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Weekly Letter – 11 January 2026 - Matthew 3:1-17

John the Baptist was a fiery preacher. Calling religious folk snakes. Saying people who aren't good will be cut down like trees that don't bear fruit and are thrown in the fire. John challenged, but he also gave a way to deal with it – baptism in the river Jordan as a sign of repentance and to wash away sins. He baptises in the place where the tribes crossed over into the promised land, hinting at national and personal renewal.

It looks like John expected the Messiah to come with greater fire – baptising with the Holy Spirit and fire. John imagined him having a winnowing fork used to separate out the wheat from the chaff, and that Jesus would do that to people. It feels like it goes with a phrase that appears six times in Matthew: there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. So, John defers to Jesus saying that Jesus should be baptising him, an exchange that is unique to Matthew. Jesus does not shout from the sidelines; he gets alongside people.

It's no wonder that later John felt the need to send messengers to check out if the one called 'a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners' really was the Messiah, the one to come (Mt 11:18). All of the gospels show closeness between John and Jesus, but also a difference in style and practice, and a shift with John's disciples starting to follow Jesus. We know that personality and temperament, experience and outlook can affect how we express and share our faith. Changes in society and the needs of the world affect what we choose to challenge and what represents fruit 'worthy of repentance'.

Pray that we may know when and how to challenge, when to be alongside and give assurance, and that we may remain close enough to God to be true to his call on our lives.

Simon

Sunday Morning Worship in Christ Well, and on Zoom at 10.30 am will be led by Rev Simon Walkling.

Bible Reading: Matthew 3:1-17; Isaiah 42:1-9.

ADVANCE NOTICE: Morning Worship next Sunday – 18th January will be led by our Moderator, Rev David Salsbury.

Cycle of Prayer in the Region – we will pray for Christ Well

Tuesday, 13th – Tea and Chat – 2-4pm

**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18th-25th January
Service at St Mary's, Swansea Minster, 3pm on 18th January**

The theme for the week is 'One Body, One Spirit' and there is devotional material for use during the week as well as the service on the Sunday. You can download the leaflet or ask Simon for a copy:

<https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/WPCU-2026-English-Pamphlet.pdf.pagespeed.ce.bpppUVNRXj.pdf>

Book Group – 1pm Wednesday 4th February, Christ Well

Stephen Baker, Ian Drew-Jones and Simon have been meeting to talk about a book. They are starting a new book and have agreed to open the discussion to anyone who is interested in joining. At their next meeting they will be looking at the first 3 chapters of Tom Wright's 'The Vision of Ephesians: The Task of the Church and the Glory of God' https://www.amazon.co.uk/Vision-Ephesians-Task-Church-Glory/dp/0281090653/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0. Let Simon know if you are interested, or just turn up.

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST

(Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 42.1-9: Psalm 29: Acts 10.34-43: Matthew 3.13-17)

God, it's hard to believe that those words spoken of Jesus could apply to me.

I am a half-hearted, fearful follower.

Could you want someone like me in your glorious kingdom of love?

At my baptism, I was chosen and marked with the sign of the cross,
a symbol of just how far your love will go to set us free.

Your own, beloved son had the courage to see it through.

Are you proud of me too, your wayward child?

Loving God, parent of all, raise me from the waters of doubt to new life with Jesus.

Let your loving Spirit hover over me, so that I will hear the words of hope and know

I am forgiven, restored, and ready to believe in your amazing love for me.

Carol Dixon (URC Prayer Handbook 2026)

