



# WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



***THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST***

**13<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2020**

**ADVENT 3**

<b><u>READINGS FOR TODAY</u></b>		<b>PARISH OFFICE:</b> Please phone or use e-mail to make contact <b>TEL:</b> 01252 331161; <b>e-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk">office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk</a> <b>BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS &amp; BAPTISMS</b> – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517 or 331161 <b>WEBSITE:</b> <a href="http://www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk">www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk</a>
Isaiah	61 v 1 – 4, 8 - end	
1 Thessalonians	5 v 16 - 24	
John	1 v 6 – 8, 19 - 28	



## **CHRISTMAS ARRANGEMENTS**

We will be putting a Nativity Themed Service online for use on Christmas Eve afternoon, as there can't be the usual Christingle Service in church this year.

There will also be **NO** Midnight Mass in church either. Instead we shall be posting a link to the Midnight Mass from Guildford Cathedral. Also, we shall be putting a service of Evening Worship online for you to use on Christmas Eve evening, or at any other time during Christmas.

On Christmas Day there will be an 8 am Holy Communion in St Peter's Centre and at 10 am a said Holy Communion in church. We are asking you to book in for these services as space will be limited, due to social distancing rules.

On Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> there will be an 8 am Holy Communion in St Peter's Centre and a 10 am Holy Communion in church.

**CHRISTMAS CARDS** – we cannot use the usual pigeon hole system this year. Please hand your cards to a steward at the door, they will then be sorted and handed out to recipients at the next service i.e. handed in on Sunday, available on the following Wednesday or Sunday. Please don't look for them yourself, or handle other people's cards. Please do not give them to others in church personally, to keep contact down.

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### **READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – ADVENT 4**

2 Samuel 7 v 1 – 11, 16; Romans 16 v 25 – end;  
Luke 1 v 26 - 38

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**ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN** - If you would like prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 This is a confidential service.

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**CARE AND SHARE** - If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. for the shelves outside church, please leave items on the doorstep of the Rectory.

It would be nice to have some Christmas treats to put out this month! Thank you.

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### **ST PETER'S CHURCH CALENDARS**

Ideal Christmas presents, our calendar for 2021 has pictures of St Peter's and room for appointments. Only £5 they are now available – at the back in church.

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### **FROM ANOTHER CHURCH BULLETIN**

Miss Charlene Mason sang 'I will not pass this way again,' giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What Is Hell?'  
Come early and listen to our choir practice.

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Please pray for the souls of all the recently Departed, among them: ELIZABETH STOKES (Liz's mother); PETER ROBERTS

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### **ONLINE ADVENT COURSE CONTINUES THIS WEDNESDAY**

The course is entitled 'Hope' and is by John Birch – a theme which seems particularly relevant this year! There is one more Bible Study and discussion: Hope for the future Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> at 7 – 30 pm. You can join online by following the link on the website.

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### **CAROL SINGING**

We are doing some socially-distanced carol singing on **SUNDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER** starting at 3 pm from St Peter's Centre. Will visit Foreman Park and some of the houses on the new estate. All are welcome to join us.

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## Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

*If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand.*

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

(L) Reveal among us the light of your presence

All: that we may behold your power and glory.

*The third candle on the Advent Wreath, (or another candle,) is lit, and this prayer is said, reminding us of 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.

*This hymn is said or sung:*

1. On Jordan's bank, the Baptist's cry  
Announces that the Lord is nigh;  
Awake, and hearken, for he brings  
Glad tidings of the King of kings!

2. Then cleansed be every breast from sin;  
Make straight the way for God within;  
Prepare we in our hearts a home  
Where such a mighty guest may come.

3. For Thou art our Salvation, Lord,  
Our Refuge, and our great Reward.  
Without Thy grace we waste away,  
Like flowers that wither and decay.

4. To heal the sick stretch out Thine hand,  
And bid the fallen sinner stand;  
Shine forth, and let Thy light restore  
Earth's own true loveliness once more.

5. All praise, eternal Son, to Thee  
Whose advent sets Thy people free,  
Whom, with the Father, we adore,  
And Holy Ghost, forevermore.

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before  
us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,  
so may the light of your presence, O God,  
set our hearts on fire with love for you;  
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) 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:

All: God, through Jesus Christ,  
will judge the secret thoughts of all:  
Lord, have mercy.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'  
will enter the kingdom of heaven:  
Christ, have mercy.

Let anyone who has an ear  
listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches:  
Lord, have mercy.

All: May God our Father have mercy on us, forgive us our  
sins, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

*We now say 'A Song of God's Herald' together:*

All God will feed his flock like a shepherd,  
and gather the lambs in his arms.

- 1 Go up to a high mountain,  
herald of good tidings to Zion; ♦  
lift up your voice with strength,  
herald of good tidings to Jerusalem.
- 2 Lift up your voice, fear not; ♦  
say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!'
- 3 See, the Lord God comes with might, ♦  
and his arm rules for him.
- 4 Behold, his reward is with him, ♦  
and his recompense before him.
- 5 God will feed his flock like a shepherd, ♦  
and gather the lambs in his arms;
- 6 He will carry them in his breast, ♦  
and gently lead those that are with young.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All God will feed his flock like a shepherd,  
and gather the lambs in his arms.

*We now say the collect for today Advent 3:*

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.

*Read Isaiah 61 v 1 – 4 & 8 to end followed by Psalm 126  
concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as  
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

*Read 1 Thessalonians 5 v 16 - 24*

(L) Alleluia, alleluia.

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

All: Alleluia.

*Now read John 1 v 6 – 8 & 19 - 28*

*Here are some thoughts on today's readings from Fr Keith:*

If you go to a pop concert or the recording of a show at a TV studio, there is usually a 'warm-up' act on first, to get the audience in the mood for the main attraction. Sometimes these acts go on to have famous careers of their own, but more often than not they are destined to be forgotten, outshone by the star that they were supporting.

Now, you might think that John the Baptist ought to be seen as just the 'warm-up' act to Jesus, the 'star attraction', if so then it is, perhaps, a little surprising that once Jesus came onto the scene John didn't just fade away. For a while in Jesus' ministry John is still there in the background. He sends some of his followers to ask Jesus whether he *is* the one they have been waiting for. We hear of his beheading. Then, even after his death, we read in Acts 19, post the resurrection of Jesus, that Paul comes across followers of John still in existence at Ephesus, who hadn't heard of the Holy Spirit and only knew of the baptism of John.

The gospel writers all mention John the Baptist and give him a prominent role in their story, and the church has always given him a place of honour, recognising his continued importance, even in the light of all that Jesus did for us. Why is that, we might wonder? Why didn't he just get pushed to one side once the story of the cross and resurrection took centre stage in the Christian church? Clearly, all four evangelists regarded John as having a lasting contribution to make to the 'Good News' that they were writing about. So, on this third Sunday of Advent, when John is our focus, it is worth spending some time looking at John again, and seeing what relevance he might be to us today as we try to be spreaders of the 'Good News'.

A couple of weeks ago, I spoke about how the words describing John, that are found in the canticle the 'Benedictus,' that is said at Morning Prayer, can be applied to us. Like him we are called to prepare the way for Jesus, and make known to people the salvation that can be theirs by the forgiveness of all their sins. But I think we can go even further than that in recognising the continuing importance of John the Baptist for us in the church in 2020.

It seems that John struggled with doubts at times, just like many people do today. When he baptised Jesus, we are told that the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove, and a voice from heaven confirmed that He was God's Son. Yet we find John, later, questioning whether Jesus was indeed the One they were all waiting for, presumably, because Jesus wasn't the sort of Messiah that John had expected. Jesus replies by referring him back to Isaiah 61 that we heard this morning - 'he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed' and Jesus also points to other parts of Isaiah where there are references to the healing and restoration to wholeness that accompanied Jesus' words.

In the light of this perhaps we need to keep asking ourselves what we expect of Jesus? Do we sometimes have doubts, like John, because Jesus doesn't seem to be measuring up to what we thought he should be doing for us or others? Do we need reminding, that He really does know best, or are we guilty of trying to mould Jesus into the figure *we think he should be*, rather than seeking to get to know the reality of who Jesus actually is. Maybe, we need to spend more time listening and watching in prayer, rather than getting carried away by our own imagined 'wisdom'.

Another thing that is relevant about John the Baptist, in my view, is his example of boldness in confronting those who needed to be confronted. John literally stepped outside the norms of society in answer to God's call. His was a lonely voice - 'crying in the wilderness'. People who wanted to

engage with him were forced to come out to him, to leave the security of the city behind. Some listened and were willing to step outside too, others retreated to the life that they were familiar and comfortable with. Of course, Jesus, too, worked mainly on the margins, but John led the way, and with his uncompromising preaching was already making waves before Jesus came onto the scene.

John called the people who were looked up to - the Pharisees and Sadducees - a 'brood of vipers' and told them they needed to repent, in no uncertain terms. He also stood up to King Herod for marrying Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and that cost him his head! Are we ever as brave as John in calling, so called 'respectable' people to account, either as individuals or as a church? And what about ourselves? What do John's words say to us about the fate of those who *do not* bear good fruit: 'even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire'? In the Advent hymn 'Hark! A herald voice is calling; Christ is nigh it seems to say,' there is the line 'startled by the solemn warning let the earth-bound soul arise'. John the Baptist's message about the judgement that is coming is the solemn warning that is meant for *us* as much as those who were listening to him long ago. Are we, then, 'startled' enough to look again at our own lives, be realistic about how much we are 'bearing good fruit' and do something about it, to improve, if we're not?

Just from these few examples I believe we can see that John the Baptist is still very relevant for us today. He's not just to be regarded as the 'last of the prophets' of the Old Testament, preparing the way for Jesus' first coming, and so made irrelevant once Jesus had come. Rather, 2000 years later, he still gives our generation a 'solemn warning'.

We can identify with John's humanity, through the doubts that he expressed, and learn with him to accept that we can't put Jesus into whatever box we would like to put him into. We can learn, too, from his directness in confronting sinners of whatever class or profession. Also his willingness to put Jesus first, and not seek glory for himself is another lesson for us - 'the one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. In our witness it should be never be about glory for, but glory for Jesus alone.

This Advent, then, let us pray earnestly for the courage to follow John's example in all these things, heed his solemn warning, and so become bearers of the good fruit that Jesus expects from all who follow Him. Amen.

*Now pause for your own reflections.*

(L): We now affirm our faith in the words of the Creed:

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

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.

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

(L) Now it is time to awake out of sleep,  
All: for the night is far spent and the day is at hand.

(L) Now is our salvation nearer than when we first  
believed,  
All: for the night is far spent.

(L) Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness  
and put on the armour of light,  
All: for the day is at hand.

(L) Put on the Lord Jesus Christ  
and make no provision for the flesh,  
All: for the night is far spent and the day is at hand.

We now say 'The Benedictus' together:

All: Look towards the east, O Jerusalem,  
and see the glory that is coming from God.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦  
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦  
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦  
to save us from our enemies,  
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦  
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham  
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦  
holy and righteous in his sight  
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the  
Most High, ♦  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦  
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the  
shadow of death, ♦  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

All: Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All: Look towards the east, O Jerusalem,  
and see the glory that is coming from God.

Now we turn to God in a time of prayer, written today by  
Fr Keith:

Let us pray for strength and courage to follow the example  
of John the Baptist and speak out with boldness about the  
need for repentance in our troubled world. Let us ask for  
God's continued guidance in how best to bring the Good  
News of Jesus to those who have yet to hear the message  
of salvation, and to those who have so far rejected it.

Silence

Heavenly Father, help us to learn from the life and  
preaching of John the Baptist in our witness to your  
saving love. Bless all members of the church throughout  
the world, and renew us, this Advent, with enthusiasm and  
courage to prepare the way for the second coming of your  
beloved Son.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the world, divided and torn apart by wars  
and violence, by greed and selfishness, by prejudice and  
hatred. Let us pray for world leaders that they make be  
always seeking justice and peace. And, let us pray for all  
who are working to support those who are suffering  
because of people's inhumanity to one another.

Silence

Heavenly Father, look in mercy, and forgive us for all that  
we have done as a human race to mar the beauty of the  
world that you made. Help us to get better at loving one  
another as you always love us. May we learn to treat all  
that you have given us with greater respect, serve one  
another as Jesus served us, and develop the gifts and  
talents that lie within us for good.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for this local community, especially those  
who are feeling lonely, isolated and afraid. Let us give  
thanks for all who have volunteered in practical ways to  
help people in this village through the pandemic. And let  
us pray for those who are working on the frontline in the  
NHS, care homes and the emergency services, whose  
lives are often in danger.

Silence

Heavenly Father, we give thanks for all who are working  
for the good of others in this place, without counting the  
cost to themselves. Bless those who give so generously  
of their time and talents, and comfort those who find this  
time of year very difficult because they are alone and  
fearful.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Let us give thanks for those who have worked so hard in developing the vaccines against the Corona virus. Let us pray for those who are ill because of the virus, at home or in hospital. And let us remember those suffering from other diseases, especially those whose treatments have been delayed or cancelled. In a moment of silence let us name before God those known to us who are sick at this time.

*Silence*

Heavenly Father, we pray for all who are sick and suffering today, may they know your loving presence with them and experience your healing love. May their families and friends also feel your support and loving presence. And we ask your continuing guidance for all involved in developing more new vaccines and treatments.

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

Let us pray for those who have died, especially Elizabeth Stokes and Peter Roberts who have died recently, and all whose anniversary of death occurs at this time. Let us also pray for those who mourn.

*Silence*

Heavenly Father, we give you thanks that through the death and resurrection of your Son, you have opened to us the path to eternal life. Welcome into your Kingdom we pray, those who we have now remembered, may they find rest and peace forever in your nearer presence, and may their families and friends who mourn them, find strength and hope in your unfailing love.

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

Heavenly Father, as Christmas gets nearer, help us to use the remaining time of Advent to grow in our faith, put our trust more fully in you, and bear fruit in our witness to the salvation which comes to all who repent and have faith in Jesus:

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

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of Him  
Who brings good news, good news  
Proclaiming peace, announcing news of happiness  
Our God reigns, our God reigns

*Our God reigns, our God reigns  
Our God reigns, our God reigns*

You watchmen lift your voices joyfully as one  
Shout for your King, your King  
See eye to eye the Lord restoring Sion  
our God reigns, our God reigns!

*Our God reigns, our God reigns  
Our God reigns, our God reigns*

Waste places of Jerusalem break forth with joy  
We are redeemed, redeemed  
The Lord has saved and comforted His people  
our God reigns, our God reigns!

*Our God reigns, our God reigns  
Our God reigns, our God reigns*

Ends of the earth, see the salvation of our God  
Jesus is Lord, is Lord  
Before the nations He has bared His holy arm  
our God reigns, our God reigns!

*Our God reigns, our God reigns  
Our God reigns, our God reigns*

*Let us pray:*

Almighty God,  
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
and to put on the armour of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life,  
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us  
in great humility; that on the last day,  
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty  
to judge the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through him who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

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. Amen.

(L) May 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 grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us, and  
remain with us, today and always. Amen.

(L) Let us bless the Lord.  
All: Thanks be to God.

All: May the souls of the faithful departed, through the  
mercy of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory.  
Amen.

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### Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,  
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.  
O Lord, make haste to help us.

Reveal among us the light of your presence  
that we may behold your power and glory.

*A lamp or candle may be lit.*

Blessed are you, Sovereign God,  
creator of light and darkness,  
to you be glory and praise for ever.  
As evening falls, you renew your promise  
to reveal among us the light of your presence.  
May your word be a lantern to our feet  
and a light upon our path  
that we may behold your coming among us.  
Strengthen us in our stumbling weakness  
and free our tongues to sing your praise.  
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Blessed be God for ever.

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

Creator of the stars of night,  
thy people's everlasting light,  
O Jesu, Saviour of us all,  
regard thy servants when they call.

Thou, grieving at the bitter cry  
of all creation doomed to die,  
didst come to save a ruined race  
with healing gifts of heavenly grace.

Thou camest, Bridegroom of the bride,  
as drew the world to evening-tide,  
proceeding from a virgin shrine,  
the Son of Man, yet Lord divine.

At thy great name, exalted now,  
all knees must bend, all hearts must bow,  
and things in heaven and earth shall own  
that thou art Lord and King alone.

To thee, O holy One, we pray  
our judge in that tremendous day,  
preserve us, while we dwell below,  
from every onslaught of the foe.

All praise, eternal Son, to thee,  
whose advent sets thy people free,  
whom with the Father we adore,  
and Spirit blest, for evermore.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,  
we pray with one heart and mind:

*Silence is kept.*

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,  
so may your mercy come down upon us  
to cleanse our hearts  
and set us free to sing your praise  
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 26; Tue 50; Wed 82; Thurs 44; Fri 49; Sat 57 ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.  
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between the two readings we say:*

*All: Surely I am coming soon.  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

- 1 'Behold, I am coming soon', says the Lord,  
'and bringing my reward with me, ♦  
to give to everyone according to their deeds.
- 2 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,  
the first and the last, ♦  
the beginning and the end.'
- 3 Blessed are those who do God's commandments,  
that they may have the right to the tree of life, ♦  
and may enter into the city through the gates.
- 4 'I, Jesus, have sent my angel to you, ♦  
with this testimony for all the churches.
- 5 'I am the root and the offspring of David, ♦  
I am the bright morning star.'
- 6 'Come!' say the Spirit and the Bride; ♦  
'Come!' let each hearer reply.

7 Come forward, you who are thirsty, ♦  
let those who desire take the water of life as a gift.

*All To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb ♦  
be blessing and honour and glory and might,  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

*All Surely I am coming soon.  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

*Readings:*

Monday Isaiah 38 v 1 – 8, 21 - 22; Matt. 16 v 13 - end  
Tuesday Isaiah 38 v 9 - 20; Matthew 17 v 1 - 13  
Wednesday: Isaiah 39; Matthew 17 v 14 - 21  
Thursday: Zephaniah 1 v 1 to 2 v 3; Matt. 17 v 22 - end  
Friday: Zephaniah 3 v 1 - 13; Matthew 18 v 1 - 20  
Saturday: Zephaniah 3 v 14 - end; Matt. 18 v 21 - end

*After the second reading we say:*

My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:  
in your word is my hope.

*All My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:  
in your word is my hope.*

There is forgiveness with you,  
so that you shall be feared.

*All In your word is my hope.*

Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit.

*All My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:  
in your word is my hope.*

*Gospel Cantic: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)*

*At the beginning and end of the Magnificat we say on  
Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday;*

*All Lord Jesus, you are the one who is to come,  
the one whom we await with longing hearts.*

*On Thursday 17 December – O Sapientia*

*All: O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most  
High, reaching from one end to the other mightily,  
and sweetly ordering all things:  
Come and teach us the way of prudence.*

*On Friday 18 December – O Adonai*

*All: O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel,  
who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush  
and gave him the law on Sinai:  
Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.*

*On Saturday 19 December – O Radix Jesse*

*All: O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the  
peoples; before you kings will shut their mouths,  
to you the nations will make their prayer:  
Come and deliver us, and delay no longer.*

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit  
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on  
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the  
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his  
name.

- 3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation to generation.
- 4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit.
- 5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.
- 6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.
- 7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to remember his promise of mercy.
- 8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

*Repeat what was said at the beginning of the Magnificat for the appropriate day.*

*Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.*

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collects for this week:

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.

Almighty God,  
 give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
 and to put on the armour of light,  
 now in the time of this mortal life,  
 in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us  
 in great humility; that on the last day,  
 when he shall come again in his glorious majesty  
 to judge the living and the dead,  
 we may rise to the life immortal;  
 through him who is alive and reigns with you,  
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

The Lord will come and not be slow;  
 His footsteps cannot err;  
 Before Him righteousness shall go,  
 His royal harbinger.

Truth from the earth, like to a flower,  
 Shall bud and blossom free,  
 And justice, from her heavenly bower,  
 Bless all humanity.

The nations all whom Thou hast made  
 Shall come, and all shall frame  
 To bow them low before Thee, Lord!  
 And glorify Thy Name!

Surely to such as do him fear  
 salvation is at hand!  
 And glory shall ere long appear  
 to dwell within our land.

Thee will I praise, O Lord, my God!  
 Thee honour and adore  
 With my whole heart; and blaze abroad  
 Thy Name forevermore!

For great Thou art, and wonders great  
 By Thy strong hand are done:  
 Thou in thine everlasting seat  
 Remainest God alone.

Let us pray:

Loving God, at this time of crisis when so many are suffering, we pray for our nation and our world. Give our leaders wisdom, our Health Service strength, our people hope. Lead us through these parched and difficult days to the fresh springs of joy and comfort that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Loving Father God be with us in our distress: with our families, friends and neighbours, our country and our world. Give health to the sick, hope to the fearful, and comfort to the mourners. Give wisdom to our frontline and key workers, insight to our government and patience to us all; Overcome disease with the power of your new life, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### A Family Prayer

Loving God, you know us and all that we are facing. We thank you that we can come to you as we are – with all our fears and concerns, our difficulties and challenges. Please draw close to each of us and those we remember before you now. Bring to us your peace and comfort. And fill us with your Spirit that we may be bearers of your grace and hope to others. As a country protect us, encourage us and keep us. In the name of your Son Jesus we pray. Amen

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

May the Lord, when he comes, find us watching and waiting and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

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### SERMON FROM BISHOP ANDREW Advent 3, John the Baptist

It was the priest and astronomer Nicholas Copernicus who discovered that the earth revolved around the sun, rather than the other way round. Before his time, it was generally believed that the earth was the centre of the Universe, with everything else revolving around it. But as Copernicus studied the stars, so he recognised that that couldn't be right: that it was the sun, not the earth, that was central. Suddenly, it seemed, the earth wasn't quite as important as people had always imagined. If Copernicus was right, we were just another planet and not the centre of anything at all.

And as we come to our second dose of John the Baptist in our lectionary readings this Advent – this time the perspective of the fourth gospel rather than the second – there are some clear differences between the two portraits. For one thing, Mark doesn't *frame* his picture in anything like the way that John does – the Baptist just bursts onto the scene in Mark, with only the briefest of introductions and none of the grandeur of John's great opening, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word as God'. For another thing, *John* doesn't paint many of the details in *Mark's* account, with no mention, for example, of the Baptist's eccentric dress sense or diet - no camel skins, locusts or wild honey here.

But there's one big theme about which Mark and John are completely united: that when John the Baptist went out into the desert and started preaching and teaching and baptising people in the River Jordan, he was at pains, time and again, to stress that he was not the centre of anyone's universe, he was simply a voice crying out in the wilderness, as the prophet Isaiah's voice had done several centuries before.

It wasn't, I suspect, a message that many of John's followers wanted to hear: for it's clear from the New Testament writers, and a handful of early Jewish and Roman historians too, that John's ministry caused a sensation at the time, drawing many thousands of people into the Judean desert to listen to his electric preaching and to be baptised at his hands as a sign of their heartfelt repentance. John the Baptist didn't invent baptism. But he was perhaps the first person to suggest that *Jews* needed to be baptised, and not just Gentiles: that being part of God's chosen people was not simply a massive privilege but also a huge responsibility; and somehow *that* message from *that* voice caught the national mood like none other, so that when John the Baptist eventually died a brutal death, we're told that huge crowds of people grieved his loss – they felt harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

So what happens when you suddenly find you have thousands of followers, hanging on your every word and doing exactly what you tell them? What happens when the spotlight is on you, when you're famous, when people start talking about you as though you're amazing, unique? Well, what happens to most people is that it goes to their heads. That's why so many men and women, teenagers and even children queue for hours in the hope of taking part in 'Britain's got Talent' or indeed 'The Voice', just to have their brief moment of fame, their 5 minutes in the spotlight. 'I want to be at the centre of things. I want everything to revolve around me'.

And perhaps that's the most remarkable thing about John the Baptist - more impressive even than his austere lifestyle, his electric preaching or his call to repentance. For just as people were circling around him, calling him all kinds of things – the new Elijah, the new Moses, even the Messiah himself – it didn't go to John's head at all. Instead, like Copernicus, he told his disciples that they'd got it all wrong: that he wasn't the centre of the Universe at all – he was just that voice again. And what was the voice saying? Simply this:

that the one who truly *is* at the centre of the Universe is on his way, and we need to be prepared for his coming. 'Oh' the voice added, 'And I'm not even worthy to tie his shoelaces'.

Now we know the rest of the story. We know how a young man from Nazareth stepped out of the crowd one day to be baptised by John – one of his cousins, in fact, a carpenter called Jesus - and how John recognised that here standing before him wasn't just another member of his family but was rather the One, the sun around whom John's life and the lives of his hearers and the life of the world itself, was called to revolve.

This sun would shine brightly for the next few years. The Spirit of the Lord would be upon him, and he would be sent to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, just as the prophet Isaiah had predicted many centuries before. When reflecting on the same question that John was being asked – 'Who are you?' – and one of his followers responded, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!' – this sun wouldn't push aside the acclamation, as John did, but would accept it as having been revealed by Heaven itself.

But Isaiah, 'the voice' in his day, had also predicted that the Messiah would suffer and die for the people – that for a time at least the sun would go out; that as John himself put it, Jesus would be the sacrificial 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'. And while some of John's disciples became jealous when people started deserting him and following Jesus instead, John told them that they'd completely missed the point. 'He must increase', he said, 'and I must decrease'. Or as he might have put it, 'He is the sun and I'm just a planet'.

All of which is all very well, but how does it relate to us?

Well, in Bishop Jo's helpful sermon last week, recorded in a field near her home and opening with those memorable words, 'Advent begins in the dark', Jo reminded us that John the Baptist is the foremost figure of Advent, and that for the evangelists there is no good news without him. And that's true for two reasons: first because John was unique as a 'man sent from God' at the most crucial moment in the story of salvation - a herald, a witness, a sentinel, a voice, as predicted by some of his great prophetic forebears. But secondly because John is Everyman, a model for each one of us to follow: someone who both proclaimed and lived the Copernican Revolution which lies at the heart of the Christian message. '*These things are written*', as John the evangelist wrote of that revolution: '*so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name*'.

That's what baptism and confirmation are all about, of course, powerfully symbolising that revolution through water and oil and those solemn promises, 'I turn to Christ', 'I submit to Christ', 'I come to Christ'. That's what it means when we proclaim 'Jesus is

Lord'. And while in themselves these ceremonies and proclamations could well become empty and formulaic, John the Baptist reminds us that through Christ they have power: 'I baptise with water, but he will baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire'.

But there's a problem here, and the problem's this: that every time we walk down the High Street, lockdown permitting, every time we pick up a magazine, every time we engage with the social media, the message we hear is completely the opposite of that. 'You are the centre of your little universe', goes the alternative voice: 'pamper yourself, look after number one!' Why? 'because I'm worth it'.

It's just that message that frequently leads to debt, buying things that we simply can't afford. It's just that message that leads to relationship breakdown. It's just that message that has motivated some of the worst of human nature in this Covid year –the self-centredness, the hoarding, the irresponsibility – where so many others have been modelling the best. And it's a strong message and a seductive message; and even the baptised and the confirmed – you and me very much included – need to be regularly reminded of the Copernican revolution to which we are committed.

And there's a little phrase that's been going round my head this Advent – a phrase from the apocrypha, from the book of Baruch, which we've been using every morning in Morning Prayer:

*'Look towards the east, O Jerusalem,  
And see the glory that is coming from God'.*

Look towards the east. Turn your eyes towards the rising sun. Remember that you are not your own, you were bought with a price. Embrace the Copernican Revolution, which John so preached and John so embodied.

And as we seek to do that, perhaps we might close with a blessing from our epistle reading this morning, chapter 5 of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians:

*'May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely;  
and may your spirit and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you in faithful, and he will do it'.*

Amen.