



Kaurihohore Historic Church

Email: kaurichurch@gmail.com Phone: 946 0813



Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish

Sunday 12 January 2025 – Epiphany 1

The service this morning is led by Kimberley Nielsen,
one of our Lay Preachers

Welcome to our service this morning.

In working together on our shared mission, we commit to seven core values:

Togetherness, Humility, Curiosity, Love, Inclusiveness, Justice, Sustainability.

Togetherness: we cultivate genuine opportunities to gather together in worship and fellowship.

*You are invited to stand if you are able,
for the hymns and the offering prayer*

Welcome

Kia ora, and welcome to church this morning. Today is the day in the church calendar where we celebrate the baptism of Jesus, and remember our own baptisms. Baptism is an important symbol and ritual within Christian communities. We say that we experience God's love and grace in this act. We say that in this act we are joined to Christ and to each other. We say that in this act we commit to living according to God's Spirit, seeking truth, justice, compassion, and love in the world. Let us remember our baptism and give thanks to God, who meets us in water and in community.

Call to worship

We hear God's voice.

It thunders through creation.

God's voice is strong.

It shatters the cedars of Lebanon.

God is still speaking.

Calling out our names.

Listen for God.

God calls us beloved.

From: Abingdon Worship Annual 2025

Opening prayer

Lord of the desert river,

You search our depths

And call us by name:

May your flame-born Spirit

Open the heavens

That we might recognise you

In the one born of earth,
Jesus Christ, the Gift of Peace.
Amen.

From: Prayers for an Inclusive Church, by Steven Shakespeare

Hymn: Psalm 29 (<https://psalms.seedbed.com/psalm-29/> Tune: [St Denio](#))

1. Ascribe to the Lord, all you ones of great might;
Ascribe to the Lord glory, strength in your sight.
Ascribe to Him glory, and His name adore;
In splendor of holiness, worship the Lord.

2. The voice of the Lord is above the great sea;
He thunders in glory; o'er waters is He!
The voice of the Lord, full of power and might;
His voice is majestic and flaming in light.

3. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars in two;
The cedars of Lebanon, He does subdue.
The Lord makes all Lebanon skip like a deer.
Mount Hermon is like a young ox when He's near.

4. The voice of the Lord strikes with flashing of light.
His voice shakes the desert of Kadesh with might.
The voice of the Lord strips the forests all bare;
And all in His temple, His glory declare.

5. The Lord sits enthroned o'er the flood – He is King.
The Lord on His throne sits forever as King.
The Lord gives His people His strength without cease.
The Lord is the One who will bless them with peace.

Prayer of yearning

Loving God, sometimes life seems overwhelming.

There is so much happening that we can't control.

We feel like we are drowning.

Then we hear your voice saying, "Don't fear,"

And we remember that your love supports and sustains us.

You are there when we feel overwhelmed.

You are there when we struggle.

You give us what we need.

Help us to place our trust in you, as we step away from fear, secure in your love.

Amen.

From: Abingdon Worship Annual 2025

Words of assurance

God says, "Don't be afraid."

God calls and names us as God's own.

From: Abingdon Worship Annual 2025

Hymn: Loving Spirit (Shirley Murray; Tune: [Stuttgart](#))

1. Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,
you have chosen me to be --
you have drawn me to your
wonder,
you have set your sign on me.
2. Like a mother you enfold me,
hold my life within your own,
feed me with your very body,
form me of your flesh and bone.
3. Like a father you protect me,
teach me the discerning eye,
hoist me up upon your shoulder,
let me see the world from high.
4. Friend and lover, in your
closeness
I am known and held and
blessed:
in your promise is my comfort,
in your presence I may rest.
5. Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,
you have chosen me to be --
you have drawn me to your
wonder,
you have set your sign on me.

Scripture readings: Isaiah 43:1-7
Luke 3:21-22

The theme linking our two reading this morning is **chosenness**. In Isaiah 43:1–7, Judeans living in Babylon are the ones of God’s choosing. Found within a section of the book often called Second Isaiah because the words reflect the fifth-century setting of the Babylonian exile, these comforting words assure the community that God knows them and they belong to God. In Luke’s account of Jesus’ baptism, Jesus is the chosen one. After the Holy Spirit rests upon him, a heavenly voice speaks directly to Jesus, calling him “Son” and “Beloved,” one with whom God is pleased.

Contemporary reading: *‘Beloved, Belonging and Delightful’* from *‘The Book of Belonging: Bible stories for kind and contemplative kids’* by Mariko Clark [no online link available]

Reflection

Our Isaiah reading this morning is a prophecy probably addressed to the children or grandchildren of those who had been forcibly removed from Jerusalem during the Babylonian conquest in the sixth century BCE. Given Babylon and Jerusalem were approximately 900 kilometres apart (a similar distance as Kaitaia to Wellington), many of these descendants had likely been born in Babylon, and never seen, let alone lived in Jerusalem. Isaiah chapters 40-54 are sometimes called “Second Isaiah”, and they consistently attempt to convince these second and third generations of exiles that their true home is Jerusalem, and that God can and will facilitate their return to the ancestral lands. While God does not ignore the sins of Israel in these chapters, God refuses to define Israel by their failures.

God speaks through Isaiah making extravagant promises of care and protection, we can hear the people’s pain. Their sense of abandonment. Their fear. Their doubt in God’s power and care.

Julia M. O’Brien reminds us that, “These promises of defying fire and flood are surely not literal promises of physical protection. Instead, they are words intended to stir the emotions. They are words of the heart, extravagant promises of commitment, care, and love in the face of

danger. In bold terms, this poem affirms and comforts those who feel separate from and distrusting of God.”¹

W. Carter Lester in his book ‘Feasting on the Word’, says that this passage is about rediscovering our identity:

Whose are we? We are God’s.

Who are we? A people valued, held precious, honoured and loved by God.

What about our many sins? Nothing can separate us from God’s love, for we are redeemed.

This passage is also a reminder that God cares about and values all people, even those who are commonly overlooked in our societies: minorities; those who are overworked and underpaid; people with disabilities; indigenous peoples who grieve the loss of land, language and culture; those who have fallen through cracks in systems they hoped would help them, only to be left feeling defeated and forgotten.

It is encouragement for us all that even though “Waters, rivers and fire happen – God does not promise freedom from the woes of the world. God’s promise is not release from suffering and pain, but accompaniment through the water, through the rivers, and through the fire. Fires, waters, river – these never have the last word.”²

Our second reading this morning is that of Jesus’s baptism. David Lose says, “Baptism, then, is wholly God’s work that we may have confidence that no matter how often we fall short or fail, nothing that we do, or fail to do, can remove the identity that God conveys as a gift. Our relationship with God is the one relationship in life we can’t screw up precisely because we did not establish it.”³

Have you ever wondered why Jesus got baptised? The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted, but that he never sinned. If baptism is about repentance and being washed clean of sin, why did Jesus get baptised? Amy-Jill Levine has a great explanation for this, she points out (remembering that Jesus was Jewish) that Jewish life then, and now, is strongly centred around community. The Lord’s Prayer, which Jesus taught his disciples to pray uses communitarian language – “*our* Father.... Forgive us *our* sins”. She adds: “Atoning in the plural, as being a member of a community

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/baptism-of-our-lord-3/commentary-on-isaiah-431-7-6>

² <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/baptismofchristc>

³ <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/baptismofchristc>

means that one person’s sin impacts the many. Even if we are not personally responsible for committing a particular sin, we still atone as a community. By accepting John’s baptism, Jesus can be seen as accepting his role as a part of the human community. He also sets an example for his followers.”⁴

There’s something really beautiful about that, isn’t there? That the creator would come to live among their creation: taking part in our rituals; publicly accepting roles and responsibilities as part of our communities; experiencing firsthand the brokenness of sin. And yet, this same God, this same creator offers redemption; promises to be with us in life’s trials; tells us that we are seen, known, and loved.

Maybe you know what it’s like to feel fearful and distrusting of God. Perhaps you have had experiences that have left you feeling doubtful of your own worth, or that God cares for you. May our readings this morning be a reminder that you are seen. You are known. You are not alone. You are loved.

As a worship team, we have been thinking about how we create an environment this year that enables you to flourish, in whatever form that takes for you. As part of this, we have decided to introduce some spiritual practices, the first of which is Breath Prayers.

These are short, mostly one sentence prayers, that are rooted in scripture. You pray these prayers with the rhythm of your breath – the first half is prayed while inhaling, and the second half is prayed while exhaling. When praying these prayers, repeat them as many times as needed, meditating on God’s Word, actively thinking and reflecting on them. Focus your mind on Christ and filling your mind with God’s word.

The breath prayers I have written for this week are taken from our Isaiah reading, and you can find them in your service sheet:

Inhale	Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
Exhale	I have called you by name, you are mine.
Inhale	Do not fear,
Exhale	For I am with you.

⁴ Amy-Jill Levine, *The Gospel of Mark: A Beginners Guide to the Good News*, page 9

For the majority of this year, we will be looking at Luke's Gospel. Luke shows us time and again that prayer was important to Jesus – he was someone who prayed a lot. Prayer should therefore be important to us too as followers of Jesus, who seek to model our lives on his. NT Wright points out that in Luke's version of Jesus' baptism, the version we read this morning, it is not until Jesus prays that the heavens open and the Holy Spirit appears. Of course the Spirit can, and does, work independently of our prayers; but prayer invites us in to the work of the Spirit, teaching us to hear God's voice, encouraging us, moulding us, and shaping us into the people, both individually and communally, that God is calling us to be.

I want to finish with the words of Mariko Clark from our story this morning, *Beloved, Belonging and Delightful*: "It is comforting to know that the same warm voice that spoke about Jesus speaks about us too. The same shimmering Spirit fills our hearts and horizons as well. The same words echo for me and for you. Put your hand over your heart and speak God's names for you: 'I belong. I'm beloved. I'm a delight.'"⁵

Hymn: Down by the Jordan (Carolyn Winfrey Gillette; Tune: [Lobe Den Herren](#))

1. Down by the Jordan, a prophet named John was baptizing,
Preaching a message the people found bold and surprising:
"God will forgive! Show that you'll change how you live!
Surely God's new day is rising!"
2. There by the river, the crowd came with great expectation:
"Are you God's Chosen One, sent here to rescue our nation?"
"No!" John replied. "He who is mightier than I
Judges and offers salvation."
3. Jesus, you went to be baptized along with the others,
Taking your place among sinners, God's lost sons and daughters.
Then with great love, God's Spirit came as a dove!
Your work began in those waters.

⁵ Mariko Clark, *The Book of Belonging: Bible stories for kind and contemplative kids*, page 177

4. Here in the Church, we are baptized and filled with God's Spirit.
Freed and forgiven, we're welcomed with joy! Can you hear it?
This is God's sign! This is how God says, "You're mine!"
Let's take the good news and share it!

Offering

Loving God, you bless us with your love.

You know each one of us.

We live in confidence and trust, knowing your care for us.

We bring these gifts to you, our source of life.

Use them we pray, that others may experience your grace and live free from fear. Amen.

From: Abingdon Worship Annual 2025

Prayer for others

God, whom we meet in Jesus, we give thanks for the faithful witness of John the baptiser.

We hear his call to turn our lives to you, to share what we have beyond our needs, to live without greed and exploitation of others.

May we enact his call in our lives, as we attend to the injustice around us:

the injustice of global supply chains

the injustice of exploitative labour conditions

the injustice of misuse of the land

the injustice experienced by First Nations peoples worldwide.

God who is present in the world, let us wonder again at the story of Jesus' baptism.

May we see within it that you turn up again and again.

May we look for your presence, and may we join you in the work that Jesus undertook to share love and to call for community in which all may flourish and live.

Send your Spirit upon us,

Amen.

Hymn: As the magi scanned the heavens ([David Bjorlin](#); Tune: [Blaenwern](#))

1. As the Magi scanned the heavens
Looking for a cosmic sign,
Give us faith to search creation
For a glimpse of truth divine.
2. As the Magi made their journey
Though their end remained unclear,
Guide us down the unknown highways,
Choosing wonder over fear.
3. As the Magi sought out wisdom
In a strange and foreign land,
Lead us out beyond our comfort
In our quest to understand.
4. As the Magi found their saviour
In a helpless baby's face,
Give us eyes to see your glory
In the most unlikely place.

Blessing

God knows your name.

As God's beloved children, you belong to God.

Secure in this love, go forth to live without fear, trusting God's abundant care, resting in God's peace.

Sung Amen x3

BREATH PRAYERS TO TRY THIS WEEK

Inhale Do not fear, for I have redeemed you

Exhale I have called you by name, you are mine.

Inhale Do not fear,

Exhale For I am with you.

For more information, see *Breath as Prayer: Calm your anxiety, focus your mind, and renew your soul*, by Jennifer Tucker (available through Whangarei Libraries)

Beginning with Beloved: A Blessing

Begin here:

Beloved.

Is there any other word
needs saying,
any other blessing
could compare
with this name,
this knowing?

Beloved.

Comes like a mercy
to the ear that has never
heard it.
Comes like a river
to the body that has never
seen such grace.

Beloved.

Comes holy
to the heart
aching to be new.
Comes healing
to the soul
wanting to begin
again.

Beloved.

Keep saying it
and though it may
sound strange at first,
watch how it becomes
part of you,
how it becomes you,
as if you never
could have known yourself
anything else,
as if you could ever
have been other
than this:

Beloved.

– Jan Richardson