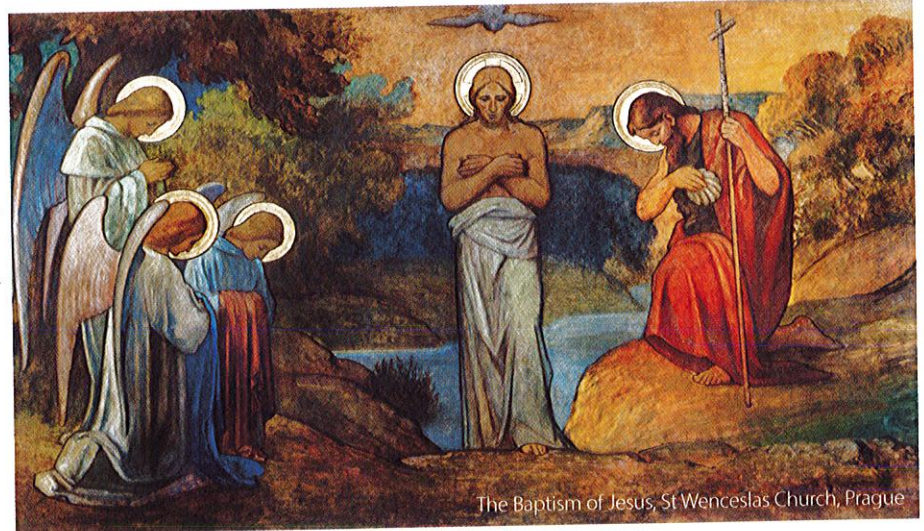


The baptism of the Messiah

Caroline Fletcher *reflects on* Matthew 3:13-end



The Baptism of Jesus, St Wenceslas Church, Prague

Jesus' baptism marks the start of his public ministry, but it often puzzles people. The baptism that John performs signifies repentance, so why does the sinless Christ need to be baptised? Indeed, John himself seems to share these concerns, protesting that it would make more sense if he were baptised by Christ, rather than the other way around. Jesus' response suggests that he acknowledges John's objections, but he urges the Baptist to go ahead anyway, as his purpose in seeking baptism is not repentance but obedience to God.

The words from heaven: "This is my Son, the Beloved" are a reference to Psalm 2:7, which was recited at the anointing of a king and had come to be associated with the hoped-for Messiah. Therefore, Jesus' baptism is like a public anointing of a heavenly king and an acknowledgement of him as the Christ.

The words from heaven continue by saying that God is "well pleased" with the Son. This, too, is believed to be a reference to an Old Testament scripture – this time Isaiah 42:1. This is also believed to refer to the Messiah, set within the context of what are known as the "suffering servant" passages. Christians understand these as prophecies about Jesus which reflect the suffering he endured. This suggests that God was not only using Christ's baptism to affirm Jesus as Messiah, but to indicate what kind of Messiah he was going to be – God's servant, whose ministry would be costly. 🙏

Lord, thank you for sending your Son as a suffering servant. May we never take it for granted and may we seek to follow his example of obedience to your will. Amen.

Purposeful prayer for the new year

Part 2 – listening in prayer

by Caroline Hodgson

Caroline looks at how we can refresh our prayer life as we move into 2026.

When he retired, the erstwhile Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, stated that he had been on "transmit" for a long time, and wanted to spend more time in "receive" mode. It's a good analogy for prayer, which is about listening as much as communicating.

In a world full of noise, it can be difficult to quieten our hearts and minds long enough

to hear what God has to say. So, after lifting your prayers, take a moment to sit in silence, allowing God to speak to your heart. Sometimes the answer comes as a sense of peace, a new idea or a gentle nudge. Listening requires patience and willingness to be still, creating space for God's wisdom to reach us. Through doing so, we deepen our relationship with God and allow God to shape our life. The more we practise quiet attentiveness in prayer, the more attuned we become to recognising God's presence, guiding hand and grace. 🙏

Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

Today I'm very sticky, as I've been spinning out the honey from last year's harvest from the bees, and so is the rest of the cottage! I only took a little honey last autumn, as the bees had a tough year of wet, cold weather early in the year, followed by a cool summer, so their harvest of pollen and nectar was considerably reduced. Keeping bees is not like any other farmed animal, since they're

truly wild creatures who will stay around as long as it suits them and then leave when they find somewhere they prefer.

The Bible has lots of references to honey – very often it's referred to as a blessing from God. Keeping them requires patience and focus. The task is to work with them, attend to their health and wellbeing and accept with joy that you may share some of their harvest of honey, which is their own winter food store. 🍯

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

Ephesians 4:4-5