**The Swiss Church in London**

**Baptism service, Sunday 7 November 2021**

**Led by Rev Carla Maurer**

**Organ prelude**

**Welcome**

“Children were being brought to Jesus that he may bless them. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said: Let the children come to me, and do not stop them. It is to such as these that the kingdom belongs.” (Matthew 19:13-15)

„Des gens amenèrent à Jésus des petits enfants afin qu'il leur bénisse. Mais les disciples leur firent des reproches. Jésus dit: Laissez les petits enfants, ne les empêchez pas de venir à moi, car le royaume des cieux est pour ceux qui leur ressemblent.”

„Kinder wurden zu Jesus gebracht, damit er sie segne. Die Jünger aber tadelten sie.

Jesus sprach: Lasst die Kinder zu mir zu kommen; denn ihnen gehört das Reich der Himmel!“

Amen

With these words from the Gospel of Matthew I would like to welcome you all to the Swiss Church in London. It is wonderful that so many people have found their way here today, to worship God, find a moment of peace and friendship, and witness the baptism of Avalon. A special welcome to Avalon’s family!

I also welcome Gabrielle and Elisabeth from Switzerland, relatives of mine, and Elisabeth is a Catholic theologian – you can see it runs in the family! Gabrielle and Elisabeth will lead the prayers today.

Do not stop the children, Jesus says, to such as these belongs the kingdom of God. If we become more like children, the Kingdom of God is ours – that’s the message.

Jesus calls us to become more like children, curious, playful, adventurous, embracing the present moment, and asking loads of questions. Why do we do things the way we do them? There are so many things we take for granted, for instance at church: we sing, we pray, we read from the Bible, it’s just what we do. Today, we will explore each of those elements with a short introduction.

Let’s start with singing. In our church we sing some very old songs, they are called hymns. People have been singing them for hundreds of years, and they are accompanied by the biggest instrument in the world, the organ, played by an organist.

To start with, we will sing one of the most famous hymns of our church, ‘Grosser Gott wir Loben Dich’ (Great God, we praise you).

**Hymn “Grosser Gott Wir Loben Dich’**

So, we sing at church, and there is another thing we do: we pray.

Prayer is a way to talk to God. God is at the beginning of everything, at the beginning of the universe, at the beginning of the world, and at the beginning of every new life. We can’t see God with our eyes, but we can feel God with our heart. God loves everybody. God is always there to listen even when our parents, teachers or friends are too busy, and we feel all alone. We can talk to God. We can pray, with or without words.

Let us pray.

**Prayer**

Loving God,

we all need your protection and your guidance in this often loud and unpredictable world. We are here today, each of us with our own individual baggage of big hopes and broken dreams. We bring with us a bag full of life experiences, painful and joyful ones.

Whatever we carry around with us, whether we are sad or happy today, we can put down our baggage before you, confident that in your presence we are safe, accepted and loved.

In you, God, there is no judgment, only love. We are vulnerable, but in your presence, we will not be hurt. You welcome us with open arms. We can be ourselves, and you know who we are. You know our innermost hopes.

Give us the strength to go our way with confidence and to hold on to what is dear to us. Protect the people we love; dry our tears. Bring comfort to everyone who is sad.

We are beautiful, we are complete the way we are, even if the world sometimes makes us feel otherwise. We are made in your image. We are the labour of your never-ending love.

Fill our hearts with peace and compassion that we may leave this church changed today, more confident and in the knowledge that you are with us wherever we go.

Amen

**Introduction reading**

Another thing we do at church: we read from the Bible. The Bible tells us the story of God and God’s people (that’s us). It’s a very, very old book, and some of the stories are thousands of years old. It’s not actually one book, but rather a collection of many books, a library, written by different people throughout the centuries.

Today’s reading is from the book of Joshua, and it’s also where Avalon’s baptism verse is from that her parents Lavinia and Simon have chosen for her.

I will tell you the background story of the reading first.

A long, long time ago there was a group of God’s people, the Israelites, who were held as slaves in a foreign country. They had to work very hard, with little to eat, no salary, no freedom. It was a very hard life, and many died. So, the Israelites decided to run away, to escape, and to go to a new land, the land that God had promised to them. Their leader was called Moses.

The Israelites journey wasn’t easy. There were no planes, no trains, no cars back then, and people had to walk through the desert for 40 years, with all their animals and their entire household. They had to sleep in tents, they had to endure the heat and the cold, and they had to find whatever food and drink they could find. There were points when they were ready to give up, too exhausted, and losing their trust in God. They even began to wonder if it had been the right choice to run away, or whether they would have been better off to remain slaves.

Do you ever ask yourself the question whether you had made the right choice? Do you ever regret your decisions? Sometimes in life it is difficult to see the way ahead. We turn around and wish there was a way back, whilst knowing that the only way is the way forward, one step at the time. We can’t turn back, and we don’t really know what the future brings, all we can do is to embrace the present moment, and trust, trust in life, trust in God, trust in the people around us, and in our own abilities.

Finally, the Israelites came to a river, the river Jordan, with blue, refreshing water, and on the other side there was the promised land. It’s said that milk and honey flew in that land. It was paradise! Finally, they had arrived. When they saw the land, they knew they had made the right choice, for themselves, and especially for their children and their children’s children. They were free. Sadly, Moses, their leader, died, before they made it across the river. The new leader was Joshua, and he led the people of God into the promised land.

Leaving one place to move to new, unknown place, always comes with some amount of uncertainty. Will the new place keep its promises? Will I make friends, find community, and will I be happy? During the pandemic, this question may have become even more prevalent. Would I have been better off in my old environment? The story of the Israelites and their journey to the promised land is an encouragement for us never to give up hope and give it time.

With this introduction in mind, we are now going to hear the reading from the Bible from that very moment when Joshua led Israelites across the river Jordan.

**Reading Joshua 1:1-9**

After the death of Moses, God spoke to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying, “My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for God is with you wherever you go.”

**Hymn “Bread of Heaven”**

**Introduction baptism**

Avalon will be baptised into the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ and become a member of the wonderfully diverse Christian community that spreads across the globe.

Baptism is a commitment; the commitment to give Avalon the opportunity to explore the world in all openness and with a critical mind; the commitment to reassure her of God’s unconditional love; the commitment to teach Avalon that every person is a precious gift of God, and to show her the values of being non-judgemental, forgiving, and peaceful, and to live in harmony with all of God’s Creation.

You have chosen for Avalon a baptism verse from the book of Joshua: “God says: Remember that I desire for you to be determined and confident.” From the moment we are born, we are on our own, unique journey in this world. No journey is like the other, and although we are surrounded by people who support and love and teach us, we will ultimately have to find our own way how to navigate this world. We make our own choices, some good and some bad. No one can live our life for us. The world is often confusing and loud and scary, and the future of our planet is uncertain. As parents, there is only so much we can do. We wish and hope for our children to have a future and to make the right choices. We can take some influence on our children, how they grow up and what values they learn, but we with every day of their life we must let them go a little bit more and trust in life and in God that they will be alright, and that they will go their way with confidence and determination. And in this spirit, we are now going to baptise Avalon.

**Hymn “Bi de Taufi chömet mir“**

**Baptism Avalon**

Avalon Serafina, I baptise you in the name of God, the parent, the son, and the holy spirit.

“God says: Remember that I desire for you to be determined and confident.”

*Blessing*

May God’s wisdom be your guiding light. May your roots grow on fertile ground and your branches reach out into the sky. May your life be filled with joy and laughter, with confidence and determination, love, and kindness.

God, we thank you for the gift of new life. Surround Avalon with your love, protect her from evil. Fill her with the holy spirit that she will grow in the knowledge of your love. Amen

*Light Avalon’s baptismal candle*

*Everyone is invited to light their baptismal candles*

**Hymn „All things bright and beautiful”**

**Prayers of Intercession** (Gabrielle and Elisabeth)

We welcome in our community the newly baptised Avalon, much loved daughter of Lavinia and Simon. Accompany Avalon, her siblings, her parents and godparents with your wisdom and your love as they navigate the ups and downs of life together. We thank them for their Commitment to God who says: “Remember that I desire for you to be determined and confident.”

“Thank you and Glory to you, mighty God, for showing us where we are needed and where our little can do a lot.”

*Kyrie Eleison*

Wir fühlen uns verbunden mit den Menschen in den Schweizer Kirchen und den Kirchen weltweit. Gemeinsam können wir ein Netz des Friedens knüpfen.

Gott, wir brauchen Deine Hilfe.

Hilf uns, damit es uns gelingt, in freundschaftlicher Gemeinschaft zusammenzufügen, was in uns und um uns getrennt ist.

„We need your help, God.

Help us to unite in the communion of love what is separated in us and around us.”

*Kyrie Eleison*

Our planet and its inhabitants are in peril. Our Thoughts go to International Organisations and especially to the Climate-Conference in Glasgow. We hope that people with courage and compassion will cooperate and find new solutions.

Mercyfull God,

“Give us a strong faith to continue supporting and listening the quiet voice that says:

Do not be afraid!

You are not alone!”

*Kyrie Eleison*

Wir bitten um Gottes Geist für die kommende Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates (Assembly of the World Council of Churches) im nächsten Sommer in Karlsruhe.

Hilf auch uns, Visionen für eine bessere Welt zu finden. Zeig uns, was wir dazu beitragen können.

Führe uns im Gebet und öffne unsere Herzen.

Wir möchten Deine Worte hören und sehen können, was unsere Nachbarn brauchen.

„Help us to have a vision of better world and help us to contribute.

Guide us in prayer and open our hearts so that we can hear Your words and the need of our neighbours.”

In a moment of silence, we give space to our own personal prayers.

*Silence*

All our prayers, we command into God’s hands with the words that Jesus Christ has taught us. Together, we pray the Lord’s Prayer, each in their own language.

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Hymn “Amazing Grace”**

**Blessing**

God bless you and keep you; God make her face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; God lift up her countenance upon you and give you peace.

Que le Seigneur te bénisse et te garde! Que le Seigneur fasse briller sur toi son visage, qu’il se penche vers toi! Que le Seigneur tourne vers toi son visage, qu’il t’apporte la paix!

Gott segne dich und behüte dich; Gott lasse das Angesicht leuchten über dir und sei dir gnädig; Gott hebe sein Angesicht über dich und gebe dir Frieden.

Amen

**Organ postlude**

**Sending**

Gönd in Friede, und bringet de Fride i d’Wält. Go in peace, and bring peace to the world.