

Apart but Together Worship
6th December - John the Baptist - Advent Week 2

Welcome

Psalm 103 verses 1-6

Praise the LORD, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.
He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases;
he redeems me from the pit and crowns me with love and compassion.
He satisfies my desires with good things,
so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

Song- Bless the Lord : [CLICK HERE TO LISTEN/WATCH](#)

Lighting the advent candles

(please light 2 candles, take a moment to look at the flames and be still)

Opening Prayers-

Lord Jesus, Light of the World, John told people to prepare for you were very near. As Christmas grows closer day by day, help us to be ready to welcome you.

As we look at this light, we recognise that we are a mixture of light and dark. We are sorry for the times we have not lived out what we say we believe. Gracious Lord we ask for your forgiveness. Let your love transform every aspect of our lives and touch those we meet. Our hearts are open to you Jesus. Amen.

We say together the Lord's prayer: -

Our Father who art in Heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen.

I wonder what phrase/picture comes to mind when you think about John the Baptist?
Here is one of the few hymns that mention him-

Song- On Jordan's bank the Baptists cry : [CLICK HERE TO LISTEN/WATCH](#)

Introduction- waiting

Have you got an advent calendar? We know we have to wait to open the last window.

One of the things we have practised a lot this year is waiting- waiting both outside and inside shops, waiting for lockdown to end, waiting for the phone to ring, waiting for Church building to open etc. Advent is a time of waiting, but of hopeful expectation, and preparation.

If I said the words "unto us a child is born, to us a son is given.", you may recognise them from Carol services. In fact, they come from the book of Isaiah chapter 9, which was written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus. We can find many prophecies in the Old Testament that give us glimpses of the coming Messiah. The Ashmeads taught me a phrase- "the New Testament in the Old Testament concealed, the Old Testament in the New Testament revealed". As we discovered doing the Bible Course as a church, it is one big story. The Old Testament ends with the book of Malachi- a call to repentance but also a promise that God would send another messenger in the future.

Malachi 3 v.1- "see, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me"

The story hasn't stopped, people are waiting in hope- and they had quite a wait! There was silence- no prophets spoke for hundreds of years. We turn over to the gospels- and all 4 gospels refer back to Isaiah and speak of "A voice of one calling in the desert"- the baton has been picked up- here is John the Baptist!

What was the picture or phrase that came to your mind I wonder? I think a good picture is one of a Herald- someone who announces the arrival of someone important.

Song- Make Way: [CLICK HERE TO LISTEN/WATCH](#)

We are going to hear 2 readings now about John-

Luke 1 v 57-66

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." They said to her, "There is no-one among your relatives who has that name." Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is

John." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.

The neighbours were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

and Mark 1 v1-7

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way-

a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' And so John came, baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan river.

John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message-

"After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

Reflection

What catches your eye when reading the Gospel accounts of John? I noticed 2 questions- one at the beginning of his life and one at the end. We just heard the first question -

What then is this child going to be? For the Lord's hand was with him.

Everything about John was unexpected- his birth announced by an angel, his name, the way he lived and what he ate- he was different. Every other prophet had said the Messiah is coming- he was saying the Messiah is here- prepare yourselves, get ready now! And people responded, repented, changed their ways, and John baptised them as an outward sign of that change.

John was striking, disturbing, passionate, forceful- but a forerunner, a messenger, one who pointed people to Jesus. As Mark reminded us last week, now it is our turn to pick up the baton and point others to Jesus in our way, in our time.

What then is this child going to be? For the Lord's hand was with him.

What struck me was the sense of wonder and excitement, both at John's birth and later among the crowds who came to hear him. The Bible stories we read in Advent may be familiar but I hope we can catch a sense of anticipation as we approach Christmas

The second question comes nearer the end of John's life. Let's look at it together-

Matthew 11 verses 1-6

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

Are you the One who was to come or should we expect someone else?

John was in prison so sent some of his followers to ask Jesus this, we are not told why. He himself had said of Jesus- "Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World", so it seems a surprising question. Maybe it was because Jesus wasn't doing what he expected the Messiah to do- perhaps he had expected a Messiah who would free them all from oppression, that their world as they knew it would be done away with. Jesus fulfilled the ancient prophecies in a surprising way- He came as Prince of Peace in the midst of a broken world.

Jesus gives the answer "Go back and report what you hear and see". That's what I would call a 'teacher answer'. I remember how frustrating it was at school when I didn't understand something and I asked the teacher- who just gave me more information. Later on, when I was training apprentices, I would spend ages talking and explaining something, to which they would reply "so what's the answer miss?" In fact, what you work out for yourself is much more valuable.

So, I wonder if Jesus here is saying -work it out for yourself, put the pieces together, see what you get. In verse 5 he says-

"the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."

These are similar words to those Jesus read from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue, when He said "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing". "Isn't this Josephs son?" they asked then. They hadn't grasped the bigger picture.

Are you the One who was to come or should we expect someone else?

The Message translation reads "are you the One we've been expecting, or are we still waiting?"

I think the answer for us is yes and yes.

Advent is about looking back but also looking forwards. Looking for the One who was, and is, and is to come. I think it is when we do our own waiting, expecting, allowing the Holy Spirit to help us put the pieces together, we will receive the Presence that is Christmas.

Song -I will wait: [CLICK HERE TO LISTEN/WATCH](#)

Prayers of intercession

Hymn - it came upon the midnight clear: [CLICK HERE TO LISTEN/WATCH](#)

Closing Prayer

God of cloven skies and angels love song,

Grant that within the noise of this season, we may find space for stillness.

That with Mary we may ponder and treasure the Word made flesh in Jesus

In His name and for His sake, may we pledge ourselves anew as heralds and makers of peace.

Amen.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore

Amen