



**SUNDAY 13 DECEMBER 2020 – THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION**

COLLECT

**God for whom we watch and wait,
you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son:
give us courage to speak the truth,
to hunger for justice,
and to suffer for the cause of right,
with Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Psalm 126

- 1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, ◆
then were we like those who dream.
- 2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter ◆
and our tongue with songs of joy.
- 3 Then said they among the nations, ◆
'The Lord has done great things for them.'
- 4 The Lord has indeed done great things for us, ◆
and therefore we rejoiced.
- 5 Restore again our fortunes, O Lord, ◆
as the river beds of the desert.
- 6 Those who sow in tears ◆
shall reap with songs of joy.
- 7 Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed, ◆
will come back with shouts of joy,
bearing their sheaves with them.

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1 Thessalonians 5.16-24

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise the words of prophets, 21 but test everything; hold fast to what is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil. 23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

John 1.6-8 + 19-28

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

19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' " as the prophet Isaiah said. 24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, 27 the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." 28 This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Reflection – from Mary-Lou

Last week we heard St Mark telling us how John the Baptist burst onto the scene, announcing the coming of God's Messiah. This week, we hear more about the Baptist from St John's Gospel. In this reading it seems important that we understand just who the Baptist is, and more importantly, who he isn't. He is not 'the Light', he comes as a witness to the Light!

John the Baptist became a significant public figure and gained a lot of followers. But he is definitely not into self-promotion. Did you notice in our reading, how much of the time he is described as telling people who he ISN'T?

Are you the Messiah? I am not.

Are you Elijah? I am not.

Are you the prophet? I am not.

In some frustration the crowds shout *Well, who ARE you then?? Tell us!*

What do you have to say about yourself??

And all John will tell them is '*I am the voice*'. Just the voice.

He is of course quoting one of the prophets, the prophet Isaiah:

I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord.

Throughout his short, but powerful ministry, John is like a signpost – a signpost pointing away from himself, even though he was amazingly popular and embodied both moral and religious power for a time. John is constant and courageous:

- Always pointing AWAY from himself;
- Always pointing to the TRUTH, to what GOD is doing, and finally
- Always pointing TOWARDS Jesus.

I'm not important, he says to the crowds coming for baptism – but you need to get ready, you need to prepare, because God is on the move! John is the voice, but the message is God's. The voice, crying in the wilderness, is a sign for those with ears to hear. For John points to the coming of the Christ: to the One who comes in the Spirit of the Lord, anointed by God; the One who comes to bring GOOD NEWS to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives and liberty to the prisoners; he comes, in the name of the Lord. This is the promised one. God is on the move.

There is something precious here for us, living as we do in a time of such anxiety, fear and uncertainty. God is on the move. God is still in charge. And God's Messiah, the true Light, comes now into the darkness of this world.

There's been much talk of Christmas not being Christmas this year, of Christmas being cancelled. It's not true, it will never be true. It will be very different – but no virus or anything else could keep the Christ Child from coming! Some do not know that though.

John provides us with such a fine example, and the challenge for us to be signposts too, pointing constantly and courageously. We can point to:

- Christmas being less about ourselves, and more about others,
- God's truth: God is with us, at work, on the move, even now, and – above all -
- we can point to Jesus.

In these remaining days of Advent, be a signpost that gently reminds those around you Christmas is really not anything to do with presents, and too much to eat and drink. It's about Jesus, who is here among us, and is born anew this Christmastide. Our Emmanuel. For although we'll have a very different Christmas in 2020, Christ is the Light that can never be put out, not even in this darkness.

And that is Good News! Amen.

*No ear may hear his coming;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still
The dear Christ enters in.*