

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Baptism of Christ

11th January 2026

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

Legend has it that Martin Luther placed a large plaque in his room bearing these words: *“When you wash your face, remember your baptism.”*

How often do we think of our baptism? Perhaps we have kept a candle, a photograph, a certificate from that day when parents and godparents carried us to the font. It mattered, of course. And yet, for many of us, baptism feels like something that happened once, long ago — a meaningful beginning that then quietly receded into the background of life.

The early Christians, it seems, understood baptism rather differently. Writing in the second century, Tertullian describes the moment with intensity. “When we are going to enter the water,” he writes, “we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, his pomp, and his angels. Hereupon we are thrice immersed... Then, when we are taken up, we taste first a mixture of milk and honey. And from that day we refrain from the daily bath for a whole week.” They wanted to hold on to the moment — to let baptism shape not just an hour, but the life that lay ahead.

Which leaves us with a question: what does baptism mean to us? Or perhaps more honestly: why does baptism so often seem to mean so little?

Today's feast — the Baptism of Christ — doesn't invite us to feel guilty about that question but to listen again: to the waters, to the voice, and to the identity spoken there.

Imagine the scene at the Jordan. Not a holy place set apart, like our churches, but an ordinary river. A crowd gathers. People come carrying guilt and regret, longing and hope. John's baptism is a call to repentance — a turning back, a restoration of relationship with God. Those who step into the water do so in search of forgiveness and a new beginning.

And then Jesus steps forward.

He enters waters meant for others. Unlike everyone else in that line, Jesus has nothing to confess, nothing to renounce, nothing to put right.

And yet he comes. Not to be set apart, but to stand alongside. Not because he needs repentance, but because he chooses solidarity. He enters fully into the human condition — into our waiting, our longing, our need for grace.

It is only then, as he comes up from the water, that heaven opens. The Spirit descends like a dove. And a voice is heard.

This moment comes before any public ministry — before teaching or healing, before the cross or the resurrection. The voice does not speak of future achievements or promised success. It simply declares: *"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*

Jesus' identity is not earned. It is revealed. Before he does anything *for* God, he is named *by* God.

From the waters of the Jordan, let the lens widen now to include us — we who, through baptism, are drawn into Christ's own identity, named and claimed, called beloved.

That may sound simple. But it is anything but easy.

We live amid a chorus of competing voices, each eager to tell us who we are. The economy names us consumers, and our purpose is to buy. The entertainment industry names us spectators, and our role is to tune in. Society measures us by what we achieve, what we possess, how we appear, whom we impress.

And then there are the quieter voices — the ones we carry within us. The inner critic that rehearses our failures. The voice that whispers that we are not enough: not clever enough, not attractive enough, not worthy enough to be loved — let alone pleasing to God.

Against all these voices stands the truth of our baptism. Before God asks anything of us, God names us. This is not sentimental affirmation; it is the deep grammar of the Gospel.

In today's Gospel, the single most important thing said about Jesus is this: *he is the Son of God*. God's voice confirms not only a relationship — "this is my Son" — but the quality of that relationship: delight. And that relationship shapes everything that follows in Jesus' life.

In our baptism, that same pattern is extended to us. Marked with the sign of the cross, sealed by the Holy Spirit, we are named as Christ's

own — not temporarily, not conditionally, but forever. This name does not erase the many other descriptions that apply to us — our work, background, politics, culture, ethnicity — but it relativises them. They may describe us; they do not define us.

In a world eager to name and claim us in countless ways, baptism reminds us of this: first and last, we belong to God. He knows us and calls us by name.

And that is a story we need to tell ourselves again and again — to counter the story of the inner critic, to resist the lie that love must be earned, and to hear anew the truth that, in Christ, God shows no partiality, and that we, too, are welcomed, accepted, and beloved.

In our reading from Acts, Peter tells the story of Jesus in remarkably simple terms. He speaks of one anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, who brought healing, and who now bears witness to God's saving work.

Peter does not begin with strategies or achievements, but with identity. Jesus' life flows from the fact that he is the one upon whom the Spirit rests, the one in whom God is present. His mission is not self-invented; it is received.

The same pattern is already present in Isaiah's words: a servant upheld by God, a light to the nations, one who opens blind eyes and sets captives free. This is not the work of someone striving to prove themselves, but of one who knows who they are and to whom they belong.

By stepping into the Jordan alongside the crowds, Jesus binds himself to the whole human story — with its failures and fears, its pain and its hope. From that moment on, his life becomes a life given for others.

Our baptism, too, is not the end of something, but the beginning. It is a point of departure. Baptism draws us into Christ's life and sets us on the way of discipleship — not all in the same manner, but all in the same Spirit.

It may be worth pausing, then, to ask ourselves: where has that baptismal journey led us so far? How, in our own small and particular ways, have we been drawn into God's work of healing, welcome, and reconciliation?

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel García Márquez tells of a village struck by an illness of forgetfulness. Slowly, the people begin to lose their memory of what things are. An outsider is brought in, and he starts placing signs everywhere: *This is a table. This is a chair. This is a ceiling.* At the edge of the village, he places two final signs. One reads: *This is the village of Macondo.* And above it, another: *God exists.*

Baptism is like that sign. In a forgetful world — and in forgetful hearts — it names what is most true. It says: God is here. God is present. God delights in his people.

We are God's beloved — even when we feel like outsiders. Baptism declares that we are insiders in the circle of grace: welcomed, claimed, and held. And as we learn, day by day, to say "yes" to that gift, our lives themselves may become signs — signs of God's presence, God's mercy, God's unextinguished hope.

This is the fire baptism gives us. It may smoulder at times, but it never goes out.

When you wash your face, remember your baptism.

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE

WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON

Sermon – Second Sunday after Epiphany

18th January 2026

All Saints' Marseille

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

Few Gospel passages are as full of movement as the one we hear this morning: people watching, turning, following; leaving one path in order to walk another. Nothing dramatic happens—no miracle, no confrontation, no great speech—and yet everything begins to change.

At its heart, this is a Gospel about attention. John the Baptist sees Jesus coming towards him and dares to name what he sees. He bears witness—and then, with humility, allows his own disciples to leave him, so that they may follow another. Seeing gives way to letting go.

Seeking. Seeing. Being seen. These are the quiet movements around which the Gospel unfolds. Jesus invites those who follow him to keep looking: “Come and see.” But before anything else, he turns and asks, “What are you looking for?” The word, however, goes deeper than that. A better rendering would be: “What are you seeking?” It is a question that reaches beyond the first disciples and addresses each of us here today—both as invitation and examination.

Jesus does not tell these disciples-to-be what they should be seeking. Instead, he invites them to look honestly into their own hearts, to notice what is already stirring there, and to bear witness to what they find.

So what are you seeking? What truly motivates you? What is it that you really need—not just on the surface of things, but deep down, at

the core of your being? Many of us, if we are honest, are seeking a sense of vocation: a way of living that gives meaning to our lives and to our relationships. We want our lives to amount to more than habit or survival.

In the quiet, hidden places of the heart, what are the hungers that carry you forward in your life of faith? The longings that shape your prayers, your choices, your persistence?

And this question widens beyond the individual life. What are we seeking in our faith community? Perhaps friendship, or forgiveness, or a place to serve and be needed—something life-sustaining, something very much like hope.

The disciples respond to Jesus' question with one of their own: "Where are you staying?" In English, it sounds almost practical. But the Greek verb the evangelist uses is *meno*: to abide, to remain, to dwell, to endure. It speaks of permanence, of rootedness, of where a life finds its home.

They are not asking for an address. They are asking something far more searching: Where are you headed, Rabbi? What will home look like if we come with you? What is the shape of a life lived in your presence? Where can we be with you—and so find ourselves in the presence of God?

Jesus' response is crucial. He does not offer an explanation. He does not define the destination. He does not provide a road map. Instead, he offers time and presence: "Come and see."

"Come ..."

We often imagine that being called by God means being asked to do something specific—something demanding, significant, clearly defined. But this Gospel suggests otherwise. Before there is any

task, there is relationship. Before there is mission, there is abiding—being with Christ, being held by him.

Christ's call is, first of all, an invitation into shared life, an invitation to step into mystery; to move, without guarantees, into uncharted waters. As Walt Whitman writes:

*Darest thou now, O soul,
Walk out with me toward the unknown region,
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?*

And yet this gentle invitation is not without its challenge. “Come and see” is also a choice. To see, we must be open to the possibility that what we encounter will be new—that it may surprise us, unsettle us, even reorder our lives.

To see with new eyes requires humility: the willingness to admit that we do not yet see fully, that there is still more for God to show us. Some of our certainties—about God, about one another, about the world—may yet be stretched, or undone.

This invitation is not given only to individuals. It is extended to churches as well. The closer we draw to Christ, the closer we may yet find ourselves to one another—and even to other communities. To “come and see” is to leave behind comfortable vantage points and to trust that grace may meet us beyond them. It is to approach life with a grace-filled curiosity, believing that the others are worthy of patience and further discovery.

That is both the risk and the promise of “Come and see.”

This Gospel, however, is not only about our seeing and seeking. At its heart, it is about what Jesus sees. Before we choose Christ, Christ has

already looked at us. He looks at John's disciples and calls forth their hunger, their curiosity, their hope. He looks at Simon—and sees Peter, the Rock: not only who he is, but who he is becoming.

And he looks at us.

He sees beneath our fears and doubts. He sees beyond the defences we build to protect ourselves. He sees not only where we are, but where grace is already, patiently, at work within us.

Is there anything sadder than being unseen—misunderstood, overlooked, dismissed? And is there anything more life-giving than being truly seen?

Something healing and holy happens when we are seen in this way: when we are known truthfully, named honestly, and accepted without condition. To be seen by Christ is not to be fixed in the present, but to be called forward into the future God is already imagining for us. As Paul reminds the church in Corinth, “In every way you have been enriched in him ... so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift.” What Christ sees in us is richer, and more hopeful, than what we often see in ourselves.

And there is more still. Only when we have been seen by the healing gaze of Christ do we begin to find the freedom to see others in the same way—as beloved of God. It is when we have been loved to the core of who we are that we discover the capacity to love as Jesus does: believers and doubters, disciples and the indifferent alike.

What we hear in this Gospel, finally, is the voice of the Lord calling us to himself. It is a call to life—to joy, to freedom, to a peace deeper than certainty or control. And it is a call addressed to all of us.

As we begin the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we do not pretend that our divisions are small or insignificant. But we do believe that Christ is greater. And we trust that if we stay with him long enough—if we learn to abide where he abides—he will teach us how to recognise one another not as rivals or strangers, but as sisters and brothers in him. Unity is not achieved by standing over against one another, but by abiding together in Christ.

May we learn to look as God looks. May we come to desire what God desires. May we never cease to seek the One who, always and everywhere, is already seeking us. And may we find ourselves drawn into one life, one hope, and one love.

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**
Sermon – Third Sunday of Epiphany – Conversion of Paul
25th January 2026
All Saints' Marseille
The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain



The event the Church remembers today as the Conversion of Paul is one of the most unlikely turning points in Christian history—so dramatic that even those far from the life of faith still speak of a “*road-to-Damascus*” moment: a sudden interruption, a flash of insight, and a life set on an entirely different path.

The story we hear in the Acts of the Apostles, traditionally attributed to Luke the Evangelist, stands behind that phrase. Before this moment, Paul—still Saul of Tarsus—was utterly convinced that he knew who

God was, what faith required, and who stood outside its boundaries. That certainty led him, in Luke's stark words, to *"breathe threats and murder against the disciples of Christ."*

And yet it is precisely this man—certain, committed, religiously sincere—who is stopped in his tracks by Christ on the road to Damascus.

Across the centuries, Christians have returned to this story as a touchstone for conversion. Moments are remembered; testimonies are told; hymns are written. Augustine of Hippo hears a voice telling him to take up the book and read. Francis of Assisi stands before the crucifix of San Damiano and hears Christ ask him to rebuild the Church. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, feels his heart strangely warmed. John Newton, captain of slave ships and later a slavery abolitionist, sings of a grace that finds him lost and makes him new.

But the conversion of Paul is unsettling, because it begins not with certainty—but with its collapse.

Acts, and Paul's own letters, make clear that he was no religious lightweight. Steeped in Scripture and Law, formed within the strict tradition of the Pharisees, he was committed to obedience, clarity, and truth.

Saul was so convinced that he possessed THE truth about God that he believed himself justified in excluding, pursuing, and destroying those who named God differently. In his own mind, he was not opposing God's work, but defending it.

And it is precisely there, in the midst of that righteous clarity, that everything unravels. Saul is not searching for God; he is interrupted by God.

On the road to Damascus, Saul is interrupted by an encounter he neither seeks nor controls. Luke gives us the barest outline: a sudden light, a voice, blindness, silence. What matters is not the spectacle, but the effect.

Saul's conversion begins with disorientation. He loses his sight. He loses his agency, will be led by the hand into the city. He loses control of the story he thought he was living. Before Paul sees differently, he must first stop seeing at all.

Caravaggio helps us see what Luke tells us. In his painting of *The Conversion of Paul*, Saul lies on the ground, arms flung open—almost cruciform. There is no visible blinding light, no dramatic heavenly vision. What Caravaggio gives us is not the moment of encounter, but its aftershock.

Here the painter is faithful to the text in a subtle manner. Conversion happens to Saul's body before it is grasped by his mind. He is undone. God meets him not in strength, but in helpless exposure. Conversion is not heroic ascent, but collapse. Saul does not rise toward God; he is brought low.

Most arresting of all, Saul is not struck down by divine anger, but overwhelmed by presence. God embraces him before God rebukes him. Divine love does not flatter—it humbles. Faced with a God infinitely greater than any idea of God he had ever defended, Saul falls backward.

Luke tells us that Saul is lifted up from the ground, his eyes opened—and yet he sees nothing. The German medieval mystic Meister Eckhart dares to say: *“He saw nothing, and that nothingness was God.”* God beyond image, beyond possession, beyond control.

Only when Saul’s old ways of seeing fall to the ground can God raise him up anew.

And here the painting begins to question us. If conversion looks like this—like falling, like unknowing, like surrender—then perhaps it is not only individuals who need it. The Church, too, may have certainties that must be laid down before new sight is given.

Paul’s conversion was never a private spiritual experience. It did not end on the road to Damascus, nor even in the darkness of those first blind days. It immediately reshaped the life of the community—its fears, its boundaries, its imagination. Ananias must overcome his terror. The disciples must learn to receive the one who once hunted them. Conversion, from the beginning, unfolds within the Body of Christ.

Paul is not converted to an idea, but to communion. And that matters for us today.

When Christ asks Saul, *“Why are you persecuting me?”* he reveals how deeply the Lord is bound to his Church: wherever there is division, violence, or exclusion, Christ himself is wounded. The risen Lord suffers wherever his Body is fractured. Where the Church is divided, Christ himself bears the wound.

If that is true, then Christian unity is not an optional extra, nor a polite aspiration for an ecumenical week. It belongs to conversion itself.

For conversion is not the adoption of a better moral code, a clearer theology, or a more convincing argument. Paul was not converted to a system of ideas. He was converted away from vanity and ambition—away from the need to dominate, to exclude, to be right at all costs. These are the forces that always lead, sooner or later, to division and even to violence.

True conversion is a movement toward unity and love: a gathering of our thoughts, desires, and identities into obedience to what is good and true and beautiful. And such conversion is costly.

It requires conversion from fear of the other, from self-sufficiency, from the illusion that we already see clearly.

True conversion is always a turning toward the future, never a retreat into the past. It exposes what we cling to for security. It loosens our grip on what once sustained us.

And so the question turns quietly toward us—not as accusation, but as invitation. Will we be changed? Are we willing to let go of our need to be right, so that our vision might be transformed by God? Are we ready to learn from one another with humility and openness? Are we willing to allow the Spirit to open our hearts, so that we might be changed to the core, and made more like Christ?

For the road to Damascus does not belong to Paul alone. It is the road on which the Church still walks.

What happens on that road is the opening of a life lived differently—attentive, vulnerable, unfinished. Conversion, for Paul and for the Church, is not a moment we master, but a posture we learn to inhabit: a posture of listening, of humility, of readiness to be surprised by God—often through the one we least expect.

And so, on this final day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we pray that the journey may continue.

May God still stop us on our roads—still unseat us from our certainties—still turn us toward one another, as God has first turned toward us in Christ.

Picture: Caravaggio (1571-1610)—Conversion on the road to Damascus (c. 1601), Church Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome