

Collect, Readings and Reflection for 11 January 2026, Baptism of Christ

Collect *(the Church's prayer for today):*

Heavenly Father,
at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son:
may we recognize him as our Lord
and know ourselves to be your beloved children;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.
Amen.

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-end

Today's reflection is by Reader, Cal Bailey. The Solidarity of God with us

How do you cause the collapse of a repressive, brutal regime of government?

I want to take you back to the 1980's. Russian communism had dominated Eastern Europe since 1945. Uprisings in Hungary and Czechoslovakia had been ruthlessly put down. Yet the shipyard workers of Gdansk in Poland found the courage to form a trades union, led by Lech Walesa, an electrician, and to go out on strike taking 17,000 people with him. The movement spread to other shipyards, mines and factories until 1 in 3 workers in Poland was a member of his union. It was called Solidarity.

The Polish government was in crisis, introduced martial law and arrested the union leaders. All protest was stifled. There was only one institution the government couldn't dismantle by forcible repression. That was the Catholic Church. Over the next couple of years, a young priest started to preach words of gospel truth into the events in Poland. His name was Jerzy Popieluszko. His sermons were picked up by an underground radio station and he gained a nationwide following.

The government panicked. They fabricated evidence against him and tried to get him sent to prison. They threatened him and intimidated him. He carried on preaching and speaking the truth regardless. On 13th October 1984 the secret police staged a car accident as they knew the priest was driving past. He got out to help, was kidnapped, beaten, and drowned in a reservoir.

The estimates of numbers attending his funeral vary between 250,000 and 1 million people. It was the beginning of the end of the Soviet regime first in Poland, and gradually across all of Eastern Europe and Russia itself. And it started with Solidarity.

Our gospel today is about Jesus' baptism, and the question I want to ask is, Why did Jesus want to be baptized?

We see from the passage that, when Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize him, John drew back. "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" he asked.

Baptism is a sign of forgiveness. It's the story of escape from Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea where the people were told to march into the river and God would make the waters recede, stop flowing, and let them through. They got wet no doubt, but they escaped the oppression of Egypt by going into the water. They came out free, the far side of the river - the Egyptians on the other side and unable to attack them anymore. Jesus didn't need forgiveness: he was the perfect lamb of God. So why did he seek baptism? Is there something else going on in baptism as well as forgiveness?

I want us to think about a line in our Creed that we usually pass over quickly. It's the line that refers to the 'communion of saints'. We say in the final paragraph: "I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." What is this 'Communion of Saints'? The reason Jesus wanted to be baptized is that he wanted to begin his ministry with a clear demonstration of his solidarity with Israel, with humans, with us.

Joseph was told: his name will be Emmanuel, God *with* us. Let's explore this for a moment. I wonder how many of us know what it is to have to flee abroad in fear of your life; or to have to depend on others for money; or what it's like to face a justice system which is rigged against you; or to feel the powerlessness of being excluded when big decisions about you are being made?

Those are all difficult, even terrifying, experiences. Jesus knew what they felt like. He left Bethlehem hurriedly to go to Egypt with his parents due to Herod's fear of a rival king and his instruction to kill all boys under the age of two. Jesus was a refugee. He depended on others for most of his ministry – he had no income, no home. He was poor and dependent. Jesus was arrested on a trumped-up charge, tried unjustly and flogged by a conspiracy of Jewish and Roman authorities who both had reason to want rid of him. And he knew what exclusion was: he was removed from a synagogue for saying things which were unacceptable and nearly thrown off a cliff; and finally he was excluded from Jerusalem to die on a hill outside. At this point not only did the authorities leave him helpless, so did his friends.

His understanding of the worst of human behaviour cannot be doubted. His solidarity with our most difficult experiences began at his baptism, when he chose not to be the master of the situation but to be the junior, to take the humbler part. And the rest of his life set the same tone. Soon after this moment of baptism, Jesus announced his ministry, using these words:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Luke 4: 18-19

This ministry was about bringing dignity to people who are poor – that sense of belonging that a community knows when it works for the good of all. It was about releasing oppressed people by healing and freeing them, and much later this was interpreted by his followers to mean creating communities of justice, which take the

devil off the back of those who have no power, no voice. Jesus' ministry was about those imprisoned by a disability or by physical shackles getting their life back again, recovering their freedom to enjoy God's good creation, to enjoy friendships on equal terms and life in all its fullness. His ministry was about removing reasons for exclusion and humiliation by creating a community in which all are equal, and all are gifted, all are responsible and all dignified. That's the communion of saints.

That's what the church is. We let ourselves down from time to time. Sometimes badly. But show me another organization which has as noble an ambition. Show me another organization which has a founder who participated in life's struggles quite so deeply. Show me another organization which has lasted as long as the church. There isn't one anywhere in the world. Our baptism is into a community of forgiveness *and solidarity*. Brothers and sisters: God, in Jesus, became one of us. He came to be with us. He was Jerzy Popieluszko writ large. And the transformation he brings is even larger than the ending of Russian communism. It's not only about forgiveness of sins; it's also the freedom to be fully human. It's about being in a community where we belong despite being poor, because wealth doesn't create barriers between us but opportunities to be a community which shares. It's about preventing people being treated unjustly because we have a justice system which respects everyone and manages power properly.

This is God's salvation – it's so much more than it seems at first. It's a way of living together where there is no exclusion, oppression or humiliation. I see this salvation at work in our church. As treasurer, I see people sharing generously, without using their money as power.

I appreciate this church enormously. I have received all kinds of help. I come with all sorts of chips on my shoulders which this community is gradually chipping off! Jesus came not only to forgive us, but to be in solidarity with us, in order to create the communion of saints. Instead of oppression, poverty, imprisonment and exclusion he cherishes us, gives us somewhere to belong, includes us and helps us get our lives back on the right track. And he gives us each other to help. I wonder what that might mean for you in 2026? I wonder how this church might help you?

Amen.