**Messy Church – 17th February 2024**

**Lent**

The activities are:

1. **John the Baptist preaching: snakes:** Matthew chapter 3, verses 1 to 12 (In the Celebration)
2. **Jesus’ baptism: doves:** Matthew chapter 3, verses 13 to 17
3. **The temptations of Jesus: bread rolls:** Matthew chapter 3, verses 1 to 11
4. **Jesus’ rejection at Nazareth: scroll:** Luke chapter 4, verses 16 to 30 (In the Celebration)
5. **Calling the first friends: boats, string nets:** Matthew chapter 4, verses 18 to 22
6. **Wedding at Cana: clay water jars:** John chapter2, verses 1 to 11

**Stories and Activities**

**1. John the Baptist preaching: snakes:** Matthew chapter 3, verses 1 to 12 (In the Celebration)

The account of John the Baptist preaching in the Jordan valley appears in all four Gospels, with slightly different emphasis in each one. You can find the stories in Mark chapter 1, Luke chapter 3 and John chapter 1.

John was Jesus’ cousin, about 6 months older. As an adult, he lived in the wilderness of the Jordan valley, probably not far from Jericho. His clothes were made from camel hair, with a leather belt, and he ate locusts – which are like large grasshoppers – and wild honey. He spent his time announcing that the Messiah – who the Jews had been waiting for for a long time – was coming soon, and telling people that they needed to be ready to meet him, by living better lives than they were already. He baptised people in the river Jordan, to symbolise their desire to change from the people they were, to the people they wanted to be. Being soaked in the river symbolised their sorrow and desire to be forgiven their sins. He told ordinary people to keep God’s laws, he told soldiers not to use their position to bully people, and he told those important people who came to see him that they were not as good as they thought they were – in fact, he called them “snakes”!

**You will need:** a paper plate, some colouring pencils or felt tip pens, a pair of scissors, a hole punch and some string or thread.

Colour the back of the plate however you like. When you have finished, draw a spiral line from the centre to the outside edge, and cut along it, making the very middle of the plate a little wider, for the head of the snake. Punch a hole in the head, and tie string or thread through the hole to hang up your snake.

**Talk about:** being sorry about bad things you have done, and how you can show you are sorry. What happens if you have said sorry and then you do the same thing again?

**2. Jesus’ baptism: doves:** Matthew chapter 3, verses 13 to 17

This story is also told in all four gospels, although the version in John is the story as told by John the Baptist himself. You can find it in Mark chapter 1, Luke chapter 3 and John chapter 1.

Jesus arrived where John was talking and baptising. John pointed him out to the crowd that was already there, saying that he himself was definitely not as good as him. Jesus waited for John to finish baptising for the day. Then he asked John to baptise him. John said that it should be the other way round – Jesus should baptise him, John! Jesus said that for the time being, it should be John baptising Jesus, and John agreed.

They went into the river together, and John baptised Jesus. As they came out of the water, all four gospels say, the Spirit of God landed on Jesus, in the form of a dove.

We have a couple of dove patterns you can complete:

**For the origami dove,** **you will need:** a square of paper, and the instructions which come with this booklet. There is also a video, link given, on how to fold the dove.

Fold the dove as given in the instructions – or watch the video and follow that.

**For the fan-fold wing dove,** **you will need:** a print out of the dove, on card, or on paper which you can stick to card, and a piece of paper – scrap paper will do, plus scissors.

Cut out the dove from the card, including the slit in the middle. (children may need help with this part). Fan fold the piece of paper, carefully put the folded paper through the slit, and then spread the wings out. If you make a hole in the back of the dove, and put string or thread through it, your flying dove can hang up.

**Talk about:** the differences between baptism in Jesus’ time, and baptism today – John was baptising adults to signify their wanting to change their way of life – dying to the old way – and most often babies are baptised these days, who cannot choose for themselves, nor have they done anything wrong. There are some churches who only baptise adults – they choose, and the symbolism is the same.

**3 The temptations of Jesus: bread rolls:** Matthew chapter 3, verses 1 to 11

The temptations of Jesus are only in the first three gospels, and they are not always the same way round, although the first one is the same in each case. The other versions can be found in Mark chapter 1 and Luke chapter 4.

After Jesus was baptised, he went further into the wilderness around the Jordan, to think and pray about how he would fulfil his ministry. The bible says he spent 40 days and 40 nights thinking about it, without anything to eat, and then the “Tempter” or the “Devil”, depending which translation you use, came and talked to him. There are three temptations, to each of which Jesus gave much the same sort of answer – a quote from the bible about each thing, saying no, not that way. The temptations were:

1. To turn stones into bread (Jesus was hungry). This was about getting people to follow him by giving them the food they needed, easily, so they would depend on him. Jesus said that people need more than bread to live (he quotes Deuteronomy chapter 8 verse 3).
2. To throw himself off a high point of the Temple, in Jerusalem, because God would not let him be hurt, so the people who saw it would follow him because of the miracle. This was about being famous, so people would follow him – like we might be interested in a footballer or a singer. Jesus said that expecting God to protect him when he was doing something silly was not a good way to get followers (he quotes Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 16).
3. To turn away from God and worship the Tempter/Devil, who will then make sure that people follow him. This was about giving up on God’s way, which Jesus had been born to follow. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 13, and says that he will serve only God, for that is the correct way.

We are going to make bread rolls, which look like stones (but taste much better!)

**You will need:** a bag of bread mix, the instructions on the pack, some hot water. (Wrights white bread mix takes the shortest time, and works fine. If you want to use a different mix, it may take longer, but if you have the time, go ahead. You can also make bread rolls starting from scratch, with yeast and flour, but again, this takes longer than we have in our session.

Make the rolls according to the instructions on the packet. (or to your own recipe)

**Talk about:** the need everyone has for food to eat. In northern Europe, bread is the most common basic food – but in other parts of the world, other things are – rice, pasta

**4. Jesus’ rejection at Nazareth: scroll:** Luke chapter 4, verses 16 to 30 (In the Celebration)

This story only appears in Luke.

When Jesus left the desert, he went home to Nazareth. Luke suggests that he was already talking in synagogues before he arrived there. On the Sabbath (Saturday) he went to the synagogue, as he usually did. When it came to the bible reading, he offered to read, and was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. (Books were not like they are now, they were long strips of vellum (goat skin), wound onto wooden sticks and kept rolled up.) Jesus read the passage from Isaiah, chapter 61 verses 1 to 3. (“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has appointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, “) And then he sat down – preachers sat down! – and said “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” At first, they were pleased, and then they thought, “hang on a minute – isn’t this Joseph’s son? Jesus said that they would expect him to do in Nazareth the miracles he had done in other places, but that God didn’t work like that – in the Old Testament (which was all the Bible they had) the prophets did miracles for people who were not part of the Jewish family. The people in the synagogue were very angry at Jesus because of this, and they tried to throw him off a nearby hill, but he went through the crowd and away from them, to live elsewhere.

We are going to make a scroll.

**You will need:** a piece of paper (scrap will do), two pieces of garden cane – a little longer than the paper is wide, glue, and a pen or pencil to write with.

Hold the paper so that it is wider than it is long. Run a little glue down each side, and stick the garden cane across the sides. In the middle of the paper, you could write the words:

*The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has appointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. Isaiah 61: 1 – 2*

**Talk about:** being sure of who you are – imagine what you would do if someone asked you if you could do something you had never done before. Would you try, or would you be too worried about getting it wrong? Never be scared to try!

**5. Calling the first friends: boats, string nets:** Matthew chapter 4, verses 18 to 22

This story is in all four gospels, with minor variations. You can find it in Mark chapter 1, Luke chapter 5 and John chapter 1.

Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, which is a large lake – it is still there – the river Jordan flows in at the north end, and out at the south end. There were fishing villages all round the lake, but in Jesus’ time, the two sides of the lake were in different Roman provinces. Jesus lived on the west side. As Jesus was walking along, he saw two fishermen, brothers, Simon and Andrew, fishing. He said to them “Follow me, and I will teach you to fish for people.” They went with him. A little further along, he saw two other brothers, James and John, mending nets in their father’s boat. Their father was called Zebedee. Jesus called to the brothers to come as well, and they did. Later on, Simon was called Peter, but that is a different story.

We have a number of activities here – choose which one(s) you will do.

**Boats – origami, or coloured and folded boats, or colour in the picture**

**For the folded boat, you will need:** a print out of the boat (preferably on card), colouring pencils or pens, scissors, glue, a stick for the mast, and a piece of paper for the sail.

Colour the boat in and cut it out. Stick the ends together with the tabs at the bottom, and a little glue for the bows, and glue the two tabs in the middle together. Make a hole in the centre strut for the mast, and stick the paper sail to the mast.

**For the origami boat, you will need:** a square of paper – cut a square from a piece of A4 – scrap paper will be fine – and the instructions with this pack.

Follow the instructions to make the boat.

**For the boat to colour in, you will need:** a print out of the picture of the fishing boat, colouring pencils or pens.

Colour in the boat as you choose.

**For the string net picture, you will need:** a piece of paper (scrap is fine), some lengths of string, glue, scissors, colouring pencils or pens, imagination

Stick lengths of string to the paper to make a net. Fill in the spaces in the net with small pictures – fish, people, places

**Talk about:** changing your job – ask your parents what it is like to change job – and especially to re-train to do a completely different job. Not everyone does that – many people do the same job in different companies – but some people decide they want to do something completely different. What sort of job would you like?

**6. The wedding at Cana: clay water jars:** John chapter 2 verses 1 to 11

This story is only in John’s gospel. It takes place in Galilee, while Jesus is staying with his mother and brothers.

They all, including at least some of Jesus’ friends, went to a wedding. In those days, weddings were very formal, and very long. Part way through the party, Jesus’ mum told him that the wine was running out. According to the story, Jesus didn’t seem to think it was anything to do with him, but Mary told the servants to do as Jesus told them. Presently, Jesus told them to fill up the water jars – there were six stone water jars, used for washing hands, there. So the servants filled them up to the brim. Then Jesus told them to take a cupful from one of the jars to the man who was running the catering; they did that, and the man tasted the water – which was now wine! He didn’t know where it had come from, though the servants did. He called the bridegroom, and told him off for keeping the best wine, instead of serving it first. This, said John, was Jesus’ first miracle.

We are going to make water jars.

**You will need:** clay, a little water to keep your hands damp (it is better to work with damp hands, or the clay just dries out and crumbles), paper towel to stand it on, so that it doesn’t mark your table.

Make your lump of clay into a jar, with a flat bottom so that it stands up. If you want to, when it is thoroughly dry, you can paint it. (it will take at least two days to be dry enough to paint)

If you don’t have clay, you can use play doh. If you use home made play doh, that also can be left to dry and then painted!

**Talk about:** being helped when things have gone wrong – or being the helper. The groom had not provided enough wine for the party, and Jesus provided what was needed.

**Celebration**

Sing O Lord, all the world belongs to you <https://youtu.be/jJMaNZ84xsw?si=QFLkDXv0hLDXxM-T>

Do you like pancakes? Did you have some on Tuesday? We made 116 pancakes at church for Pancake Parlour. Tuesday was Shrove Tuesday. Shrove, or Shrive, is an old word for getting rid of your sins, that’s the things you’ve done wrong. Ash Wednesday is the start of Lent when, because Jesus went hungry in the desert, people used to only eat very plain food, and they used up milk and eggs making pancakes first.

But before Jesus went into the desert he met with John the Baptist. John had been standing by the river Jordan and telling everyone that the Messiah was coming and they had to get ready. He was very rude to people! He called them names, particularly the religious leaders. He said they were snakes, and they needed to change their ways. Do you like snakes? Not that many people do, because some snakes are poisonous or can hurt you in other ways. Snakes are also considered to be sneaky.

We are going to make snakes out of paper plates.

If the people who came to hear John said that they wanted to change, John would baptise them. He would take them into the river Jordan and duck them under the water to symbolise washing away sins. Jesus went to meet him and asked to be baptised as well. John realised that Jesus was the Messiah, and didn’t want to baptise him, he thought it should have been the other way round, but Jesus told him he should. This was when the dove came down.

After that Jesus went into the desert, and then he went back to Galilee, where he started preaching and teaching and healing people. During this time he called a number of people to come and join him. At least four of these were fishermen.

Sing Big man standing by the blue waterside <https://youtu.be/qDX_lxHdg6Y?si=5cgB8CLnIsb3AVP9>

The first miracle that Jesus did was at the wedding at Cana, where he changed water into wine. But he soon did other miracles, especially healing people. Everyone thought it was great that he did things like this, but one time, Jesus went to the local synagogue (that’s a bit like a church, but it involved a lot more talking and debate – synagogue is a Greek word, the Hebrew word is Knesset which is what the parliament is called in Israel). At first everyone was happy, but when Jesus said that he had come to fulfil Old Testament teaching people started to say that he was just Joseph’s son, so couldn’t be special, and they rejected him. When you are a child, particularly if your mum or dad is well known, you are often known as “So-and-so’s son or daughter” you may even be known as someone’s grandchild. My father was a Methodist minister, and I remember the first time he was introduced to a group as Clive’s father, rather than me being known as his son! Sometimes, if we live in the same place all our lives, it is difficult for people to realise that we are different. This was even more the case for Jesus, who was very different.

In the synagogue, Jesus read from a scroll. We’ll make a scroll. What would you write on your scroll?

Let’s pray.

Dear God at Lent we remember when Jesus started his ministry. As we grow older, let us know what you want us to do and, if we’ve not started already, tell us how and when to start.

Amen

Sing One more step along the world I go. <https://youtu.be/7PXV3dwaeNU?si=gijtWyMZHdN5eWde>

Next Messy Church is 16th March. See you then.

Enjoy our celebration on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw>

Then have tea or a treat if it isn’t tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (if you want to send pictures that you don’t want shared, just tell me. I’ll only share the one’s you’re happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team

We’ll have a Zoom meeting open for those who can’t come to the church. Our end of Zoom will go on YouTube during the celebration, but we won’t put pictures from your end on. Contact me if you want the link for Zoom. Look out for the broadcast on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw/videos>