

Ashburton and Moorland Team

Advent 3

11th December 2022



¶ The Gathering

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Lighting of an Advent wreath or candle

Week 3. John the Baptist

Blessed are you, Sovereign Lord, just and true,
to you be praise and glory for ever!
Your prophet John the Baptist was witness to the truth
as a burning and shining light.
May we your servants rejoice in his light,
and so be led to witness to him
who is the Lord of our coming Kingdom
Jesus our Saviour and King of the ages.
Blessed be God for ever. **Amen.**

Hymn – On Jordan's bank

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVCv6vSVxEc>

On Jordan's bank, the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
come then and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings from the King of kings.

Then cleansed be every Christian breast,
and furnished for so great a Guest!
Yea! let us each our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.

For Thou art our salvation, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward;
without thy grace our souls must fade,
and wither like a flower decayed.

Stretch forth thine hand, to heal our sore,
And make us rise, to fall no more;
Once more upon thy people shine,
And fill the world with love divine.

All praise, eternal Son, to Thee
Whose advent sets thy people free,
Whom, with the Father, we adore,
And Spirit blessed for evermore.

Words: John Chandler
1876 - 1749

Prayer of Preparation

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Prayers of Penitence

The Summary of the Law

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:
The first commandment is this:
'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.'

The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'
There is no other commandment greater than these.
On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

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.

**Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen**

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon us,
pardon and deliver us from all our sins,
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness,
and keep us in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger
to prepare your way before you:
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

¶ The Liturgy of the Word

Readings

Isaiah 35.1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
'Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.'

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;

the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;

the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.

No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;

everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

James 5.7-10

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn – Hail to the lord's anointed

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJcuKB93wco>

Hail to the Lord's anointed
great David's greater Son.
Hail in the time appointed
his reign on earth begun.
He comes to break oppression,
to set the captive free,
to take away transgression
and rule in equity.

He comes with succour speedy
to those who suffer wrong,
to help the poor and needy
and bid the weak be strong.
To give them songs for sighing
their darkness turn to light
whose souls, condemned and dying
were precious in his sight.

He shall come down like showers
upon the fruitful earth
and love, joy, hope, like flowers
spring in his path to birth.
Before him, on the mountains
shall peace, the herald, go
and righteousness, in fountains
from hill to valley flow.

Kings shall fall down before him
and gold and incense bring.
All nations shall adore him
his praise all people sing.
To him shall prayer unceasing
And daily vows ascend;
His kingdom still increasing
a kingdom without end.

O'er every foe victorious
he on his throne shall rest;
from age to age more glorious
all blessing and all-blessed.
The tide of time shall never
his covenant remove.
his name shall stand forever
that name to us is love.

Words: James Montgomery
(1771 – 1854)

Gospel Reading

Alleluia, alleluia.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia!

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew
Glory to you, O Lord.

Matthew 11.2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."

Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

The Sermon

You may remember the story at the beginning of Luke's Gospel about Mary and Elizabeth? Elizabeth was married to the priest Zechariah, and the two of them were elderly with no children and no expectation of children. Then an angel announced to Zechariah that he was about to become a father. He couldn't really believe it, but it happened as the angel foretold.

Six months later, Mary was told by an angel (perhaps the same one) that she also would conceive and bear a son. Mary was so excited she journeyed from Nazareth to Jerusalem to visit Elizabeth, her cousin. I guess the two first-time mums-to-be had lots to talk about!

John duly arrived, and 6 months later, in fairly unusual circumstances(!), Jesus was born.

So John and Jesus were almost the same age, closely related and clearly knowing each other all their lives. But reflect for a moment on the role of John, of whom his father said:

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.”

Jesus himself said that the prophets foretold this. We hear him quoting in today’s gospel a passage that he sees as relating to John:

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.”

John’s and Jesus’ destinies were inextricably linked, with John being Jesus’ forerunner, but they were the same age, so how did John get ahead? He started first! John must have started his ministry in his mid-twenties, about five years before Jesus started his. It was only in that sense that John became Jesus’ forerunner.

They were very similar – both men were deeply steeped in the scriptures, and they felt called by the prophets, in the same way that the prophets they read about were themselves called.

John grew up with a comfortable life in Jerusalem, and would have observed over the years that life in the capital was incredibly unfair. The city was run by the wealthy and important people who looked after their own interests, and those without property or money just had to lump it.

I envisage John seeing the unfairness and injustices, being upset by them, and gradually growing in his resolve to do something about it. This was a high-risk strategy. He was challenging the establishment, he was embarrassing the people with power, he was seen to be sparking a revolution – he was imprisoned and in the end he was executed by Herod.

I can’t help thinking that his passion for justice and fairness has many, many immediate parallels in today’s world. Such as:

- Women in Iran challenging the oppression they live under, demanding the freedom to uncover their heads. For this, dozens have lost their lives

- Citizens in China rebelling against the Covid policy, and being arrested and imprisoned, and possibly executed
- Back a few years ago, Nelson Mandela imprisoned for decades for seeking racial equality
- LGBT campaigners in many countries being imprisoned for breaking the law
- Whistle-blowers in big business and governments challenging corruption and abuse and being punished

When an individual feels compelled to challenge power, they are immediately putting themselves at risk. It's a costly act which can have dire consequences for the individual.

The commonest strategy by the authorities is to “nip it in the bud” – come down hard on the troublemaker before they can gather a significant following. But if that doesn't work, there will be laws brought in to deal with any uprisings.

Personally, I am very impressed by John the Baptist's success. He attracted crowds to the river Jordan, and his baptisms seem to have become quite fashionable despite his uncompromising criticism of people's behaviour.

I guess that there were several factors leading to his success – for a start he was 25 miles from Jerusalem, so he was well out of sight most of the time.

Then his theology was unarguable – like all the Old Testament prophets he quoted scripture and the Ten Commandments to challenge his listeners.

And what he was doing was novel – he invented baptism! It was a symbolic cleansing that fitted in well on a day out, and whilst it would have been a powerful experience, by the time you had walked 25 miles home again, you would have dried off, become weary, and then ordered a servant to bring you a glass of wine as you returned to your old lifestyle.

Significantly we don't read about John performing miracles – he didn't heal people, make the blind see or the lame walk. He did,

however, gather a group of disciples – I'd love to know what they did – did they also baptise people?

As a result, John continued his baptism ministry for many years. And in John's gospel (in Chapter 3) we are told that in due course, a little way away from John, Jesus began baptising in the Jordan as well; indeed becoming more successful than John. John was wonderfully humble about this, saying "He, Jesus, must increase, but I must decrease."

John the Baptist's ministry came to an abrupt end when he publicly reproved Herod for divorcing his first wife and unlawfully taking his sister-in-law (his brother's wife) as his second wife Herodias. This was too much for Herod – he imprisoned John and then had him executed.

In a sense Jesus took over where John had left off, and Jesus' ministry flourished for three years, before he too was arrested and executed. John was a forerunner and contemporary, their lives interwove, both challenging authority, seeking justice and risking all.

Well, the task isn't done – injustices abound, and challenging them can still be extremely costly.

But today is a day for rejoicing in the example of the courage of John the Baptist, who inspired Jesus, and modelled integrity.

Thank you, John, for your selfless example.

Amen.

The Nicene Creed

***I / We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.***

***I / We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.***

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

***I / We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.***

***I / We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
I / We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
I / We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.***

The Peace

In the tender mercy of our God,
the dayspring from on high shall break upon us,
to give light to those who dwell in darkness
and in the shadow of death
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with us.

Hymn – Hark the glad sound

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2blvj5-anE>

Hark, the glad sound! The Saviour comes,
the Saviour promised long!
Let every heart prepare a throne,
and every voice a song.

He comes the prisoners to release,
in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before Him burst,
the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace,
to enrich the humbled poor.

Our glad Hosannas, Prince of Peace,
thy welcome shall proclaim;
and heaven's eternal arches ring,
with thy beloved Name.

Words: Philip Dodridge
1702 - 1751

Prayers of Intercession

United in the company of all the faithful
and looking for the coming of the kingdom,
let us offer our prayers to God,
the source of all life and holiness.

Merciful Lord,
strengthen all Christian people by your Holy Spirit,
that we may live as a royal priesthood and a holy nation
to the praise of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Bless Robert our bishop, and all ministers of your Church,
that by faithful proclamation of your word
we may be built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets
into a holy temple in the Lord.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Empower us by the gift of your holy and life-giving Spirit,
that we may be transformed into the likeness of Christ
from glory to glory.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Give to the world and its peoples
the peace that comes from above,
that they may find Christ's way of freedom and life.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Hold in your embrace all who witness to your love in the
service of the poor and needy;
all those who minister to the sick and dying;
and all who bring light to those in darkness.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Touch and heal all those whose lives are scarred by sin
or disfigured by pain,
that, raised from death to life in Christ,
their sorrow may be turned to eternal joy.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Remember in your mercy all those gone before us,
who have been well-pleasing to you from eternity;
preserve in your faith your servants on earth,
guide us to your kingdom,
and grant us your peace at all times.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Hasten the day when many will come
from east and west, from north and south,
and sit at table in your kingdom.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We give you thanks
for the whole company of your saints in glory,
with whom in fellowship we join our prayers and praises;
by your grace may we, like them,
be made perfect in your love.

**Blessing and glory and wisdom,
thanksgiving and honour and power,
be to our God for ever and ever. Amen.**

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.
And 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,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

(For those in church, the Eucharistic prayer comes here)

Hymn - Hills of the North, rejoice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5LOPA7EqF0>

Hills of the North, rejoice;
river and mountain spring,
hark to the advent voice;
valley and lowland, sing;
though absent long, your Lord is nigh;
he judgment brings and victory.

Isles of the southern seas,
deep in your coral caves
pent be each warring breeze,
lulled be your restless waves:
he comes to reign with boundless sway,
and makes your wastes his great highway.

Lands of the East, awake,
soon shall your sons be free;
the sleep of ages break,
and rise to liberty.
on your far hills, long cold and grey,
has dawned the everlasting day.

Shores of the utmost West,
ye that have waited long,
unvisited, unblest,
break forth to swelling song;
high raise the note, that Jesus died,
yet lives and reigns, the Crucified.

Shout, while ye journey home;
songs be in every mouth;
lo, from the North we come,
from East, and West, and South.
City of God, the bond are free,
we come to live and reign in thee!

Words: Charles Edward Oakley
(1832 - 1865)

¶ Ending

We give you thanks, O Lord, for your heavenly gifts;
kindle in us the fire of your Spirit
that when your Christ comes again
we may shine as lights before his face;
who is alive and reigns now and for ever.

Amen.

The Blessing

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon us,
scatter the darkness from before our path,
and make us ready to meet him when he comes in glory;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always.

Amen

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