**Morning Praise @ Home 15th December 2024**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading Luke 3:7 – 18

### Reflection from John

**There will always be people we warm to and others we find it hard to connect with. Some grow on us over time.**

John the Baptist is a compelling figure. He has been portrayed since the earliest days as a wild and unkempt man with a shaggy beard and tangled hair.

He was very outspoken to the point of rudeness – it’s quite something to call people a brood of vipers!

His outspokenness brought about his untimely death – he denounced Herod in public for marrying his brother’s wife, setting into motion a chain of events which lead to his imprisonment and his brutal execution.

The unkemptness, wildness, outspokenness and rudeness make him sound very far from the sort of person you’d want to spend time with, and yet thousands flocked to hear him speaking. And the places they flocked to were inhospitable places – out in the open with no shelter from the sun or the heat.

In one sense John was like a magnet and we do well to wonder why so many were drawn to him and his uncomfortable but life-changing message. John worked no miracles, wrote no books, and lived in the wilderness. His ministry lasted less than a year because he ran into trouble with powerful people. He went to jail where he struggled with doubt. Finally, he ended up with his head on a platter to satisfy a guilty king. He arrives on the stage of history for one moment, then he disappears.

You see John the Baptist has continued to call our attention over almost 2000 years since his death. He is often remembered in the church’s calendar – more so than almost anyone else apart from Jesus himself: he has two official feast days to mark his birth and his death in June and then in August. And he looms large in Advent – the third Sunday of Advent is especially devoted to him. As Philip said last week John was the last of the old style prophets.

**What do we know about John?**

FOR ALL THAT we really know very little about him. St Luke sets out the story of his birth, a story that is woven around the narratives of Jesus’ nativity. The Benedictus, the song of John’s father Zachariah, tells of John’s role as the prophet who will announce the coming of the Messiah. We have fragments of John’s preaching, like those in today’s Gospel, and we have the account of him baptising Jesus in the Jordan and his revelation that this is God’s son. And of course, the beginning of John’s Gospel speaks of John as the one who was sent to testify to the light, but was not, himself, the light.

**‘It’s not about me’!**

We can’t know for certain what it was about John that made him so compelling, but I have a feeling that this speaking out whilst at the same time pointing away from himself is an important part of the answer. He was very clear that this wasn’t all about him – he was there to draw attention to someone else.

John brought a message of transformation, refreshment and renewal but it was a challenging message.

In human history God always works to accomplish His tasks through human beings.

* To a world that was being ruined he had sent Noah.
* When he wanted to raise up a new nation, he sent Abraham.
* When he wanted to deliver that nation from slavery, he sent Moses.
* He sent Joshua to lead the nation into the Promised Land.
* Much later he sent David to be their greatest king.
* In Babylon He raised up Daniel.

Now that Jesus the Saviour was on the way his coming was heralded by a cousin – John the Baptist – and his preaching called for readiness through repentance - through life turned around towards God. John was uncompromising in pointing to Jesus, for He alone will save God’s people from their sins.

John knew his purpose: Prepare the way for the Lord. Repent!

That repentance is more than saying a few prayers, attending Holy Communion, crying a few tears.

Repentance is about exchanging our crooked behaviour for a lifestyle that imitates Jesus. To repent means you quit breaking God’s commandments, and where they will take you if Jesus doesn't change things. Repent means allowing the Holy Spirit to reverse the sinner that I am - through the Saviour's sacrifice.

One of the disciplines of a good preacher is to get out of the way, so people can see God. That was John.

Whenever he crops up, he is always pointing to Jesus and telling people to get ready to meet him – ‘the one who is coming after me, the one whose sandals I am not worthy to untie’. He is the one who comes to testify to the light but who isn’t, himself, the light. This is no stage-strutting preacher star – John has put his ego aside: he is utterly authentic.

John could draw a crowd who were baptised in large numbers. His audience were ordinary people. We can see in today’s gospel his message to ordinary people in general – he was challenging them to share what they had with others. And he spoke specifically to tax collectors and soldiers: people in these roles had enough power to prey on others for their own gain. Again, people took this from John, and, again, I think this must have been because of his authenticity and honesty.

**What can we learn from John?**

So, here was a man who was completely devoted to his calling, someone who mastered his ego and declined to call attention to himself. When he received attention he always pointed away from himself – ‘don’t look at me – look for God!’ He was a man without pretension – a holy man of God, he was very far from ‘holier than thou’ or self-righteous. He stood by what he believed, even when it was dangerous. His message was challenging, but he said what he had to say openly and honestly.

There are few like John, but his influence lives on long after he had gone. The power of his personality echoes down the generations: if we listen, we can still hear his advent cry: ‘repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is close at hand’. **Amen**

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**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

Mighty God, as we contemplate the teaching of John the Baptist on our Advent journey, give us courage to be faithful and to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” until your promises are fulfilled.
Help us to look forward in hope to the coming of our Saviour. May we live as he taught, ready to welcome him with burning love and faith.

Creator God, we pray for people in parts of the world where life is precarious, whether through terrorism, disaster, poverty, disease, drought, flooding or war. We pray that the time may be hastened when there is peace on earth and goodwill between all people. Especially as we pray for our precious world help us all to be good stewards so that we can pass on our world in good order to the generations yet to come.

Father God, as we approach Christmas, we so often fail to hear you; we are busy with so much that we go about the things we do as though trapped in household routine, hardly giving a thought to what our lives and the season of Advent are all about. Our spirits grow tired and you, Father God, can seem far away. Help us to hear your voice today and be with us with every gift we buy and wrap and with those who receive and open them.

Loving God, we thank You for the gift of life and pray for those whose lives are troubled by illness, grief, poverty or injustice. We pray that in the darkness of their suffering and pain Your Advent light will shine to bring them the assurance and hope of the coming of your son Jesus. We remember at this time those known personally to us and those who have requested our prayers.

Loving God, we thank You for the gift of life and pray for those whose lives are troubled by illness, grief, poverty or injustice. We pray that in the darkness of their suffering and pain Your Advent light will shine to bring them the assurance and hope of the coming of your son Jesus.

Gracious God, we hold before you those who mourn at this time of year. We pray especially for the family and friends of Geoffrey Parsons and Michael Redmond. May they feel your love enfold them.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

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