

WELCOME AND NOTICES

Today 12.30pm Thanksgiving of Luna Webb

Monday 6th Year 5 from St. Michael's Junior School are visiting the Church.

Wed. 8th and Thurs. 9th at 1.45pm St. Michael's Junior School are coming here for their Christmas Carol Service.

LIGHTING OF ADVENT CANDLES

CALL TO WORSHIP

'The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing' (Zephaniah 3:17).

SONG/HYMN: HOW LOVELY ON THE MOUNTAINS (OUR GOD REIGNS)

How Lovely On The Mountains Are The Feet Of Him

**Who Brings Good News, Good News
Announcing Peace, Proclaiming News
And Happiness**

Our God Reigns, Our God Reigns

Our God Reigns, Our God Reigns [x2]

**You Watchmen Lift Your Voices Joyfully
As one**

**Shout For Your King, Your King
See Eye To Eye The Lord Restoring Zion
Our God Reigns, Our God Reigns**

Our God Reigns, Our God Reigns [x2]

**Waste Places Of Jerusalem Break Forth
With Joy**

**We Are Redeemed, Redeemed
The Lord Has Saved And Comforted His
People
Our God Reigns, Our God Reigns**

Our God Reigns, Our God Reigns [x2]

**Ends Of The Earth, See The Salvation Of
Your God**

**Jesus Is Lord, Is Lord
Before The Nations He Has Bared His
Holy Arm**

Your God Reigns, Your God Reigns

Our God Reigns, Our God Reigns [x4]

SONG/HYMN: DAYS OF ELIJAH

**These are the days of Elijah
Declaring the word of the Lord
And these are the days of Your servant
Moses
Righteousness being restored**

**And though these are days of great trial
Of famine and darkness and sword
Still, we are the voice in the desert crying
"Prepare ye the way of the Lord!"**

**Behold, He comes riding on the clouds
Shining like the sun at the trumpet call
Lift your voice, the year of jubilee
And out of Zion's hill, salvation comes**

**And these are the days of Ezekiel
The dry bones becoming as flesh
And these are the days of Your servant
David
Rebuilding a temple of praise**

**Oh, these are the days of the harvest
For the fields are as white in Your world
And we are the labourers in Your
vineyard
Declaring the word of the Lord!**

**Behold, He comes, riding on the clouds
Shining like the sun at the trumpet call**

**Lift your voice, the year of jubilee
And out of Zion's hill, salvation comes**

**Behold, He comes, riding on the clouds
Shining like the sun at the trumpet call
Lift your voice, the year of jubilee
And out of Zion's hill, salvation comes**

**Oh, we give glory to You, Lord (we
worship You, Lord)
You're the Lion of Judah
The Lamb who was slain (we worship
You, Jesus)
You're the God of Jacob
You're the God of Elijah (Lamb of God)
You're the Lord God of Israel (oh, I praise
You, Lord)
You're the Lord God of the universe
(You're the Lion of Judah)
You're God of Heaven and earth
Oh, Lord our King and our Redeemer, You
are**

OPENING PRAYER

God our Father, In love you promised
from ancient times a Saviour and
Redeemer.
In time you gave your only Son, to be the
Saviour of the world.
Glory to you, God our Father.

Lord Jesus Christ,
for us and for our salvation
you came down from heaven
and opened the gate to everlasting life.
Glory to you, Lord Jesus.

Life-giving Holy Spirit,
You hovered over creation bringing life.
You overshadowed Mary bringing life.
Breathe new life into us.
**Glory to you, Holy Spirit.
Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
now and for ever. Amen.**

CONFESSION

When the Lord comes, he will bring to
light the things now hidden in darkness,
and will disclose the purposes of the
heart. Therefore in the light of Christ let
us confess our sins.

**Holy and forgiving God, we have sinned
against you and each other in thought
and word and deed. We have turned
from your life-giving word, and ignored
the message of those you sent. We are
unprepared for the coming of your Son.
Have mercy upon us and forgive us, that
strengthened by your love we may serve
you more faithfully; through Christ our
Lord. Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

'I am making all things new,' says the
Lord. This is his gracious word: 'Your sins
are forgiven.' **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

COLLECT FOR ADVENT

God of all time and space, who are we,
that you should come to us? Yet you have
visited your people and redeemed us in
your Son. As we prepare to celebrate his
birth, make our hearts leap for joy at the
sound of your word and move us by your
Spirit to bless your wonderful works.
We ask this through him whose coming is
certain, whose day draws near, our
Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

PLAQUE PRESENTATION

BY GROUP CAPTAIN STEWART
BLACKBURN MBE DL

SONG/HYMN: TO YOU O LORD I LIFT UP MY SOUL

To You O Lord I lift up my soul

**In you I trust O my God
Do not let me be put to shame
Nor let my enemies triumph over me**

**No one whose hope is in you
Will ever be put to shame
That's why my eyes are on you Oh Lord
Surround me, defend me
Oh how I need you
To you I lift up my soul
To you I lift up my soul**

**Show me your ways and teach me your
paths
Guide me in truth lead me on
For you're my God, you are my Saviour
My hope is in you each moment of the
day**

**Remember Lord your mercy and love
That ever flow from of old
Remember not the sins of my youth
Or my rebellious ways
According to your love remember me
According to your love
For you are good O Lord**

READING: Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 The axe has been laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.'

10 'What should we do then?' the crowd asked. 11 John answered, 'Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one

who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.'

12 Even tax collectors came to be baptised. 'Teacher,' they asked, 'what should we do?' 13 'Don't collect any more than you are required to,' he told them.

14 Then some soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?' He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.'

15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, 'I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' 18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

REFLECTION: WHAT'S THE TIME (3) It's time to confront – by Mike Acaster

We continue looking at John the Baptist and his story in Luke chapter 3. We know very little about John's early upbringing. He was the son of a priest, Zechariah, and he may have been, at least in part trained to go into the priesthood. He seems to have gone out into the desert as a hermit until the Holy Spirit moved him to start preaching. It is tempting to dismiss John as a just a signpost to Christ's ministry, the amuse bouche to Jesus's entrée. But I think that trivialises John the Baptist.

What he did and what he said also had substance. I know not everyone is comfortable with confrontation but there are times in life where it just cannot be avoided. We might try procrastinating but that only delays the inevitable confrontation and may make it worse, if only you had said earlier then perhaps, we might have avoided this unpleasantness. Whatever it was with John, empowered by the Holy Spirit, John speaks out God's word and confronts the Pharisees, the Sadducees, all the religious and political leaders with his message. His is not a polite, gentle warning message it is fiery and intense. It was a call for significant societal change, away from worldliness and for a return to God's ways, a back to basics campaign way before John Major re-discovered the phrase. But it was a popular message the passage in Luke talks of crowds or even multitudes going out to hear John the Baptist.

The main thing I want us to consider this morning is that John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ but more than that his message had real substance and posed a REAL challenge to his listeners.

Undoubtedly, John was there to prepare the way for Christ as we can see in the reference to Isaiah 40: 3, prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. If we take last weeks reading and this weeks together then we can see John's mission is based on the concept of baptism of repentance for the remission of sin. Not that repentance is enough in its own right it is rather an outward sign, Oswald Chambers put it this way, "Repentance always brings a person to the point of saying, I have sinned. The surest sign that God is at work in his life is when he says that and means it. Anything less is simply sorrow for having made

foolish mistakes-a reflex action caused by self-disgust." With John the outward sign of repentance was baptism a public statement then as it is now. This brings me to the first point of confrontation with the Jewish leadership.

Repent and be Baptised

Yes, they were familiar with the practice of baptism but for them it was a practice reserved for gentiles converting to Judaism. Yet here is John telling Jews that they too needed to be baptised as a symbol of repentance of sins. This was a scandalous suggestion as it implied that even Jew's needed to repent which was a second outrageous suggestion.

Repentance applies even to Abraham's kin

John confronts the crowd coming out to be baptised and calls them a brood of vipers. Can you imagine coming here on a Sunday and to greeted by Mark or I calling you all a bunch of snakes in the grass, that's what John is doing here. There are two images to this firstly, John is saying that the crowds are like snakes fleeing from a fire, their motivation is self-preservation rather than being right with God. For many generations the descendants of Abraham felt they did not need amend their ways, they had no need of repentance. They had inherited from Abraham the promise from God, a get out of jail free card if you like. They inherited the promise given to Abraham, surely, they were OK, secondly, John warns the crowd that they are the descendants of the destroyer of all things seen in Genesis 3 in the serpent rather than inheritors of Abraham. Of course, we don't see things that way do we, or do we? Just because we are British does our birth right mean

we are saved? Just because we are a member of a certain denomination, does that mean we are saved? It is still possible to fall into exactly the same trap that the Jewish leaders fell into. John is saying to the multitudes who came to hear him only genuine repentance, a changed life, baptism and heeding the words of the one from God, the one who is mightier than he means you will be saved. John leaves them in no doubt saying that if God wanted to, he could raise up sons of Abraham from these stones, in other words ancestry or inheritance from the great founder of the Jewish nations is not an automatic right to salvation.

Genuine repentance bears fruit

Even the chosen need to repent of their sin. And the proof of that change is that their lives will bear fruit. John Calvin said, "Repentance is an inward matter, which has its seat in the heart and soul, but afterwards yields its fruits in a change of life." It is not enough to profess sorrow for transgression; we have not truly turned from sin if our lives are unchanged (Isa. 29:13–14; James 2:14–26). What type of changes is John proposing?

Specific advice

In response to the crowd's urging John doesn't leave his audience hanging, wondering what they needed to do, he goes on to give them very specific advice on what those life changes are, particularly for three groups who might be problematic and two in particular who might be considered beyond the pale, beyond the palisade, beyond hope of redemption. The three groups are the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians – those who have more than they need – they should share what they have with those who have nothing.

The tax collector – don't collect more money than you are required to, don't collect more and pocket the difference. In other words, don't cheat your fellow citizens for your own benefit.

The soldiers – don't bully people to get extra pay but be content with your pay, don't protect the tax collectors as they rip people off.

These are the sort of fruits that John expects from our repentance. John is not saying that these professions are the sort of professions that we shouldn't go in to only that if you are in those professions that you carry out your duties ethically, fairly, morally. Are there any modern occupations that Christians should go in to? Clearly, we shouldn't take up any criminality ruling out drug dealing, prostitution, modern slavery, or the like. Personally, I'm not certain I could do anything that promoted tobacco or gambling. The point being if our work means that we cannot deal with people ethically, honestly, morally then yes perhaps it is time for a change of career. In these few verses 7 to 9 confronts the Jewish leaders in at least three ways. They need to repent of their sins and not just rely on their inheritance.

They need to be baptised as a sign of their repentance.

Their repentance needs to bear fruits to be real, their lives need to change.

Messages as relevant today as they were in John's the Baptist's time.

John goes on to warn the crowd that time is short, the axe lies at the root of the tree and God is about to wield it.

We think of Jesus coming into the world to spread the good news of salvation, here is John starting to lay first bricks in that foundation. It may seem odd to say John's message was of good news if we

look at the dire warnings it so obviously contained. William Barclay said the message of John was not a gospel. It was not good news, it was news of terror, it's about fire sweeping all before it, it's the axe about to fall, certainly John seems to have been in the mould of an apocryphal prophet. But I think John goes much further and at the risk of contradicting William Barclay I see John's message as a mixture of good news that those who repent of their sin, those who listen to the one who is so much mightier than John, the one who follows after him will be right with God. So, the good news is that those who genuinely repent will be gathered like wheat into the barn and not consumed like chaff in the fire.

While it might be tempting to pigeon-hole John just as someone who was sign-posting the coming messiah. In doing so we miss out on the substance of John's message. His mission was to confront the Jewish leaders that they needed a change of mindset, no longer could they rely on their inheritance and descendancy from Abraham. They needed to change their lives so that they would be fruitful. They needed to treat others with fairness, grounded in moral and ethical considerations, with compassion for the other person. In confronting the Jewish leaders with these truths, he does not lose sight of the truth that the one who comes after him is more powerful than he is. John begins to open up the good news of repentance and redemption, even if combined with dire warnings. Clearly the time was right for John to confront the Jewish leaders of his day to wean them off the belief that they were inheritors of the promise of Abraham without repenting of their sin and without bearing fruits of that

repentance. Baptism, then as now, is a symbol of that repentance and one nowadays we see as an acceptance of what God has done in Christ Jesus for us. John the Baptist came to confront everyone and especially the Pharisees and Sadducees with the impending judgement of God, but he came to start the Good News that in Jesus Christ, the greater one that came after him we might receive God's grace and our salvation. A present we don't deserve, cannot earn and one so much more precious than any longed-for Christmas present this or any year. So is John the Baptist just a signpost for what was about to come or did he have something substantial to say. I like to think that he was plucked out of the desert to start confronting the Jewish leadership with the arguments Christ would go on to expand and be the living embodiment of the resolution and reconciliation with God that Christ brought into the world. What John confronted the Jewish leadership with 2000 odd years ago is what we need to confront ourselves with on a daily basis, and what we need to confront others with the bring them to Christ. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

In joyful expectation of his coming to reign we pray to our Lord, saying,
Come, Lord Jesus. **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to your world as King of the nations. We pray for all nations and the leaders of the world. Before you rulers will stand in silence. So, we pray for governments across the world, for justice and peace to be their watchword. May your peace reign in your world.

Come, Lord Jesus. **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to your Church as Lord and Judge. We pray for all churches everywhere of whatever tradition, that we may be examples to the world of Christ-like love and hope. Help us to live in the light of your coming, and give us the longing to do your will.

Come, Lord Jesus. **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to your people as Saviour and bearer of pain. We pray for all who suffer at this time, especially for those known to us. Enfold us all in your love and mercy, wipe away our tears of failure, fear and distress, and set us free to serve you forever.

Come, Lord Jesus. **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to us from heaven with power and great glory, and lift us up to meet you, where with all your saints and angels we will be with you forever. Be with those who mourn at this time, especially we pray for Linda, Carol and Pam.

Come, Lord Jesus. **Come, Lord Jesus.**

All these things we pray in the mighty name of Jesus. **Amen.**

SONG/HYMN: O COME O COME EMMANUEL

**O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear**

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel**

**O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and
cheer**

**Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight**

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel**

**O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear**

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel**

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel**

THE PEACE

May the God of peace make you holy and keep you free from every fault as you wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

THE ACT OF HOLY COMMUNION

The Lord is here.

His Spirit is with us.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good to give you thanks and praise, almighty God and everlasting Father, through Jesus Christ

your Son. For when Christ humbled himself to come among us in human flesh, he fulfilled the plan you formed before the foundation of the world to open for us the way of salvation. Confident that your promise will be fulfilled, we now watch for the day when Christ will come again in glory.

And so we offer our praise with all your people, on earth and in heaven. With the full chorus of your creation, we proclaim the glory of your name:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise you, Lord God, King of the universe, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who on the night in which he was betrayed, took bread and gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take this and eat it. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

And so we proclaim:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again in glory. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end; the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Recalling his death and resurrection, and in obedience to his command, we celebrate the offering of his eternal sacrifice, until he comes again. Through him, our Priest and King, accept us as a living sacrifice, a people for your praise.

Generous and holy God, pour out your Spirit that these gifts of bread and wine may be for us the body and blood of Christ. Refashion us in your image that we may be found ready at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Blessing and honour and glory and power be yours, O Lord, for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Let us pray for the coming of God's kingdom in the words our Saviour taught us.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the
glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

Like those that look for the morning, so our souls wait for the Lord.
Be known to us, Lord, in the breaking of bread.

Please stay seated to receive the bread. If you wish to just receive a blessing, please

do not put your hands out to receive the bread.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Let us pray.

We thank you, Lord, for feeding us with the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation. Keep us in your grace and at the coming of Christ in glory bring us with your saints into the life of your kingdom. Amen.

SONG/HYMN: WAYMAKER

**You are here, moving in our midst
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, working in this place
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, moving in our midst
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, working in this place
I worship You, I worship You**

CHORUS

**You are
Waymaker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are
You are
Waymaker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are**

**You are here, touching every heart
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, healing every heart
I worship You, I worship You**

**You are here, turning lives around
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, mending every heart
I worship You, yeah, I worship You, Lord**

CHORUS

**You are
Waymaker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are
You are
Waymaker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are**

**That is who You are
That is who You are (That is who You are)
That is who You are (That is who You are)
My Jesus, that is who You are (That is who You are)
We lift You up, that is who You are (That is who You are)
My Jesus**

BRIDGE

**Even when I don't see it, You're working
Even when I don't feel it, You're working
You never stop, You never stop working
You never stop, You never stop working**

CHORUS

**You are
Waymaker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are
You are
Waymaker, miracle worker
Promise keeper, light in the darkness
My God, that is who You are**

DISMISSAL AND BLESSING

How mighty is our God whose name is Jesus. The day of the Lord is surely coming. Be faithful in worship, unwavering in hope, fervent in the work of God's kingdom and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Christ the Son of Righteousness shine upon you and

12th December 2021
What is the time? (3) It's time to confront
Luke 3: 7 - 18



prepare your hearts and souls to meet
him when he comes in glory.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the
Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be
with you and all whom you love now and
for evermore. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.