

**The Baptism of Christ,
Sunday, 9th January 2022**



Dear Friends,

‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’
(Luke 3: 22)

Happy New Year! I pray you, your families and friends are well, and though your Christmas and New Year plans might well have been affected by the Omicron variant, may the Light of the world illumine each of your paths this coming year and bring you the joy of His healing love.

This comes with my thanks to everyone across our five parishes who have contributed to our worship this Christmastide. Communities gathered, bells rang, Posadas processed, masked carollers sang, Gospellers proclaimed, leaders inspired, sides-people organised, Nativities performed, donkeys brayed, musicians thrilled (Churchwardens included), holly berries perfumed, trees shone (and even trains raced around one), soloists awed, congregations lingered distanced though they were, and prayers lifted us to the coming of the Christ-child among us.



Alfredo and Aylin – Source: Natividad Medical Centre/Globe Newswire

With the scourge of Coronavirus still impacting our global worship of Christ's birth, it is wonderful to share the joy of new earthly birth with the delighted parents of two little miracles of God's creation. In Salinas, California, these two beautiful twins were born 15 minutes apart – a little boy, Alfredo, entered the world just 15 minutes before midnight on 31st December 2021 and his sister, Aylin, was born in the first minute of January 1st 2022.

Today's Gospel from Luke guides us to leave our Christmas Day celebrations behind us. We journey together in faith and thanksgiving for the presence of 'God with us' in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The forty days from Advent to Epiphany begin by preparing us for a fresh Coming. They conclude by developing what the Celts call '*the seeing eye*.' As we give of ourselves into spiritual contemplation throughout this time, we open up our spiritual antennae to glimpses of God's glory here on earth.

The Welsh poet priest, R.S. Thomas, wrote about this in his extraordinary poem, 'The Bright Field':



'The Bright Field' by Margaret Cooter

The Bright Field by R S Thomas

I have seen the sun break through to illuminate a small field for a while,
and gone my way and forgotten it.
But that was the pearl of great price, the one field that had treasure in it.
I realise now that I must give all that I have to possess it.
Life is not hurrying on to a receding future, nor hankering after an imagined past.
It is the turning aside like Moses to the miracle of the lit bush;
To a brightness that seemed as transitory as your youth once,
But is the eternity that awaits you.

What are we to see, who gaze on? The sun illuminating that beautiful field? R S Thomas is alluding to Jesus' coming to earth to show us what God looks like. So, the 'pearl of great price' is the opportunity for us to really look and see the glory of God manifested in Christ Jesus. And in glimpsing Him, to make a decision not to dismiss the vision, but to make a lifelong commitment to give all we have to follow Him.

Isaiah tells us God describes us as being 'Created for my glory, whom I formed and made.' This then, is how we should come to our baptism, and if too young to comprehend that vision for ourselves, then certainly this is how we should present ourselves for Confirmation: eyes open, hearts obedient and ready to follow the Light of the World.



'The Baptism of Christ' by Andrea del Verrocchio

Jesus did not specify why He came to be baptized. But something profoundly important happened on earth when He stepped into the waters of the River Jordan, with John the Baptist washing clean a man he already knew to be divinely pure. For in this action of baptism, Jesus humbled Himself in obedient faith to His Father.

In response to Jesus' obedience, God physically reached down to earth and touched His Son – and to those who witnessed this transfiguring moment, the presence of God's Holy Spirit became manifest like a radiant white dove. God's voice was heard saying to Jesus, *'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'*

Listening to the words from Isaiah, we hear that God also calls *us* by name. And of course, in the Christian Church, baptism is traditionally when we are named.

In baptism, as we mirror Jesus' obedience to God, something profoundly important happens to us too. Baptism in this sense is, as the prophet writes, how the Church gathers up God's children and draws them into the fold. In this holy gift of God's grace, we have no more to fear; even the worst ravages of Coronavirus will not overwhelm us. Jesus in His pure obedience to His Father, has come to save us.

In these early days of 2022, we are being called to look afresh at the first Christian baptism, to marvel at and be inspired by John's courage and to follow in Christ's gesture of radical humility.

For, if we watch how Jesus acts, imitate how Jesus treats people; and if we listen carefully to what Jesus says, it's the same as hearing and doing what God wants. This year, may we take the opportunity to give thanks that God calls us by name from the ends of the earth, and that we express that by being a truly inclusive and obedient Church.

Yours, baptised by Christ

Jax
Rector, The Downs Benefice

Collect Prayer for The Baptism of Christ

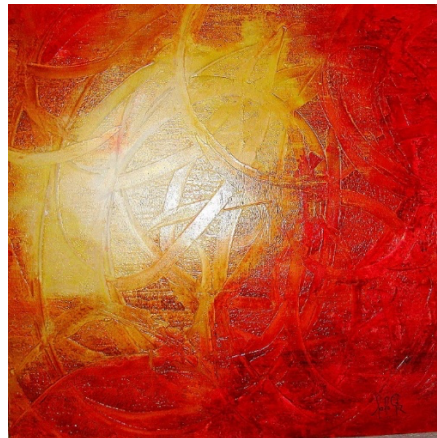
Eternal Father,
who at the baptism of Jesus revealed him to be your Son,
anointing him with the Holy Spirit:
grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit,
that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Isaiah 43:1-7 - Restoration and Protection Promised

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.

Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, 'Give them up,' and to the south, 'Do not withhold;' bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.



Luke 3:15-22 – Jesus is Baptised

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Schedule of Services

This schedule is correct at this time but may be subject to future alterations – please check on our website for the most up-to-date information.

All services start at 10am, unless marked differently on the table below.

Owing to the new Government Coronavirus restrictions, masks must once again be worn in church services and services must be booked by contacting the Benefice Office on 01962 880 845 or office@downsbenefice.org.uk

<i>Date</i>	<i>Ch</i>	<i>Cr</i>	<i>Li</i>	<i>Sp</i>	<i>Wh</i>
<i>9th Jan</i>			Holy Communion		Morning Prayer
<i>16th Jan</i>	Holy Communion	Morning Prayer			
<i>23rd Jan</i>			Morning Prayer	Morning Prayer	8am – Holy Communion
<i>26th Jan</i>			Mid-Week Holy Communion		
<i>30th Jan</i>		Benefice Holy Communion			
<i>6th Feb</i>	Morning Prayer to mark 70 th Anniversary of HM The Queen's accession to the throne	Holy Communion	4pm - Café Church		
<i>13th Feb</i>			Holy Communion		Morning Prayer
<i>20th Feb</i>	Holy Communion	Morning Prayer		8am – Holy Communion	
<i>27th Feb</i>			Morning Prayer	Morning Prayer	8am – Holy Communion
<i>2nd March ASH WEDNESDAY</i>	12 noon - Holy Communion with Ashes		Holy Communion with Ashes		<i>With Chilbolton</i>