

**Worship at Home service Sunday 7<sup>th</sup>  
January 2024 with Revd Alan Sharp.  
Today is Covenant Sunday. For the sake of  
those unable to share the Covenant  
Service in Church items from the Service  
are used here.**

**HYMN StF 470 “Lord for the years”**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=awCwApNIAD4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awCwApNIAD4)

Lord, for the years your love has kept and  
guided,  
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,  
sought us and saved us, pardoned and  
provided,  
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires  
us,  
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls  
ablaze,  
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires  
us;  
Lord of the word, receive your people’s praise.

Lord, for our land, in this our generation,  
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and  
care;  
for young and old, for commonwealth and  
nation,  
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our  
prayer.

Lord, for our world, when we disown and  
doubt him,  
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;  
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him;  
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may  
reign.

Lord, for ourselves, in living power remake us-  
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,  
past put behind us, for the future take us,  
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

**Opening liturgy**

Let us pray.

Glory to the Father, the God of love,  
who created us; who continually preserves  
and sustains us; who has loved us with an  
everlasting love and given us the light of the  
knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus  
Christ. **Blessèd be God for ever.**

Glory to Jesus Christ our Saviour,  
who, though he was rich, yet for our sake  
became poor, and was tested in every way as  
we were, yet without sin;  
who proclaimed the good news of the  
kingdom,  
and was obedient to the point of death,  
even death on a cross; who was raised from  
the dead and is alive for ever,  
and has opened the kingdom of heaven  
to all who trust in him;  
who is seated at God’s right hand in glory,  
and will come to be our judge.

**Blessèd be God for ever.**

Glory to the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of  
life, by whom we are born into the family of  
God, and made members of the body of  
Christ; whose witness confirms us; whose  
wisdom teaches us; whose power enables us;  
who will do for us more than we can ask or  
think. **Blessèd be God for ever.**

To the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be praise and glory for ever. **Amen.**

**Bible reading:** Mark 1.4-11 The Baptism of  
Christ.

**Reflection:**

Many people have wondered "Why did Jesus  
have to be baptised? But it is there in each of  
the four Gospels and no-one really doubts that  
it happened. Bible scholars say that if a story  
is a bit embarrassing, or causes theological  
problems, and still gets told then it is more  
likely to be true. And if it gets told by  
everybody, then it is almost certain to be true.  
So, what's happening. Why did Jesus want to  
be baptised?

A Minister in Canada tells how a few years  
ago he was reading his newspaper when a  
picture suddenly reached out to him and  
caught his attention. It was a picture of a  
young man sitting on some steps outside a  
school. The young man was bald, and all  
around him were his classmates,  
about 25 of them, their heads bowed towards  
the camera - and they too were bald. The  
Headline next to the picture read: TRUE  
FRIENDS, and the caption said: "Mark Busse,  
16,

poses with classmates from his high school". His friends shaved their heads to show support for Busse after his hair fell out following chemotherapy for inoperable lung cancer. His friends said that they didn't want him to stand out among the other students at school. In other words, they identified with him. They showed him that he was not alone. They gave to him a sign which he could treasure, a sign that made real to him and to others their love for him.

That is what the Baptism of Jesus is all about. It is about making love real - God's love for us - and our love for God. And just as the baptism of Jesus was an act by which he identified himself with us, so our own baptism in His name identifies us with him. And as Jesus makes God's love real for us, we have to make it real for others - whatever the cost.

But we don't do this in our own strength. Jesus saw the heavens torn apart - and then the Spirit descended like a dove upon him. There seems to be two extremes here, but something happened - from now on he changes. This is the same Spirit by which God moved in creation and brought meaning out of chaos.

Isaiah believed that the same God, the God of Creation, would give a new start to people wearied by the chaos of exile. It is the same Spirit that can give us a new start now.

As we start 2024, we may be facing it with trepidation. But God is with us. That is the message of the Covenant Service. Read that opening prayer again, and reflect on its words, prayed by Methodists since the time of John Wesley - almost 300 years! In that time there have been many ups and downs, but God's love has been constant - and will remain so in 2024.

### **Prayer of Confession**

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Therefore, to all who truly repent this is his gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven.'

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

### **The Covenant**

Sisters and brothers in Christ,  
let us again accept our place within this covenant  
which God has made with us and with all who are called to be Christ's disciples.  
This means that, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we accept God's purpose for us, and the call to love and serve God in all our life and work.  
Christ has many services to be done:  
some are easy, others are difficult;  
some bring honour, others bring reproach;  
some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both;  
in some we may please Christ and please ourselves; in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.  
Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.  
Therefore, let us make this covenant of God our own. Let us give ourselves to him, trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.

Eternal God, in your faithful and enduring love you call us to share in your gracious covenant in Jesus Christ.

In obedience we hear and accept your commands;  
in love we seek to do your perfect will.  
With joy we offer ourselves anew to you.  
We are no longer our own but yours.

**I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me,**

**in all that I do and in all that I may endure; when there is work for me and when there is none; when I am troubled and when I am at peace. Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded. when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking. when I have all things, and when I have nothing. I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose. Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. May it be so for ever. Let this covenant now made on earth. be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.**

### Intercessions

Loving God, hear us as we pray for your holy catholic Church:

**make us all one, that the world may believe.**

Inspire and lead all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world:

**establish justice and peace among all people.**

Have compassion on all who suffer from any sickness, grief or trouble:

**deliver them from their distress.**

We praise you for all your saints who have entered your eternal glory:

**bring us all to share in your heavenly kingdom.**

Let us pray for our own needs and for those of others.

### Our Father

#### HYMN StF 476 "One more step"

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXp1NUULdgc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXp1NUULdgc)

One more step along the world I go  
One more step along the world I go  
From the old things to the new  
Keep me traveling along with you  
*And it's from the old I travel to the new*  
*Keep me traveling along with you*

Round the corners of the world, I turn  
More and more about the world I learn  
All the new things that I see  
You'll be looking at along with me

As I travel through the bad and good  
Keep me traveling the way I should  
Where I see no way to go  
You'll be telling me the way, I know

Give me courage when the world is rough  
Keep me loving though the world is tough  
Leap and sing in all I do  
Keep me traveling along with you

you are older than the world can be  
You are younger than the life in me  
Ever old and ever new

Keep me traveling along with you:

### Benediction.

May God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – guide you throughout 2024, and fill the year with peace, joy and love. **Amen**