

## Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2020 – Bulwell United Reformed Church

Today is the third Sunday of Advent - the reading for today is John 1: 6-8, 19-28. In response to questions, John the Baptist denies that he is the Messiah. He says that he is a voice crying out, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'. Questioned again, John says that someone much greater than him is coming. *A short service for personal communion focusing on confessing Jesus is Lord is included. Please have your bread & wine/juice ready.*

### Prayers of Approach, Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

#### Lord God,

We come as guests invited to join in praise and worship,  
grant us this time of serenity and peace  
Allow us to remove ourselves from the hustle and bustle of life  
And Calm our minds from distracting thoughts  
So that we may share in the words prayers and praise of this service.

There have been times when we have ignored your invitation Lord,  
Displaced our graciousness with contempt and ignorance  
Please forgive us for these lapses in judgement and guide us in your way.  
Grant us the fulfillment of joining in your praise and worship.

Forgive us Lord, for those times when we allow our faith to be hidden  
from view  
Remind us of the work undertaken by Christ with the poor, outcast and  
estranged.  
Provide us with the grace to follow in his footsteps as we walk in the  
world today

Thank you for reminding us of our journey,  
open our eyes and keep us ever vigilant as we step along your pathway of  
love and understanding.  
And hear us now as we pray together in the words Jesus taught us,  
saying..

**Our Father who art in heaven...**

**Song            Light of the world – Tim Hughes**

[\(291\) Light of the World lyric video - YouTube](#)

**John 1: 6-8, 19-28**

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.



## **John the Baptist denies being the Messiah**

<sup>19</sup> Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. <sup>20</sup> He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Messiah.'

<sup>21</sup> They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?'

He said, 'I am not.'

'Are you the Prophet?'

He answered, 'No.'

<sup>22</sup> Finally they said, 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'

<sup>23</sup> John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Make straight the way for the Lord."'

<sup>24</sup> Now the Pharisees who had been sent <sup>25</sup> questioned him, 'Why then do you baptise if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?'

<sup>26</sup> 'I baptise with water,' John replied, 'but among you stands one you do not know. <sup>27</sup> He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

<sup>28</sup> This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

(NIVUK)

## **John the Baptist - What do you say about yourself?**

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing any of us is to 'know' ourselves. It is so difficult for us to see ourselves as we truly are. Indeed, many great spiritual writers – for example, the monk Thomas Merton, and the pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer – claim that we can only see ourselves clearly in relation to God. As we come to know God better, we slowly begin to see ourselves more clearly. This, they suggest, is the wellspring of true humility. For humility is not about putting yourself down, but seeing yourself more honestly as you are.

The experience of John the Baptist in this week's reading from John's Gospel is a salutary reminder of this. He is the first witness to Jesus, to the one who is the very presence of God. But the impressive thing about John is his clarity about who he is not. He is, in the deepest sense of the word, 'humble'. True humility is knowing yourself, and part of that is knowing who you are not. John is bombarded with questions: 'Are you Elijah?' 'Are you the prophet?' – and so on. He is clearly a remarkable man, because he attracts a lot of attention from a crowd hungry for holiness and blessing. But he is also clear himself that his job is to prepare the way for Jesus, not to build up himself.

So, John points to Jesus, the very Word or truth of God now in human form. As the Gospel of John puts it in a passage the lectionary presents to us on Christmas Day: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1.1). Jesus is the one who is truly himself, who is truly humble. He is the light to whom John the Baptist testifies (vv.7-8) – the 'light of the world' who shows up the world in its true light,

illuminating all its shadows and its darkness, and revealing all its wonder. But Jesus does not come merely to show us our limitations; he comes to invite us into a new way of living. This new way of living is about coming home from exile and being at peace with our truest selves.

### **Advent Reflection - In our waiting**

God, we come to you in our waiting.

We wait with our fears,  
our anxieties and frustrations,  
our pains and regrets,  
our shame and confusion.  
God, help us to wait in peace.

*Pause*

We wait with impatience:  
We rush around, preparing for the festivities,  
not leaving the space to prepare  
our hearts.  
God, help us to wait in faith.

*Pause*

We wait in excitement:  
We are ready to celebrate!  
We know the story with its humbleness, simplicity,  
and wonder.  
God, help us to nurture our joy.

*Pause*

We wait in thanksgiving:  
We are free and able to celebrate.  
We have others around us to share in the journey.  
We are able to wonder in the marvel of your gift.  
God, help us to receive your love. AMEN

*Katrina Crosby, from Candles & Conifers, Wild Goose Publications*

*Please add your prayers for others you wish to pray for today . . .*

**Song Come thou long expected Jesus – Fernando Ortega**

[\(291\) Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus - Fernando Ortega - YouTube](#)

### **HOLY COMMUNION - Advent 3 – Thanksgiving Prayer**

We give you joyful thanks at all times, O God,  
for you have turned our grief into songs of joy,  
and clothed us in salvation and victory.



Salvation has come in your Messiah, Jesus,  
— the one whose coming light  
your servant, John, bore witness to.  
Filled with your Spirit,  
Jesus came proclaiming good news for the poor,  
healing for the broken hearted,  
and the day of freedom to all who are bound.  
He was killed by the proud and powerful,  
but with your wonderful power you raised him to life.  
In his presence we are filled with expectant hope and joy,  
and eager to embrace your eternal covenant.



***Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,  
we offer you thanks and praise at all times  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.***

#### **The Sharing of the Bread and the Wine**

*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Blessed are those who are called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. Alleluia.*

*Holy things for a holy people. Only one is holy, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are made holy in him.*

*[sharing of the bread and wine]*

Take, eat; this is the body of Christ, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of him.

This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ, shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sin. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of him.

#### **Prayer after communion**

Loving God, you have fed us generously at this table,  
as we have remembered Jesus and rejoiced that he is with us today.  
We are ready now to follow him, and to be your people in the world.  
May your Holy Spirit show us the way, make us holy and fill us with love.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

#### **A sending out prayer**

May your heart be at peace,  
and your mind be at rest.  
May you be confident in who you are,  
and share God's gifts of light, hope and grace  
with those you meet and those you pray for.  
**Amen.**



