

*“he separated the light from the darkness”*

Today’s readings are Genesis 1: 1-5, Acts 19: 1-7 and Mark 1: 4-11.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

We all know that nothing can produce anything, everything must start somewhere, even the theory that the atheist trumps as the explanation for the start of the universe says that in the beginning there was nothing then there was an explosion and so they proclaim that theory explains how everything came about but forget that one small point, how can something start from nothing? But the Bible tells us that in the beginning there was God, and here in the first verses of the Bible we affirm God’s existence, and it is from God everything was and is created. Interestingly, again which the atheists deny is that when you match side by side the Big Bang theory and the Genesis account of creation told in the Bible, we find that what the Big Bang theory says matches up with the Bible says with one exception, God has always existed and it was He, that created everything, also we forget that the Big Bang theory was written thousands of years after the Biblical account was written down, again like many false teachings from atheism, they take what the Bible says and take God out. So, today at the beginning of a new year let us affirm God’s existence every time we wake up in the morning and confirm His existence, grace, mercy, and love when we thank Him for getting us through the day when we go to our beds at night. Of course, the Bible teaches us that everything else had a beginning except God, He has always been in existence and this is known as ex-nihilo – always existed. This gives us hope knowing that God is there for us, because He created the earth for us to live on, He gave us a home for we are His.

*“1 In the beginning, when God created the universe”, we find that these words also stress the work of Christ in creation which we find in John’s gospel chapter 1 which also opens with the same words, because Christ is part of God, He is from God and therefore is God in human form. Elohim is used in the Old Testament and refers purely to the divine in creation and once again highlights the importance for us to confess that God exists, and it is from Him that all things have been created. Before God came everything was dark and desolate; “2 the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water. 3 Then God commanded, “Let there be light” - and light appeared.” Before God*

everything was in darkness, there was no light, then God created light, he separated the darkness from the light. Today this is important for us because here we are reading about the creation of our world by God, we also know that the Spirit of God was involved and so was Christ. God spoke and brought light and life into a desolate place, very much like the Spirit of God restoring a fallen or sinful man or woman. Light is necessary for making God's creative works visible and life possible and in the Old Testament it is also symbolic of life and blessing, so, when a sinner hears the gospel message of hope, he or she receives the light of Christ within them and God begins a new creative work within that saved man or woman. When that happens, God is pleased.

*"4 God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness, 5 and he named the light "Day" and the darkness "Night." Evening passed, and morning came - that was the first day."* Day and Night mentioned here in these verses refers also to the night and day of a man's soul. Night is when he or she walks about aimlessly in darkness, stumbling around bouncing along from one selfish desire to another, never finding or having any form of happiness until he sees the light of Christ, when he hears the gospel message of hope and is born anew, because everything that God creates is good and we see that here in the creation of the world. The creation made by God had no lingering traces of disorder and no dark and threatening forces arrayed against God or man. Even darkness i.e., night had a purpose, as it was part of a world fashioned to bless and sustain life. It was only when the Devil corrupted man in the Garden of Eden did creation spoil and we have struggled with it ever since, for the corruption of sin infects every aspect of creation since the fall and because of that humanity now walks in darkness until they see the light of Christ, God's new creative, redemptive work in the world. Paul and the other disciples knew this and went around the known world to spread the Good News.

*"1 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul travelled through the interior of the province and arrived in Ephesus. There he found some disciples 2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" "We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit," they answered."* This appears to be a reasonable question that Paul asked, and we ask the same of our fellow man and woman, have you been baptised? In this case the people of Ephesus said yes, they had been baptised by John." **3** *"Well, then, what kind of baptism did you receive?"*

Paul asked. "The baptism of John," they answered. **4** Paul said, "The baptism of John was for those who turned from their sins; and he told the people of Israel to believe in the one who was coming after him - that is, in Jesus."

**5** When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." Paul found these twelve followers of Jesus, but indirectly through John the Baptist, whatever way they came to believe in Jesus they only had a partial understanding of the gospel message. This was clearly shown through their answer that they had not heard of the Holy Spirit. They knew the Old Testament teachings and they knew John's teachings, but they did not therefore know about the Holy Spirit because it was new and came from Christ. "**6** Paul placed his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them; they spoke in strange tongues and also proclaimed God's message." What is special here is the fact that these people were re-baptised which clearly indicates the uniqueness of Christian baptism.

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, it was preparatory and provisional, stressing man's sinfulness and thus creating a sense of need to hear and receive the Gospel message of Christ. John's baptism looked forward to the coming of Christ who by His death and glorious resurrection would make possible the forgiveness of sins. We can see clearly from the reading that as soon as Paul baptised them in Jesus Name and placed his hands on them that the Holy Spirit blessed them and made them a new creation for God to work within them, we see that for the Holy Spirit allowed them to speak and understand foreign languages allowing them in turn to spread further the Good News.

We see further the importance of baptism from the Gospel of Mark. "**4** So John appeared in the desert, baptizing and preaching. "Turn away from your sins and be baptized," he told the people, "and God will forgive your sins." Mark starts off with John's ministry, and John means "The Lord is gracious". God was indeed gracious to us by sending John to prepare the world for the coming of Christ. To prepare the people and have them look at their sinful lives, and come to him asking for forgiveness from God, so John symbolically washed them clean of their sins, they knew they had taken the first steps of faith by admitting they were in darkness and needed the light of God in their lives, many people today still walk about in darkness and need the light of God in their lives, are you one of them?

*“5 Many people from the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River.”* John was preaching repentance-baptism i.e., baptism that was preceded or accompanied by repentance, the person being baptised, first admitting their sins, and then asking God for forgiveness. Baptism was not new to the Jewish people, they knew the Gentile converts to Judaism got baptised, but they did not realise that they themselves, the descendants of Abraham needed to repent and be baptised. Through their repentance they were deliberately turning their backs away from sin to righteous living, after all God always grants forgiveness when there is repentance.

*“6 John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.”* John's dress was straight out of history, the Jewish people would recognise here is a prophet for that was how Elijah dressed and that was one of the reasons many people came to hear John, because there hadn't been a prophet in Israel for centuries until John, that was why he was preparing them for a new life because: *“7 He announced to the people, "The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* He will make you a new creation, He will take you out of darkness and bring you into the light. Then we are told: *9 Not long afterward Jesus came from Nazareth in the province of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw heaven opening and the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you.”* The uniqueness of Christian baptism is seen here, all three aspects of the Trinity are here involved in Jesus' baptism – The Father speaks, the Son is baptised, and the Holy Spirit descends on the Son to anoint Him for His ministry. In Mark's gospel, he is proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God which is backed up by the Father speaking from heaven Himself proclaiming Jesus as His Son. Jesus and John saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove which symbolises the gentleness, purity, and guilelessness of the Holy Spirit. It is here we realise that before Jesus's ministry started, He was immersed in water and anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. This enabled Him to do the task His Father sent Him to do. The same goes for us, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are equipped for service in

the kingdom of God because we can draw upon the power of the Holy Spirit the same as Jesus did. Therefore, we through our baptism are His witnesses here on earth and are therefore called to go out and witness to others so that they can be brought out of darkness into the Light of Christ because just like in the beginning *“he separated the light from the darkness.”*

### PRAYER

Father you brought light into the world on Christmas day, your special light came to light up this dark dangerous world to bring us home to you. Today in the middle of the pandemic too many people are still wandering about blindly in darkness, feeling dejected, alone, struggling spiritually because they are empty inside, help them Lord to see the light of Christ and find your peace we pray. We also ask Lord for your wisdom so that the government can organise the vaccination program effectively so that all people can receive it. Bless all the medical staff who are coming out of retirement to recertify to be able to help with the immunisation program. Also bless the doctors, nurses and care home workers who are working tirelessly to care for the vulnerable in our society, grant them your strength and peace we pray. Bless all the delivery drivers and shopworkers that provide us with our food, again Lord we pray for your peace and strength and keep them free from abuse from people who are selfish and uncaring.

Today we pray for peace throughout our land and wherever our brothers and sisters in Christ are we pray that you will look after them and provide for their spiritual and physical needs. Help us Lord to be grateful for what you have given us, but at the same time Lord helps us to pray for and help our neighbours in whatever way we can so that through our witness we can be a shining light in this darkness for them. We especially pray Lord for those who are lost today, who are spiritually struggling with life, we pray that they will find their way home to you and ask you Lord Jesus to come into their lives and make them new people in Christ, help them through the power of the Holy Spirit to find your peace as we have, this we pray always in Jesus name.

Today we pray for wisdom and leadership for our Ministers, Pastors and Priests, we pray that you will guide your Church here on earth to make wise decisions and allow us to be able to meet in fellowship in some

way, for we know that you are always there for us and that we are never alone, fill us today with the Holy Spirit and let our individual prayers and praise reach up to you today in heaven and bring peace to our world. In Jesus name we pray always. AMEN.