

Who Is, Who Was and Who is Yet to Come -- Welcome!

"Jesus said, I am the Alpha and the Omega, Who Is, Who Was and Who is Yet To Come". This infamous reading comes from the Revelation to John, and apocalyptic writing that has been studied by scholars for millenia, with the intent of "cracking a code". So far, the code has not been cracked.

Today, we are welcoming a new member to the family -- Claire Marie Penson.

Today, we, her Church Family, will make promises to be with her always.

To walk with her, to support her, and to show her how to live her life in the fullest way, as a child of God.

Make no mistake, today is NOT Claire's introduction to God. She has known God since before she was conceived. She chose Brianna and Curtis to be her parents, and personally, I think she chose well. While she was being knit together in her mother's womb, God was with her. She has felt the Holy Spirit surrounding her all the while she floated and grew inside her Mum.

Claire's introduction today is NOT to God. It's to all of you. Her new family. Her lifelong family. Not related by blood, but by a deep seated belief in the Divine and a long, loving, eternal relationship with God.

Today is the Reign of Christ, which is the last Sunday before the four weeks of Advent. It's a perfect day for a Baptism because in today's scripture we hear about the past, present and future all rolled together, through Jesus. Today marks the last day of Year "B" where the gospel we focus on is Mark.

Next Sunday marks Advent and the beginning of Year "C" where the gospel we will focus on is Luke. It is the beginning of the four weeks of intentional anticipation, leading to the birth of Christ.

As you may be aware, Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last. There are twenty-four letters in the Greek alphabet. As

you know, there are twenty-six letters in the English alphabet. Now, there has been some debate as to whether Jesus actually spoke Greek.

I would suggest that he did, because otherwise, what use would the passage we are using today have? Jesus would have likely spoken Aramaic first, then Hebrew, then Greek. Jesus' reference as the alpha and the omega meant that he was the first and the last, he used to be, he still is and he will be to come.

Eternal, unchanging.

Claire has also been touched by the eternal. As I said earlier, she had an experience of the Divine even before she was born, even before she was conceived. The Spirit of God has surrounded Claire for a very long time.

There is an ancient Hebrew belief that when a child is born and they draw their first breath, they receive the "Ruah", or "Breath" of God. Ruah also means Spirit or Wind. When Claire inhaled for the very first time, she drew in her "Ruah Adonai", or Breath of God.

Further to this belief, when a person exhales for the last time, their "Ruah" leaves them, and returns to the eternal. Where it goes is speculation best left for another sermon. What I can tell you is that Claire has been wanted even before she was born. Claire has been loved even before Brianna felt the first flutter of her, or saw her tiny form on a screen.

And do you want to know something very cool? The same is true for you.

God has known you since before you were conceived. You, each one of you, received "Ruah Adonai" when you drew your first breath and when the time comes for you to leave this life, you will exhale your "Ruah Adonai" and it will return to the divine. You will not need it anymore.

Today is a big day for Claire, and for Brianna and Curtis. It's a big day, especially for Tilly. And, for each of you here in person and joining us from home. Because today, each of you will be partaking in promises made on behalf of Claire.

Choosing Godparents can be a joyous experience. There's a lot of pressure to get it right. Choosing Godparents can also be an absolute nightmare. And after a lot of conversation, prayer and sleepless nights, Brianna and Curtis have decided to resurrect another ancient tradition - this entire congregation will be Claire's Godparents!

So, if you need to go to the bathroom, you might want to go now because we'll be starting the baptism shortly.

The words will appear on a screen and as you read them, I want you to ponder their meanings. Some of the promises and prayers are based on ancient Hebrew prayers. Almost every Hebrew prayer of blessing begins "Baruch atah adonai eloheynu, mehalech, ha olam", which translates loosely to, "Blessed are you, O God, Ruler of the universe..." and we will be sharing this prayer, in its entirety, in English, in a few minutes.

When you are asked to answer these questions and join in these prayers, please ponder what you are being asked to do. Claire is becoming a member of this gathering of followers, of believers in Jesus. And while her paperwork, registration and certificate say "United Church of Canada", she is part of both the United Church of Canada and the larger fellowship of God. And as she is being baptised into our Shared Ministry, there will be some Anglican goodness included as well.

It has been seven years since Knox United Church, Fernie celebrated a baptism. Claire's baptism is a milestone in a number of ways. It is the first in a very long time, and it will, quite likely be the last Baptism in this physical space.

And, for those who are wondering where this service came from, it's from the United Church of Canada resource book "Celebrate God's Presence." It gives several options for things to include or exclude from the service. And me, being me, included all of them.

The United Church of Canada does recognise the laying on of hands and making the sign of the cross on individuals, especially at baptism and

ordination. Claire is going to receive both, so she will be both baptised and anointed, or set apart as God's beloved child.

Remember, Jesus was not Christian. He was a Jew. And a fairly devout Jew. He did not set out to form his own religion, rather he wanted to REFORM his faith. Moving away from doctrine and rules, and moving more towards relationship and love. Jesus was a radical in that he chose love first. He chose to love his neighbour as well as his enemy.

We need to teach Claire to love God, first and foremost. She needs to learn to love herself, early in life. She needs to learn to love (and obey) her parents, right parents? And we need to learn from her to always begin with love. It's not too late for us, we just have to be willing to change our ways.

At what age do we stop looking at the world through eyes of wonder and begin looking through lenses of fear, of judgment, of hatred? I pray that Claire will grow up in a world where love overwhelms fear, judgment and hatred.

I pray that she will grow up knowing she is fierce and powerful. And she will grow up knowing that all God's creatures, be they finned, furry or feathered, deserve love. And even the ones that are called humans need love. Humans need that most of all. She can teach us. We must be willing to learn.

And so, beloved tiny girl, welcome to the family of Fernie Knox United and Christ Church Anglican. You, my darling, are so very wanted, and so very welcome. Let all God's children say...AMEN!

The Reverend Andrea L. Brennan, Incumbent  
Elk Valley Ecumenical Shared Ministry between  
Fernie Knox United and Christ Church Anglican  
Fernie, B.C.

Reign of Christ  
Revelation 1. 4b-8