yet real way baptism unites Christ with us and us with him - it also unites us with all whom he has called. It makes us part of him and it makes us part of his church - the church which he died to give birth to, - the church which is called, throughout the scriptures - his body.

In the Basis of Union which is the foundational document of the Uniting Church in Australia, there are eighteen articles of faith which the founding members of our denomination agreed summarized our faith. According to the articles 2, 6, and 7, baptism is a means of grace which works in us to quicken and strengthen and comfort our faith in Him. It seals our union with Christ and makes us part of his covenant people. It gives us communion with him and with one another. It is one of the means by which we confess Christ as our Lord and are visibly distinguished from the rest of the world. Jesus began his ministry among us, those three brief years of glory, by identifying himself with us through the act of baptism. We begin - as his followers - to identify ourselves with him and with one another - to commune with him and one another in the same manner. We are called to be one with Christ, and one with his church - visible and distinct within this world. Baptism is for this purpose - a good beginning - indeed it is the beginning that has been instituted for us by Christ himself.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to identify ourselves with Christ and to identify ourselves with his body - the church, and to do so visibly and distinctly within this world. It is through Christ, and in Christ, and through the church and in the church that the new covenant of forgiveness of sins and eternal life is made effective. The baptism of the Lord began his ministry - a ministry in which he took upon himself our yoke and our burden, and returned to us God's love and his concern. Our baptism into him, our acceptance of his healing love and our desire to be as he was, begins our ministry: - a ministry in which, we are called to do as he did, and identify with those who are lost and those who are cry out for wholeness and proclaim then, the word that Jesus has given us. May the good beginning that was begun in Christ be your beginning - and may we together, as his body, grow in righteousness. Amen.

HYMN: TIS 409, "O breath of life, come sweeping through us"

O breath of life, come sweeping through us,
revive your church with life and power;
O breath of life, come cleanse, renew us,
and fit your church to meet this hour.

O wind of God, come bend us, break us,
till humbly we confess our need;
then in your tenderness remake us,
revive, restore: for this we plead.

O breath of love, come breathe within us,
renewing thought and will and heart;
come, love of Christ, afresh to win us
revive your church in every part.

Revive us, Lord! Is zeal abating
while harvest fields are vast and white?
Revive us, Lord, the world is waiting,
equip your church to spread the light.

PD; text, Elizabeth Ann Porter Head

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OFFERING & OFFERING PRAYER

By your grace, God of the waters,
we can open our eyes to see those in need around us.
By your abundance in our lives,
what we offer can bring hope and healing to more people
than we can ever imagine.
By your blessing, others are invited to the waters of life.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Most Holy God, we gather before you in prayer,
celebrating your presence and your light in our lives and in our world.
The old year has ended and a new one lies before us;
a new year full of promise, hope and potential.

As we enter into this New Year
we pray that your Holy Light will shine upon all nations,
all people and all of creation leading us in love, peace and joy.
We pray that your guidance and wisdom will lead us in this New Year;
that your voice will encourage us to live in your ways
and that your Spirit will enliven us as we grow, learn and work together.

In the midst of our celebrations we hold before you
those who suffer alone this day –
those who ache with pain or hunger –
those who tremble in fear or anxiety –
those who feel empty and unfulfilled –
those who feel unloved and unwanted
and those who are homeless.
May your presence and your peace surround all who are in need.

Lord, we pray for the elderly,

who are so often and so easily neglected by a fast-changing world;
for all who feel isolated and vulnerable in a society designed
for the young, the fit and the active.

We pray for communities
that have lost sight of your love and compassion.
Enable us, we pray, to be channels of Christ's love
as we share in the hurt of our neighbours.

Lord, we pray for the sick and people in suffering
who are known in this congregation.
(Brian and Rhonda and their son Malcom, Prema and her family)
Please give them your intensive care and healing, strength and hope.
Please lift the hope and joy of their family because of your healing.

We praise you, O God, for pouring out your light upon us.
May your living word call to us and may we, in faith, answer.
All of this we pray in the name of your beloved child
who came to us all those years ago and lives among us today. Amen.

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 in the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.***

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| The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper |
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INVITATION

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life;
Those who come to me shall not hunger,
and those who believe in me shall never thirst."

Come, let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ
in remembrance that he died for us,

and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

COMMUNION HTMN: Be known to us in breaking bread TIS 514

Be known to us in breaking bread,
but do not then depart;
Saviour, abide with us, and spread
your table in our heart.

There share with us in love divine;
your body and your blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine,
be our immortal food.

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PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks, O God, for making your love evident
since the very beginning of time when you spoke the word
which replaced the darkness of chaos with life-giving light.

A light which has nurtured generations of people,
and plants and creatures, great and small.

A light which also revealed the fear and powerlessness
caused by corrupt and evil actions.

And so you spoke the Word which would once
and for all dispel the darkness of chaotic lives.

Through your love for the world
the Word became flesh and lived among us full of grace and truth.
The angels caroled glory to you in the highest heavens
and peace to all people on earth, and we join with them
and with all people to praise your holy name:

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.***

***Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.***

Holy God,
as the travelers with their treasures were overwhelmed with joy on finding Jesus,
so we also are overwhelmed on finding out the depth of his love for us.
For Jesus showed just how beloved we are to him,
by loving us and giving himself for us.

On that night when he gave himself up for us,
as he sat at the table and broke bread with his friends, he said:
Take, eat. This is my body given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after supper, he also took the cup and said:
Drink from this all of you.
This is my blood shed for you and for the whole world
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Send the power of your Holy Spirit
upon these gifts of bread and wine, O God,
that we may experience the presence of the Word-
made-flesh – Jesus Christ.

Breathe your Spirit in us that we may be one body with him –
living out his ministry in the world today and every day.
This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen

BREAKING OF THE BREAD

LAMB OF GOD

Jesus, Lamb of God,
Have mercy on us.
Jesus, bearer of our sins,
Have mercy on us.
Jesus, redeemer of the world,
Grant us peace.

THE COMMUNION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Most gracious God, source of all blessing,
we give you thanks for inviting us
to share this meal as your family.
Strengthen us to be a blessing
to one another and to all people,
glorifying you in everything we do and say,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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| The Sending Forth of the People of God |
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HYMN: God Gives Us a Future TIS 687

God gives us a future, daring us to go
into dreams and dangers on a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow in the Spirit's power,
we will let God change us, for new life starts now.

We must leave behind us sins of yesterday,
for God's new beginning is a better way.
Fear and doubt and habit must not hold us back:
God gives hope, and insight, and the strength we lack.

Holy Spirit, teach us how to read the signs,
how to meet the challenge of our troubled times.
Love us into action, stir us into prayer,
till we choose God's life, and find our future there.

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BLESSING

May the light of the glorious gospel of Christ
shine in our hearts, transform our lives,
and brighten the world.

And the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
rest upon you always. Amen.

SENDING SONG: May You Find Peace Seasons 7-26

May you find peace,
may you find hope,
may you find joy this day.
May you find love,
may you find rest
here in this place together.

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