

A Reflection for Baptism of Jesus Sunday-January 11, 2026

by Jennifer Irving

Oh my goodness, what a start to the new year—and I’m not just talking about me ringing it in with the flu and bronchitis—although that wasn’t fun either. But no, I’m talking about what triggered a meme I saw on facebook this week on January 8th that said they wanted to unsubscribe from the 7 day free trial of 2026.

And it just reminds me that living in this world—where bad things happen and the hope, peace, joy and love we just proclaimed in our Christmas services seems so far away—living as Christians in this world—is no easy feat.

And I have a sneaking suspicion that it wasn’t much easier 2000 years ago when Jesus was born—I mean, it wasn’t long after his birth that Herod ordered the murder of the innocents... when he came to John to be baptized, to answer God’s call, I have a feeling he came really needing something—a renewal of hope, a moment of peace, an experience of joy, a re-awakening to love. And the miracle is, that in his baptism, I believe that is exactly what he got. When the Holy Spirit descended upon him and declared him beloved—can’t you just imagine what a boost that gave to his soul?

He went down to the river and got exactly what he needed. Healing and grace.

It got me thinking, where do we go to get that kind of healing? To feel God’s grace? Because we all need it don’t we?

Years ago, my sister Sandra discovered a local artist at some kind of folk festival she went to with some teacher friends in Owen Sound. Her name was Coco Love Alcorn. And she and I have followed her ever since. Neil and I even went to a House Concert she did in Greenwater Provincial Park in Saskatchewan.

And when COVID hit, Sandra and I almost joined her virtual choir that she started up since her Owen Sound Choir couldn’t meet in person anymore.

Then, last week, I read online that Coco Love Alcorn has a very aggressive form of cancer and although at first she planned to keep this news private and lean on a small circle of friends and family for support, others had encouraged her to reach out—to widen the circle and the response has far exceeded their hopes and dreams. I pray that the response she received has strengthened her for what lies ahead.

But, here’s why I’m sharing this—when I went to prepare for the service this week—barely sitting up and coughing mightily with only one dose of medication in me, one of the hymns suggested for this Sunday’s worship was from our brand new hymn book: “Then Let Us Sing” (a hymn book we’re going to be exploring in a couple of Sundays—mark your calendars—you don’t want to miss it). But when I looked at this hymn I couldn’t believe it—the author was none other than Coco Love Alcorn! Someone I’ve met, someone I know, someone from around here and whose hymn speaks to the very question that had been niggling at me—where do we find strength, healing, grace, hope, peace, love, and all that we need to walk in the way of Jesus in this world.

Coco describes how she goes to the river—that amazing river in Owen Sound—you know the one? The river that inspired this song. [The River:](#)

*The river is a healer, the river is a sage
The river knows no end and the river feels no age
The river is a leader, every single day
It's living in the moment and it always finds a way*

*Water, heal my body
Water, heal my soul
When I go down, down to the water
By the water, I feel whole*

*The river calls me over, it's calling out my name
In the day and in the night, I hear that river all the same
It's calling me over, calling out my pain
Oh, a river gathers tears just like a river gathers rain*

*The river is a traveler, always on the go
Oh, a river never worries if it's fast or if it's slow
River, take me to where I need to go
Oh, and I will just relax and let the river flow*

Song by Coco Love Alcorn © 2016

Here's the thing, here in our worship space, this same water of wholeness and healing flows for me and for you—this same living water. And so today, I'm going to invite each of us to come to the water and as we renew our baptism, may we be renewed.

Invitation

As the Body of Christ, we need to be renewed and refreshed. As members, we belong to the baptized and covenantal life in Christ. We gather today to affirm our faith and renew our commitments as followers of Jesus.

Affirmation of Faith (Adapted from a Reading from the 2nd National Meeting of United Church of Christ Women)

O God, because you are the source of all life

And love and being,

We call you Creator.

Because we know the history of your presence

Among your covenanted people and honor their tradition,

We call you Lord.

Because our Savior, Jesus Christ, your beloved child,

Knew you intimately and spoke of you so,

We call you Father.

Because you are present in each act of birth;

And because you shelter, nurture and care for us,

We call you Mother.

Because you hold us up

And give us strength and courage

When we are weak and in need,

We call you Sustainer.

Because we have known you in our pain and suffering,
We call you Comforter.

Because beyond pain lies your promise
Of all things made new,
We call you Hope.

Because you are the means of liberation
And the way to freedom,
We call you Deliverer.

Because you have chosen to come among us
And share our common lot,
Making the hard choices, suffering and dying;
Because you rose victorious, bringing new life,
We call you Redeemer.

Confident that you will hear,
We call upon you with all the names
That make you real to us,
The names which create an image in our minds and hearts,
An image which our souls can understand and touch.
And yet we know that you are more than all of these.
Blessing and power, glory and honor be unto you, our God, Amen.

You, who believe in the One of Many Names—God, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit:

You, who reject the powers of oppression in this world, the systems that marginalize and degrade human beings and communities created by God, and the norms of the world at odds with the way of the kingdom:

You, who embrace grace as God's gift, to be freely given and freely received:

You, who recommit to the covenantal and baptized life, the cost and joy of discipleship, and the community of belonging as a member of the Body of Christ:

come forward now to this baptismal font, dip your fingers in this water filled with divine grace—a reminder of God's love and power—and mark your forehead with a cross saying: I am God's Beloved. I am Baptized.

Renewal “I am God’s Beloved. I am Baptized.”

John the Baptist told his disciples that he baptized them with water but the one to come would baptize with the Holy Spirit. As we receive the mark of our renewed baptismal vows, we recognize the movement of the Holy Spirit within us and among.

Prayer for the Baptized

Voice, Body, Spirit, we give thanks for the gathering of your people into a beloved community of belonging. By our baptism, we accept the invitation to public and faithful witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world and to be instruments to that work. May we live the baptized life in the Spirit as caring companions of one another, with accountability, support, and grace. Shelter us in your love, nourish us in your truth, and uphold us in your word. May it be so. Amen.