

Knox Presbyterian Church
Rev. Emma Duncan
JANUARY 12, 2025



Greetings

Call to worship

Leader: In the beginning was the Word

People: Jesus, you are the Word of God

Leader: The Word became flesh and blood

People: And moved in to our neighbourhood

Leader: The Word gives life and light

People: We will let His light shine in the darkness

All: We worship our Triune God with thanksgiving! Amen.

Music: This is the day (#78, all verses)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession (including The Lord's Prayer)

God of glory and strength, you are splendid and majestic! You created the heavens and stretched them out. You created the earth and command the mighty waters. You have taken your people by the hand and given us a covenant of grace and hope. In the fullness of time, you chose to become human and dwell among us. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, your eternal Son came as God, Light of Light, begotten, not made. We offer you our thanks and praise for the gifts that you have given us through the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

Merciful God, in baptism you promise forgiveness and new life, but we confess that we prefer our old lives. We confess that we are in love with the past and our resolve for change is short-lived. We let nostalgia prevent us from accepting your spirit of newness into our lives. We promise to care for the poor and needy, but instead, we hoard our treasures. We cling to destructive habits, we nurture grudges, and we are reluctant to forgive one another.

O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!

Lord, bathe us in the life-giving waters of your righteousness and grace! Restore our faith in you so that we can honour you through our worship and service. Guide us by your Spirit to be the men and women that you desire us to be – people who prepare the way of the Lord.

We pray all this in the glorious name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

2025 is the 180th anniversary of this congregation and we have much to be thankful for. As I reflect on this milestone, I find myself asking the question – what if these walls could talk? What would they say? One of the things that I hear is that this is a place for broken people to hear the Good News of the Gospel...that in the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Announcements

1. Welcome!
2. Join us in the Fellowship Hall after worship for refreshments and conversation.
3. Thank you to Rick Craig for doing our readings today.
4. Sermon Series on the Gospel of John
For the first half of 2025, I will be preaching through the Gospel of John. She has prepared a reading plan that takes you through the entire Gospel. This reading plan is available in the sanctuary or through the church office.
5. Volunteers Needed for Coffee fellowship
Sign-up sheet is in the Fellowship Hall.
6. Readers Needed
If you are interested in reading Scripture during worship, please contact Rev. Emma.
7. Celebration of Life service for Dorothy Prior
We will be celebrating Dorothy's life and faith on Sunday January 19th at 1:30 p.m. at Knox.
8. Upcoming Events
Sunday February 9
Sacrament of Holy Communion
Saturday March 1, 9:00 a.m.
Congregational Pancake Breakfast
Saturday April 12, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Easter Eggstravaganza

Music: Jesus, friend of all the children (#656, all verses)
Children's Time: Make them proud

Prayer of Illumination

Let us pray. Beloved God, as your Word is proclaimed in this place, may your Spirit descend upon us like the dove that descended upon Christ at his baptism. Reveal your Son to us for who he truly is – the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In Christ's holy name we pray. Amen.

Our Old Testament reading is taken from the Book of Psalms and we will be reading Responsively Psalm 29.

Leader: Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,

People: ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

Leader: Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;

People: worship the LORD in holy splendor.

Leader: The voice of the LORD is over the waters;

People: the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters.

Leader: The voice of the LORD is powerful;

People: the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

Leader: The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;

People: the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

Leader: The Lord makes Lebanon skip like a calf,

People: and Sirion like a young wild ox.

Leader: The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;

the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

**People: The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare;
and in the temple of the Lord all say, "Glory!"**

Leader: The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;

People: the LORD sits enthroned as sovereign forever.

Leader: O LORD, give strength to your people!

All: O LORD, bless your people with peace! Amen.

Our 1st New Testament reading is taken from the Gospel of John and we will be reading chapter 1, verses 1-14.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Our 2nd New Testament reading is taken from the Gospel of John and we will be reading chapter 1, verses 19-36.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.”

Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”

This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.”

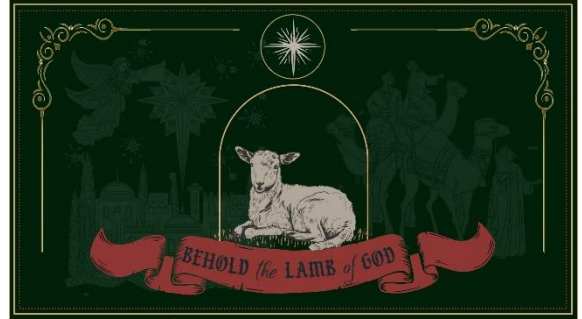
And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Reflection: Here is the Lamb of God

From now until June, we will be immersing ourselves in the Gospel of John. Each year, I have chosen to focus on one Gospel instead of using the Revised Common Lectionary which jumps around from Gospel to Gospel. I prefer doing it this way



and since none of you have complained about this, you must be fine with my decision! Each Gospel is unique – they have different authors, different audiences, and different themes. The Gospel of John stands apart from the other 3 because of its unique stories, literary structure, and poetic beauty. Written by the Apostle John, a member of the inner circle of Christ’s disciples, he provides his thesis statement towards the *end* of his gospel narrative – Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written down that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31) Throughout John’s gospel, he tells us the story of Jesus Christ who gives light in the darkness and whose glory is full of grace and truth. This gospel is full of beautiful imagery about who Jesus is from the very first chapter, where we hear...Jesus is the Word made flesh. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. All of these images and stories point us John’s goal – that we should **believe in Jesus Christ and have life in his name.**

It’s also important for us to understand that from the very first chapter of this Gospel, John points towards Christ’s death and resurrection. There is no secret here – Jesus is going to be misunderstood and rejected. He is going to become a sacrificial lamb that is slaughtered for the sins of the world. And then he is going to defeat the darkness of death through the glorious light of the resurrection.

And along the way to the resurrection, John is going to tell us some amazing stories and we are going to meet some incredible people. Like the other disciples. Like a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Like his friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Like the Samaritan woman at the well. And many more.

Today we meet John the Baptist.

We know from the other Gospel narratives – especially from the Gospel of Luke which we explored last year – that Jesus and John the Baptist were related through their mothers, who were cousins. (see Luke 1) But John, the gospel writer, makes no mention of their relationship, which is typical of his gospel. He also doesn't mention what John the Baptist wore or ate. The gospel writer is not interested in that level of detail. In fact, many of his stories begin with – the next day... or some time after this... - John had a job to do, to get the world to believe in Jesus Christ and he was not wasting any time on the lesser details. We all know people who take a VERY long time to tell a story. Well, John was not one of those people.

And so, the story of Christ's baptism in the Gospel of John has a *very* different flavour compared to the other Gospels. In fact, John doesn't record any details about Christ's actual baptism! Instead, the gospel writer immediately launches into a story of confrontation, where John the Baptist is accosted by the religious leaders with this question – who are you? They want to know if he is a great leader of Israel like Moses or a prophet like Elijah. They ask him – what do have to say for yourself? John replies by quoting the prophet Isaiah – *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness to make straight the way of the Lord.* (John 1:19-23) John is saying to them, I am just a messenger. And my message is this - Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come to our neighbourhood and he will baptize us with the power of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Even without the extra details from the other Gospels, John's opening story about Jesus still has a lot of power. And its power lies in the fact that Jesus' entrance into ministry was messy and complicated. His baptism was not a neat and tidy affair like we do today. It was not performed in a beautiful sanctuary with a



wooden baptism font. It was performed in the murky waters of the Jordan River. Jesus was not surrounded by his loved ones who gave him cards and gifts. He was surrounded by the religious leaders who would hound him for his entire ministry.

The fact that Jesus' baptism is described as a messy affair is actually a good thing because it shows us that God intentionally came into the messiness of the human condition. Because let's face it, our lives are anything but neat and tidy. We are all dealing with struggles of one form or another. Health issues and money woes. Conflict in our relationships. Challenges in the workplace. Uncertainty about what tomorrow will bring. The global Church is sadly more divided than unified and many congregations are struggling to reclaim their relevance in the post-pandemic world. And all you have to do is watch the news to know that our society is not in good and decent order.

In the chaos and brokenness of all of our world, Christ's baptism reminds us that the Son of God, the Word made flesh, the Lamb of God has arrived. He has come into our neighbourhoods, our Church, and our world and he alone is our Redeemer and Saviour. He alone has the power to defeat the darkness of our sin and the darkness of our world with his glorious light. And the stories that we are going to hear from the Gospel of John this year show us that Jesus did not perform this grace filled work from on high in an ivory tower – he did it all in the thick of the messiness of our humanity.

And so, John is inviting us with his opening story to get into the water with Jesus so that we can be washed clean through his grace and truth, so that we can experience belief and faith, so that we can have life in his name.

To God be the glory. Now and always. Amen.

Dedication of our Tithes and Offerings

Living Faith is a statement of faith from the Presbyterian Church in Canada and it says this about baptism:

Baptism assures us that we belong to God.
In life and in death, our greatest comfort is that
we belong to our faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ. (Living Faith, 7.6.5)

We will now sing our song of thanks, Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Praise God from whom all blessing flow;
praise him, all creatures here below:
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Let us pray.

Holy and loving God, you welcome us as sons and daughters through baptism in Jesus Christ. Your Holy Spirit lives in us as we seek to prepare the way of the Lord. May our offerings support the work of this church, lifting up your hope and new life in our community and beyond. We dedicate ourselves to a life of service and growth in the name of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Almighty and everlasting God, as we hear the story of Christ's baptism in the Gospel of John, you invite us to enter into this story. From the messiness of our lives and our world you draw us into the water so that we may receive new life in your name. There are no words or hymns or prayers that can ever thank you enough for the gift of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life that we have received through Christ. We love you, O Triune God, and we offer you all that we are and all that we have.

Hear our prayers today we lift up to you the cares of our lives and the world.

Blessed Father, we have so much to be thankful for. We thank you for the year just past, for its joys, for laughter shared, and for love received. As we enter into a New Year, we thank you that you walk beside us each and every day, regardless of what the future holds. We thank you for this community of faith as we celebrate 180 years of worshipping and

serving from the corner of Elizabeth and James streets. Bless this community of faith with wisdom, courage, and hope for the coming year.

Redeeming Saviour, we pray for our world. Lord – there are so many needs that we can never express them all. We pray for all nations. We pray for those regions of the world where peace is just a remote concept. We continue to ask you to intercede in the Middle East and in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Be with the people of Syria as they seek to envision of new future. Be with all who are struggling because of war and violence, poverty and hunger, oppression and injustice, and the effects of climate change and natural disasters. We remember especially the people of California as they deal with deadly forest fires. Give strength to all those who have lost their homes and communities. Be with government leaders and first responders. We may not know their names Lord – but you do. Thank you for all of the helpers in our world – those who work for peace and justice on the global stage and those who serve without any need for recognition or reward.

Comforting Spirit, we pray for our family and friends. Many of us are dealing with complex situations in our families, our friendships, and in the workplace. Help us to focus on Christ as we muddle our way through the messiness of life. We pray for those who suffer, be that physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. Let them experience the glory of your healing love. We also remember those in our midst who grieve the loss of a loved one. May they know your peace, O God.

Together, we pray for your children by name...

God of grace and glory, you call us to be your people, faithful and joyful. As your beloved Son embraced his mission in the waters of baptism, let the fire of your Spirit descend on us so that we may join Christ in his transforming work. We ask this in the name of our Saviour, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.

Music: Lord the light of your love is shining (#376, all verses)

Blessing (Revelation 21:1-8)

Sung Amen