



BREAKING OPEN

Scripture Study

Living Together in the Light.

Living together in the light
Christ has revealed, letting it
lead us out of the shadows
— like dawn breaking over
the water.

Dennis Webster

A weekly reflection based on the teachings at
St Peter's by the Lake, Paynesville, together
with a study guide based on the readings, some
liturgical resources RCL Lectionary, and a
weekly devotion

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Epiphany

Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm 29

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-17



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to
receive the prayers of thy people
which call upon thee;
and grant that they may both perceive
and know what things they ought to do,
and also may have grace and power
faithfully to fulfil the same;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

There can be no better starting point than Isaiah 42:1-7 in terms of understanding the beginning of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

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.
2 He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
3 a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
4 He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.
5 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:
6 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,
7 to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

The imagery that I sit with this week is in verse 3b. "A dimly burning wick he will not quench."

For many in the world, there seems to be many a wick that is dimly burning, fighting to not let darkness overcome it. Some people, in their own wilderness journey, will fail to see the light, partly because their back is to it, and the shadow being cast before them is not evil, but their own. This is not to say evil is genuinely in the darkness, but only obscured by a lack of light.

The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew's gospel picks up the same place as Mark's account. John is baptising near the Jordan River. Matthew and Luke have invested heavily in justifying who Jesus and John is. But it is not in the settling of John's role that is at issue here. It is in the manifestation that the one just baptised is indeed God's servant whom is being upheld. This is the delight of God. Into his baptism we are baptised, but collectively, as the body of Christ, verses 6 and 7 become our baptismal ministry as a Church, and not as individuals.

As we walk lightly on sacred ground,
teach us Lord to make known your kingdom,
and let this reflect in all that we do and say.

Living together in the Light.

Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm 29

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-17

We often come to the Baptism of Jesus expecting to hear about ourselves:

- About our baptism,
- Our promises,
- Our identity.

And there is a place for that — just not at the beginning.

The readings today are stubborn. They won't let us start with ourselves. They insist that we begin by looking — carefully and steadily — at Jesus:

- Before he teaches,
- Before he heals,
- Before he gathers followers or challenges authority.

At the Jordan, God does something very clear:
God defines who Jesus is and what he has come to do.
This is not a private spiritual moment;
It is a public unveiling.

Isaiah has already named its shape:
“This is my servant... I have put my Spirit upon him...
He will bring justice...
He will be a light to the nations.”

Not loud justice.
Not crushing justice.
Not justice that breaks what is already bruised.

This is purpose, not personality: vocation, not self-expression.

Then Matthew shows us the moment this is spoken aloud.

Jesus comes up out of the water, and the voice from heaven does not whisper reassurance. It declares: “This is my Son.”

This is testimony — God naming Jesus for the sake of others.
The baptism is not about repentance or imitation.
It is about manifestation: making clear who Jesus is before that identity will be questioned, resisted, and finally rejected.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we are helped to understand what the Jordan really meant, even if it takes the Church a long time to catch up.

Peter says, “God shows no partiality... He is Lord of all... He brings peace.”
Then he traces everything back to the baptism John announced.

The mission to the Gentiles is not a change of plan.
It is the long echo of the Jordan.
What God named there cannot be contained.

And here's the detail that matters:

- Jesus does not come out of the Jordan and pause.
- He doesn't stay.
- He doesn't build a shrine to the moment.
- He walks away.

From the river to the road.
From the road into the wilderness.

The Jordan is not an arrival point.
It is an exit.

Jesus goes into the water as Yeshua of Nazareth.
He comes out marked, named, and sent — and there is no going back.

What follows immediately is not ministry, but temptation.
Identity must be tested before it can be lived.

And Lent will show us what kind of Messiah this is:

Not one who binds others,
but one who unbinds.
The blind see.
The possessed are released.
The sick are restored.
Lazarus is unbound and let go.

And all the while, Jesus moves closer to the place where he himself will be bound.

That is the pattern:

Gift received,
then gift given.
Life poured out.

So before we rush to talk about our baptism, this feast asks us to linger here.

To see that the Baptism of Jesus is not a mirror held up to us,
but a signpost pointing to him.

It invites us — gently but unmistakably —
from revelation to way of life.
Not compulsion.
Not competition.
Not proving ourselves better or more faithful.

But alignment.

As we stand at the beginning of a new year, this feast does not ask us to do more. It asks us to notice what has already been given.

And that leaves us with a quieter, harder question.

Jesus steps out of the Jordan.
The voice falls silent.
The road opens.

Perhaps the invitation for us, as a parish, is not to strive harder,
but to live more honestly with what has already been revealed.

What if, instead of asking how much more we can do,
we wondered

How truthfully are we living with the gift we've been given?

Not as individuals trying harder,
but as a people already sent —
quietly,
faithfully,
together.

The gift has been given.

The way is opening.



1. Revelation before reflection

The readings insist that we begin not with ourselves, but with Jesus — his identity and mission revealed at the Jordan. **How does seeing** who Jesus is help clarify what it actually means for us to be baptised in Christ, rather than baptised like Christ?

2. Public testimony and witness

At the baptism, the voice from heaven speaks for the sake of others: “This is my Son.” **Why do you** think it matters that Jesus’ identity is named publicly, in front of John and the gathered crowd? What does that suggest about the role of testimony in the life of the Church today?

3. Mission as an echo, not a new plan

Acts presents the Church’s outreach to the Gentiles not as a new idea, but as the long echo of what was revealed at the Jordan.

What might it look like for our parish to understand mission not as “doing something extra,” but as living more truthfully with what God has already revealed and given?

4. From the moment into the demanding world

Jesus does not stay at the river; he moves from the Jordan to the road, and then into the wilderness, where his identity is tested.

What helps — or hinders — us from moving beyond meaningful moments of faith into the complex and demanding realities of the world we’re sent into?

5. Sent together: service and liberation

The pattern of Jesus’ ministry is unbinding, healing, restoring — and being quietly, faithfully sent.

Where do you see our shared calling as a community to serve, liberate, or “unbind” — not through loud action or competition, but through faithful, aligned life together?

This five-day devotional will shed new light on the sermon from this weekend. Join us as we explore the themes of light, courage, and hope, encouraging us to turn the page in life with faith and trust in God’s steady guidance.



Day One — Begin with Jesus

We often expect to reflect on ourselves during Jesus’s Baptism, but the Scriptures tell us to start with Jesus himself. Before teaching, healing, or gathering followers, Jesus stands in the Jordan and lets God define him. This is a public unveiling, not a private spiritual reassurance. God names Jesus and his purpose. Isaiah had spoken of such a servant, and at the Jordan, that ancient promise is given a face and a name.

Before we ask who we are, we are invited to look steadily at Christ.

- What changes when we allow Jesus to be defined by God’s voice before we try to define ourselves by our faith, promises, or actions?
- How does seeing the Baptism of Jesus as a public unveiling — rather than a private reassurance — reshape the way we understand God’s work in the world?
- What might it look like, in this season, to pause our self-examination long enough to look steadily at Christ and receive who he is and what he is for?
- Pray for the grace to see Jesus clearly — not as we expect him to be, but as God reveals him: gentle, faithful, and given for the life of the world.
- Pray that our lives, and our life together as a community, may be shaped not by striving or self-definition, but by living truthfully with the gift God has already revealed in Christ.

Day Two — “This Is My Son”

When Jesus rises from the water, the heavenly voice declares, “This is my Son,” not “You are my Son.” This distinction matters. God is not merely reassuring Jesus; God is bearing witness for others. John, the crowd, and the Church, reading centuries later, all hear it. Faith is never private. Revelation seeks to be shared truthfully, preparing the way for misunderstanding, resistance, and rejection. Jesus’ identity will be questioned, but it will never be unclear. The Church exists to receive and echo what has already been spoken.

- Why does it matter that God’s declaration at the Jordan is spoken

aloud — “This is my Son” — and heard by others, not kept as a private reassurance?

- What does this moment teach us about the nature of faith as something shared and witnessed, rather than owned or protected as a purely personal experience?
- How might the Church learn to echo Christ’s identity truthfully — without exaggeration or force — in a world that may misunderstand, resist, or reject it?
- Pray for the grace to speak and live the truth of Christ with clarity and humility, trusting that what God has revealed does not need embellishment or defence.
- Pray that our community may remain attentive to the voice that has already spoken, and find courage to echo it together — quietly, truthfully, and in love.

Day Three — The Long Echo of the Jordan

In Acts, Peter finally comprehends the Jordan’s meaning. Standing in Cornelius’s house, he declares God’s impartiality and Jesus’s lordship. This mission echoes John’s baptism. The light at the Jordan was meant to travel beyond Israel, familiarity, and Church boundaries. Mission isn’t an extra programme; it’s what happens when revelation is taken seriously. God’s naming cannot be contained. The Church doesn’t create mission; it learns to live with its consequences.

- What changes when we see mission not as a new initiative or programme, but as the natural consequence of taking God’s revelation in Christ seriously?
- Peter discovers that the meaning of the Jordan reaches further than he first imagined. Where might God be stretching our understanding of who is included in Christ’s peace and lordship?
- If the Church does not create mission but lives with the consequences of what God has already revealed, what might that ask of us as a community right now?
- Pray for hearts willing to be surprised by the reach of Christ’s light, especially where it challenges familiarity, comfort, or long-held assumptions.
- Pray that our parish may recognise mission not as something to be manufactured, but as a way of life shaped by what God has already named and given in Christ.

Day Four — From River to Road

Jesus leaves the river, not lingering or building a shrine. He walks from the river to the road, then into the wilderness. The Jordan is an exit, not an arrival. Jesus enters the water as Yeshua of Nazareth and leaves

marked, named, and sent. The immediate response is temptation, not ministry. Faithful discipleship is about walking into uncertainty with trust. Lent shows that Jesus’ path leads to unbinding others, even as he moves toward being bound himself.

- Why do you think Jesus does not remain at the Jordan, and what might that teach us about the limits of spiritual “moments” in shaping a life of faith?
- What helps — or hinders — us from moving from clarity into uncertainty, from insight into the demanding realities of the road ahead?
- How might this movement from river to road reshape our understanding of following Christ as a community, rather than as individuals preserving private experiences?
- Pray for the grace to trust God beyond moments of clarity, and to step onto the road even when the way forward feels uncertain.
- Pray that our parish may recognise when it is time to walk on together, rather than remain where faith once felt clear and contained.

Day Five — Gift Received, Life Given

The pattern of Jesus’ life becomes clear: gift received, then gift given; life poured out for others.

The blind see. The bound are released. Lazarus is unbound and let go. All of it flows from what was revealed at the Jordan.

So before we rush to speak about our baptism, this feast invites us to linger. Not to strive harder, but to live more honestly with what has already been given. As a parish, the question before us is not “How much more can we do?” but something quieter and more authentic.

- What does the pattern of unbinding in Jesus’ ministry reveal about the purpose of the gift he received at the Jordan?
- Where do you see the call to serve and liberate others emerging quietly and faithfully within our shared life as a parish?
- How might being “sent together” change the way we understand mission — not as individual effort, but as a shared way of life shaped by gift?
- Pray for attentiveness to where Christ is already loosening burdens, restoring dignity, and bringing life — often quietly, without recognition.
- Pray that our community may live as a people already given a gift, sent not with urgency or noise, but with trust, patience, and love.

End notes and further reading

End notes and further reading

Harrington, Daniel J Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew
Andrew McGowan
substack.com/@abmcg
N.T. Wright, Twelve months of Sundays Year A

A few very warm and long nights wrestling with what seemed to be only four verses of Bible Text
but required all the anti-mine protection of Princess Diana!

The gift has been given.
The way is opening.
We are sent — together.



Brabarlung Totem

This is produced on
GunaiKurnai Country and
our respects are made to
the First Nations people
everywhere.

Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville, Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

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