

## Readings

### Philippians Chapter 2 verses 2 – 11

2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature <sup>[a]</sup> God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature <sup>[b]</sup> of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

### John Chapter 1 verses 1 – 11

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

<sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— <sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, “This is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”) <sup>16</sup> Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

## Reflection

Today is about beginnings.

When was the last time you started something new or started doing something again after a long break? You probably felt very nervous when you did. What will it be like? What will I feel? How will others respond or react? You might, of course, ask these questions if someone that you love or know has started something new or returned to something? Depending upon what it was, you – or they – might have wondered what it was all about. As some of us prepare to return to school or our offices, these questions will, no doubt, be going through our minds. As Bayley and Parker come for their baptism today, a few of you might be wondering what all this is about.

At a practical level, baptism morning is about taking some water and making Bayley and Parker ever so slightly damp with it. On the surface, that is what we will all see happening this morning.

But before we get to “sprinkle” the boys, other things will happen. Kylie and Stuart, as their parents and Paul, Denise, Samantha and Rebecca as their Godparents, will be asked to stand up. Having done so, they will make promises on behalf of Bayley and Parker – since they aren’t old enough to proclaim their faith for themselves.

In the world of work – and, indeed, in some other areas of life – particular roles require certain words to be said as people start them. When police trainees – or cadets – finish their basic training and before they can begin their probationary period, they have to swear loyalty to the crown. At a Passing Out Parade, the armed forces do the same as they move from initial training to being fully signed up soldiers, sailors or air force crew. I can remember taking an oath when I joined the scouts. I expect the other uniformed organisations – the cubs, rainbows, brownies and guides – take similar oaths.

The promises that Kylea, Stuart, Paul, Denise, Samantha and Rebecca make today are about turning away from evil and the deceit and corruption that sin causes. If you like, this is the negative bit. Having turned away, they undertake to turn towards Jesus as Lord and Saviour and to help to bring Bayley and Parker up in the Christian faith. This is the positive bit. It is like taking on a whole new mindset and pledging ourselves to keep that mindset and this new way of living. In doing so, they will be saying – as many of the church family here at Chilvers Coton and Astley have already done – that the ways of the world and its values are neither our Lord nor our Saviour. In making these promises, we are pledging ourselves to God as Father and his son, Jesus Christ in the power of God the Holy Spirit. The reason that we are prepared to do this is that we believe that God is calling us through Jesus Christ to live in a way that is both different from, and better than, anything that the world has to offer.

Writing in the middle of the First Century AD, the Apostle Paul sets out the mindset that he believes will make the difference between life in the spirit and death in our sins. We aren’t sure if Paul is quoting either a poem or a hymn or whether he is writing something totally new. Either way, he gives us a majestic summary of the mindset that Jesus had and demonstrated in his life and death. Jesus is absolutely the Son of God. As such, he shared the same qualities – what we call the nature – as God.

That could have led him to prize his status and hang on to it for all he was worth. However, instead of doing that, Paul tells us, he 'emptied himself' and took on the 'form of a slave'. In these days of the Black Lives Matter protests, that's potentially difficult language. In this description, Paul is saying, as John the Evangelist puts it, 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us'. What this actually means is that the God who created us in his image and saw that we were unable to save ourselves from the sins into which we have fallen through our weakness decided to do something to help us. Remarkably, he sent his son to earth to take on our humanness in every way. This is what we celebrate at Christmas as we recall the birth of Jesus in the stable in Bethlehem. Miraculous as this was – that Jesus came to us as we are yet keeping all of his divine nature as well – it was but the start of an incredible story. That story saw Jesus walk amongst us and experience every aspect of our lives in all their diversity. It ended, however, in a way that no-one had foreseen. He went to Jerusalem and was nailed to a cross in a death that – to some people – seemed to be senseless, scandalous, total disaster. And yet, as Paul wrote to the early church, because Jesus deemed his life as nothing compared to our need for redemption from the power of sin, 'Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' Paul poetically describes the reality that on the cross Jesus died to pay the price of our sins. And yet God raised him from death to show – beyond any shadow of a doubt – that the power of sin and death had been broken once and for all. As a result, just as Jesus has been given a new resurrection life, we too can enjoy a life of resurrection both in the present and in the future with God if we place our faith in him.

This morning, through baptism, we are claiming this promise for Bayley and Parker. They will be: -

- Signed with a cross – the image of the death that Jesus suffered to bring us life
- Sprinkled with water – a symbol of the fact in we share with Jesus the death that he died and are washed clean by it
- Sealed with the Holy Spirit – a deposit / guarantee of the eternal life to come

In the promises that Kylea, Stuart, Paul, Denise, Samantha and Rebecca make today, they are saying that this is the faith into which they Bayley and Parker to be nurtured in and live by. Baptism, however, is not the final destination – it can happen at any point in our lives., it is the beginning of a journey of, and in, faith. It is the beginning of a new life that takes us in a totally different direction from the values of the world where looking after number one is the way to live. Along the way, we are all trying to learn what it means to embrace the life in which God calls us to 'Love the Lord your God with all your mind, all your strength, all your heart' – every inch of our being in fact – and 'Love our neighbours as ourselves'. In sacrificing our natural selfish wants and desires and seeking the welfare of others instead – just as Jesus did upon the cross – God wants us to answer his call and to be crowned with the prize beyond all measure – eternal life. It won't be an easy journey – there will be thrills and spills, twists and turns – not all of them expected or welcome, moments of certainty and of doubt along the way. However, regardless of what lies in front of us on the journey, we know that God is with us – through his Holy Spirit dwelling within us – each and every step along the way and his light will guide us – even though we have to walk along the darkest of paths and meet death face-to-face. Jesus has died for us, passed through death and come out the other side to resurrection. He calls us to follow him and his son, Jesus, in trust and faith. On a visit to Holy Trinity, Attleborough some years ago now, I clearly remember two phrase that Bishop Colin Bennetts used and they stay with me today. He said "Jesus doesn't ask us to go anywhere that he hasn't already been" and "Jesus has been to hell and back for us and has got the scars to prove it". We may not be able to see the way ahead but wherever our lives lead us, the way is known to Go and, in the words of a certain football song, "You'll never walk alone".

In baptism this morning, Bayley and Parker are joining their lives to that of Jesus' but need us – and particularly their parents and Godparents – to help them along the way as they grow up. Only by living in imitation of Jesus' selflessness can we hope to do that.

Are you ready for that journey? Remember that God doesn't ask us to do it alone but sends his Holy Spirit to guide, guard and protect us on the way that will take us on a journey that leads to nothing less than eternal life secured by the death of Jesus on the cross for us. We are called to follow; do we have the courage to hear the call and to answer it?

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