West Sussex Area Ministry, United Reformed Church (Billingshurst, Petworth and Pulborough)

 **Bulletin for Sunday 9 January 2022**

Good morning, friends, I hope you’ve been managing to keep warm this week. Each day now is getting two or three minutes longer, and there are catkins and buds just waiting…! This morning we remember Jesus’ baptism in the River Jordan, when the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove, and God’s voice told him that he was beloved….

We pause as we prepare to worship..…. and then praise God as we sing:

Hymn: Praise, my soul, the King of heaven (R&S 104)

Prayer: God of grace,

this, right now, is the day that you have made -

 may we rejoice and be glad in it, and live it to the full.

 You know us - we have always belonged to you.

 You love us, and call us each by name -

 may we hear, and know ourselves to be loved,

 and knowing ourselves beloved, respond to you…

 We ask your blessing on everything we do,

 or bring to you, or give in your service,

 today and every day. In Jesus’ name. Amen

followed by The Lord’s Prayer

Reading: Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

Reflection: As we meet the adult Jesus for the first time in Luke’s gospel, we see him choosing to join the crowds of people who have come to hear John preaching in the wilderness; and then, as many of them did, choosing also to make a commitment to God by being baptised in the River Jordan. And there is a response - he sees the Spirit come to him, and he hears God’s voice telling him that he is God’s beloved son. What a way to prepare for the next phase of his life, his public ministry!

Anyone starting a new job may expect to receive appropriate training and be introduced to their new colleagues. I remember once being sent on a team-building course which involved abseiling off a bridge! But imagine, especially if you were unsure of the way ahead, the reassurance and the confidence that would come from hearing God’s own voice telling you that you were known, that what you were doing was right, and above all that you were loved. Notice that there is no mention of Jesus’ name, but rather his relationship is emphasised - ‘my son’. A warm, loving relationship gives confidence to grow and move forwards, and Jesus spent the next few years conveying, both by word and by action, the wonderful good news that God loves all of us. Always. Amen!

Hymn: God is love: let heaven adore him (R&S 95)

Prayer: Loving God, we rejoice in the love you show us:

 thank you for your wonderfully created world -

 may we all seek ways to heal and preserve it;

 thank you for our safe and peaceful communities -

 we pray for those living with fear and violence;

 thank you for those working in the NHS or in care -

 we hold before you the sick and the exhausted…

 We pray for our neighbours,

 for all those we love, and for ourselves…

 In Jesus’ name we ask all our prayers

 including the unspoken prayers of our hearts… Amen

Hymn: Will you come and follow me (R&S 558)

Blessing: May we know the warmth of God’s love

 for each and every one of us;

 and may the blessing of God

 Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

 be with us and with all those we love,

 this week, and always. Amen

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There will be a ‘Sunday at Six’ Zoom at 6pm this Sunday - all welcome.

We all have a part to play in caring for each other and doing what we can to keep everyone safe from Covid - wearing masks, giving people space and having plenty of ventilation. The URC’s advice is at

https://urc.org.uk/covid-plan-b-synod-moderators-updated-guidance/

Please also let us know if you have a positive Covid test after recently being in church.

It’s obviously impossible to make our churches entirely risk-free.

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