



PARISH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW WESTHOUGHTON

St Bartholomew

St Thomas

St George

Sunday 10th January 2021 – The Baptism of Christ

TODAY'S SERVICES

11:00am Holy Communion Service at St. Bartholomew's Church Revd Angela Wynne

We pray for:

Those who are ill: Brian Cato, Lisa Ginniff, Irene Halliwell, Jenny Harris, Keith Haworth, Mario Heaton, Edith Ibbotson, Joan James, Patricia James, Mike Johnson, Jeffrey Lyon, Eileen Marsh, Norman Sidlow.

*** Please note that we are updating this list for 2021. If there are names that you would like to remain on this list or be added, please see / e-mail us here so we comply with the Data Protection legislation. Many thanks. Ed ***

Those who have died recently: Doreen Fowler, Julie Holmes, Eva Lomas

And on their anniversaries this week we remember: Eric Baldwin, George Bryant, Joseph Darbyshire, Doris Eckersley, Thomas Gibbs, James Hayes, Herbert Hollingsworth, Wilfred Kirkman, James Marginson, Robert Parker, Alice Seddon, Joan Turner, Alice Wallwork, Melissa Walmsley.

This week:

Welcome to worship this week on the Sunday after Epiphany when we remember Jesus' baptism by John in the River Jordan.

Although St. George's school were happy for our Sunday services to continue during the current lockdown and public worship is permitted, the majority of St. George's committee felt that we shouldn't open at present under the current restrictions. We have decided, therefore, to close St. George's church for the time being. Sunday services at St. Bartholomew's will continue at 11:00am.

The Church of England issued the following statement in response to the latest lockdown guidelines:

"The Government has chosen not to suspend public worship in England at this time and we will continue to follow the guidance and ensure that churches remain as safe as possible. The Government guidance on the safe use of places of worship makes clear that those attending a place of worship must not mingle with anyone outside their household or support bubble.

"However, some may feel that it is currently better not to attend in person, and there will be parishes which decide to offer only digital services for the time-being. Clergy who have concerns, and others who are shielding, should take particular care and stay at home."

As Jesus was baptised, Calvin Carp watched on. The next time Calvin would see Jesus was at a hillside picnic with 5 loaves and a couple of Calvin's friends.



Church Attendance for School Places:

To register attendance, **please e-mail:**

bdhww.churchattendance@gmail.com

giving both your name / your child or children's names and the church you would usually attend. You will need to do this even if you attend a service and sign in. Only one e-mail per week will be counted [even if you would have attended more than once in any week]. Please do NOT use any other e-mail address to register church attendance as these will not be included. Thank You

We are holding a Team zoom 'Meet and greet Malcolm' session TODAY at 4 pm at which Malcolm will be interviewed by Matt Dunne. If you would like the link for the zoom, please contact Matt on 07773 883691 or email mattdunne92@yahoo.com Matt also asks people to forward any questions to him for Malcolm. He might not get through all the questions but he will ask a few.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity runs from 18 – 25th January – more details in next week's pewsheets.

While services and attendance at church is limited, these pewsheets and on-line services will continue. Do keep any news, views and feedback coming. Please also check our Team YouTube channel for online services:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDx266HLh9ShYeBJnON8ODg>

Ed



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The Collect:

Heavenly Father, at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son: may we recognize him as our Lord and know ourselves to be your beloved children; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

Old Testament Reading : *Genesis 1. 1 - 5*

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

New Testament Reading: *Acts 19. 1 - 7*

¹While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ²He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' ³Then he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They answered, 'Into John's baptism.' ⁴Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.' ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied – ⁷altogether there were about twelve of them.

Gospel Reading: *Mark 1. 4 - 11*

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the

forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, '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. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' ⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'



The Post Communion Prayer:

Lord of all time and eternity, you opened the heavens and revealed yourself as Father in the baptism of Jesus your beloved Son: by the power of your Spirit complete the heavenly work of our rebirth through the waters of the new creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.



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Sermon for the Baptism of Christ 2021 by Revd Carol McCabe

There is a huge jump from last week and the Epiphany celebrations with the Magi searching for the baby who would become the King of the Jews. To this week with Jesus the man coming to John for baptism in the river Jordan. Why? Well, they are taken from different Gospel accounts. Matthew's gospel begins with Jesus' ancestry, birth, and the visitors from the East. Whereas Mark begins some background information about John and then moves onto the beginning of Jesus' ministry. His baptism in the river.

The River Jordan is 156 miles long and flows from West Asia to the Dead Sea, and although it plays a very important role in irrigation, on the whole, it is a shallow stretch of water with its high-water period only lasting from January to March. Water running through a wilderness, for what is commonly referred to as **Judea's wilderness** which is located on the far eastern side of the province, **near** the River and the Dead Sea, which under the Romans, was ruled by Herod the Great.

It's so disturbing, as today global warming and pollution rear their ugly heads, with many people believing that the river is drying up, and with evidence all around, it's hard to dismiss the fact that the river is used as a dumping ground for not only general waste, but raw sewage as well.

Hardly surprising, that organizations are asking for help from all over the world to restore the river and prevent further damage to this area. An area which still attracts huge numbers of tourist and I wasn't surprised to read that believers want the river to continue flowing forever because of what it represents.

It displays a very rich symbolic value to the world's three major religions with many who still flock to the river to be baptized themselves. It has a long history that dates back to biblical times. Christians believe that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist.

Mark, Matthew, and Luke all depict the baptism with the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus immediately after his baptism accompanied by a voice from Heaven. Luke and Mark record the voice as addressing Jesus by saying "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased", while in Matthew the voice states "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". And so, we are given Mark's words today "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". Jesus went out of his way to be baptised; we are told that Jesus came from Galilee to the river Jordan to be baptised by John.

Jesus was about 30 years old, understood to be the age at which public office could be held by the Jews. John was about 6 months older and had been baptising for about the same length of time and so suddenly Jesus comes to John, a trip of between 40 & 50 miles by foot, no trains or buses in those days. As we call to mind John in the wilderness, we call to mind how he preached about repentance and about the messiah. With Jesus coming to John this became the fulfilment of that message. And if there were any outstanding questions before his baptism, whether this was appropriate or not, all was wiped away by what happened next. For as he came out of the water the heavens opened and the spirit of God came down like a dove and a voice spoke directly to Jesus, and with this we are for the first time, given a complete and clear indication of the Trinity. All three persons were there together. The spirit came and gave Jesus the power to begin his ministry and God the father gave his approval and endorsement of Jesus his son.

We are constantly finding ourselves going through some kind of wilderness experience, when maybe our prayer life feels dry, when we feel separated from God and keeping our faith seems hard, believe me we all go through those experiences along our own personal journeys of faith, even more so at this time as we all cope with COVID-19. As we continue to do what is needed to keep ourselves and the world safe, it does seem to me, anyway, a lot like living in a wilderness. From time to time, it has felt as if we are living out an apocalyptic film. People panic buying. Makeshift hospitals being set up. Fear and anxiety. The police and the military, phone calls and emails to friends asking how they are? Nothing in our diaries.

If we are not careful anxiety can come creeping in to overwhelm us like a wave. The COVID-19 pandemic is a wilderness moment for the whole world. Let us keep praying that we don't get lost in it.

The question that a lot of people have is 'Where is God in all of this?' Everywhere that's where. This means that when we wake up feeling anxious, when we feel depressed and powerless at the current global struggle which unfolds day by day, we can rest in Jesus. Even in this global health pandemic, Jesus—whom we also call Immanuel, is here amongst us. God is with us. He blesses us, he supplies all our needs, he sustains us and will continue to do so through this time and beyond.



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Jesus' baptism was a complicated affair. What seemed in the beginning to be one man responding to the preaching of his cousin, became the event which identified Jesus as the messiah and heralded the start of his public ministry. Through baptism he identified himself with the people He came to save and after this wilderness experience things really began to happen. He ministered, he helped, he loved, he served and Jesus serves as our example.

Today gives us the opportunity to think very carefully about our own baptism. Baptism, as we are reminded, is not an end it is a beginning. Just like Jesus we are called to minister, to recognise the work we have been called to do, in response to God's grace and his love for us, and to tell others of the love God has for all his children.

If I have not already wished you a Happy New Year, may I do so today, and as we move forward into this new year, may we be reminded of all our blessings in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Intercessions

God of truth,
you are faithful to the covenant you have made
with us;

look in mercy on your people.

From all our sins, O Lord:

wash us, and we shall be clean.

We have broken the pledges of our baptism,
and failed to be your disciples.

From all our sins, O Lord:

wash us, and we shall be clean.

Though we are saved by Christ
and dead to sin through the deep waters of
death,

we have not witnessed to his grace by our
manner of life.

From all our sins, O Lord:

wash us, and we shall be clean.

We have shown indifference to those in need
and have been afraid to stand up for justice and
truth.

From all our sins, O Lord:

wash us, and we shall be clean.

We have been slow to forgive, and have failed
to remember

your repeated forgiveness of our sins.

From all our sins, O Lord:

wash us, and we shall be clean.

Today we rejoice and give thanks
because your Son humbled himself to be
baptized in the Jordan.

Through the waters you have given us the
mystery of baptism

for the remission of our sins.

From all our sins, O Lord:

wash us, and we shall be clean.

Through water and Spirit
you give us new life as the people of God,
and pour out upon us the gifts of your new
covenant.

From all our sins, O Lord:

wash us, and we shall be clean.

Almighty God,

in our baptism you have consecrated us
to be temples of your Holy Spirit.

May we, whom you have counted worthy,
nurture your indwelling Spirit with a lively faith,
and worship you with upright lives;

through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**



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Background: The Letter to the Hebrews

So who wrote it? Basically, we don't know. The writer of this letter does not identify himself, but he was obviously well known to the original recipients. The one thing we know is that it wasn't St. Paul. There is no disharmony between the teaching of Hebrews and that of Paul's letters, but the specific emphases and writing styles are markedly different. Contrary to Paul's usual practice, the author of Hebrews nowhere identifies himself in the letter—except to indicate that he was a man ([11:32](#)). Moreover, the statement “This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him” ([2:3](#)), indicates that the author had neither been with Jesus during his earthly ministry nor received special revelation directly from the risen Lord, as had Paul ([Gal 1:11–12](#)). A number of suggestions have been made including St. Barnabas and Apollos amongst others.

When was it written? Hebrews must have been written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 because if it had been written after this date, the author surely would have mentioned the temple's destruction and the end of the Jewish sacrificial system and the author consistently uses the Greek present tense when speaking of the temple and the priestly activities connected with it. So it possibly dates from about 67AD.

What's the style? Hebrews is commonly referred to as a letter, though it does not have the typical form of a letter. It ends like a letter ([13:22–25](#)) but begins more like an essay or sermon ([1:1–4](#)). The author does not identify himself or those addressed, which letter writers normally did. And he offers no manner of greeting, such as is usually found at the beginning of ancient letters. Rather, he begins with a magnificent statement about Jesus Christ. He calls his work a “word of exhortation” ([13:22](#)), what would be called a sermon but in a synagogue service (see [Ac 13:15](#), where “message of encouragement” translates the same Greek words as “word of exhortation”). Like a sermon, Hebrews is full of encouragement, exhortations and stern warnings. It is likely that the author used materials from a sermon but then sent them out in a modified letter form.

Why is the title confusing? When the various New Testament books were formally brought together into one collection shortly after A.D. 100, the titles were added for convenience. This epistle's title bears the traditional Greek title, “To the Hebrews.” Within the epistle itself, however, there is no identification of the recipients as either Hebrews (Jews), or Gentiles. Since the epistle is filled with references to Hebrew history and religion and does not address any particular Gentile or pagan practice, the traditional title has been maintained.

Background – Setting: Emphases on the Levitical priesthood and on sacrifices, as well as the absence of any reference to the Gentiles, support the conclusion that a community of Hebrews [Jews] was the recipient of the epistle. Although these Hebrews were primarily converts to Christ, there were probably a number of unbelievers also, who were attracted by the message of salvation, but who had not yet made a full commitment of faith in Christ. One thing is clear from the contents of the epistle: the community of Hebrews was facing the possibility of intensified persecution ([10:32–39](#); [12:4](#)). As they confronted this possibility, the Hebrews were tempted to cast aside any identification with Christ [*see Monday's notes*].

Where are we?: Possible locations for the recipients of the epistle include Palestine, Egypt, Italy Asia Minor, and Greece. The community that was the primary recipient may have circulated the epistle among those of Hebrew background in neighbouring areas and churches. Those believers probably had not seen Christ personally but had been evangelized by “those who heard” Christ and whose ministries had been authenticated “by signs and wonders and by various miracles” ([2:3–4](#)). So, the recipients could have been in a church outside Judea and Galilee or in a church in those areas, but established among people in the generation following those who had been eyewitnesses of Christ. The congregation was not new or untaught (“by this time you ought to be teachers”), yet some of them still needed “milk and not solid food” ([5:12](#)).



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The generation of Hebrews receiving this epistle had practiced the Levitical sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. Jews living in exile had substituted the synagogue for the temple but still felt a deep attraction to the temple worship. Some had the means to make regular pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem. The writer of the epistle emphasized the superiority of Christianity over Judaism and the superiority of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice over the repeated and imperfect Levitical sacrifices observed in the temple.

Historical – Themes: Since the book of Hebrews is grounded in the work of the Jewish Levitical priesthood [their priests were descendants of the tribe of Levi], a brief explanation of the book of Leviticus is handy if you're trying to understand Hebrews. So here's a one paragraph summary!

Israel's sin had always got in the way of God's fellowship with His chosen people, Israel. Therefore, He established a system of sacrifices that represented the repentance of sinners and God's forgiveness. But, the need for sacrifices never ended because the people and priests continued to sin. What we needed was a perfect priest and a perfect sacrifice that would once and for all remove sin. God's provision of that perfect priest and sacrifice in Jesus Christ who took on himself the sins of the world is the central message of Hebrews.

The epistle to Hebrews is a study in contrast, between the imperfect and incomplete provisions of the Old Covenant, given under Moses, and the infinitely better provisions of the New Covenant offered by the perfect High-Priest, God's only Son and the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Included in the "better" provisions are: a better hope, testament, promise, sacrifice, substance, country, and resurrection. Those who belong to the New Covenant dwell in a completely new and heavenly atmosphere. They worship a heavenly Saviour, have a heavenly calling, receive a heavenly gift, are citizens of a heavenly country, look forward to a heavenly Jerusalem, and have their very names written in heaven.

One of the key theological themes in Hebrews is that all believers now have direct access to God under the New Covenant and, therefore, may approach the throne of God without fear (4:16; 10:22). One's hope is in the very presence of God, into which they follow the Saviour (6:19-20; 10:19-20) rather than the Jewish temple service where believers under the covenant of law did not have direct access to the presence of God (9:8), but were shut out of the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the temple. The one line summary of the book of Hebrews is:

Believers in Jesus Christ, as God's perfect sacrifice for sin, have the perfect High-Priest through whose ministry everything is new and better than under the covenant of law.

Summary: Hebrews, however, is also practical in its application to everyday living (chapter 13). The writer himself even refers to his letter as a "word of exhortation" (13:22; compare Acts 13:15) designed to stir the readers into action.

First century Jewish Christians were confronted with the anguish of having given up long held godly traditions only to experience increased persecution and unfulfilled promises. Both family and foe now harassed them. Further, Christ had not yet returned, and there were no apparent indications that His return and the restoration of Israel would ever occur. The first generations of Christians had passed, and Israel was still unsaved. The Book of Hebrews is an exhortation to Jewish Christians to hold fast to their faith in Christ.

Throughout the epistle, the author stresses the continuity and flow between the Old Testament revelation and the new faith in Christ, while emphasizing the superiority of both Christ and His New Covenant, using such words as better, perfect and heavenly. By so doing, he assures the Jewish Christians of the biblical heritage contained in the New Covenant. (*Hebrews contains 29 direct quotations from and 53 clear allusions to the Old Testament*). He challenges them to run with endurance the race that is set before them (12:1), even as their Jewish ancestors had done (chapter 11). The style of the epistle is one of encouragement, comfort, and warning. The book leads one from superficial thinking to profound depths concerning the person and work of Christ. Its argument is the superiority and finality of Christianity. Its theme is the high priestly ministry of Christ in behalf of believers.



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Monday 11th January

Hebrews 1 . 1 - 6

God Has Spoken Through His Son

1 In the past God spoke to our people through the prophets. He spoke to them many times and in many different ways. **2** And now in these last days, God has spoken to us again through his Son. He made the whole world through his Son. And he has chosen his Son to have all things. **3** The Son shows the glory of God. He is a perfect copy of God's nature, and he holds everything together by his powerful command. The Son made people clean from their sins. Then he sat down at the right side of God, the Great One in heaven. **4** The Son became much greater than the angels, and God gave him a name that is much greater than any of their names.

5 God never said this to any of the angels:

"You are my Son.

Today I have become your Father."

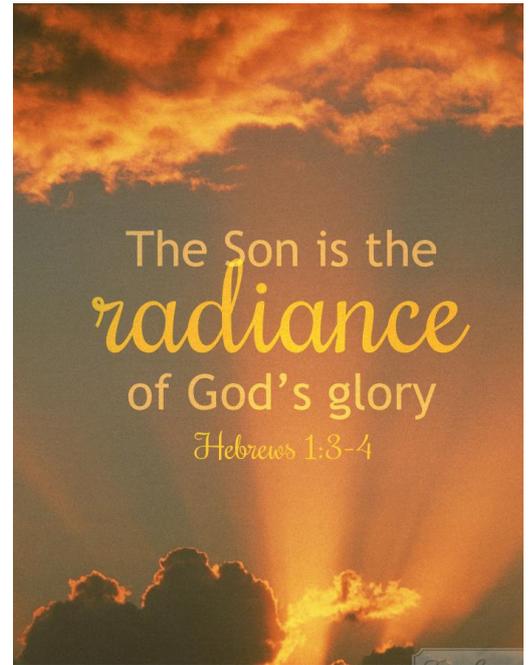
God also never said about an angel,

"I will be his Father,

and he will be my son."

6 And then, when God presents his firstborn Son to the world, he says,

"Let all God's angels worship him."



There's no greetings or introductions here – we go straight in. From the start of this letter, the writer shows that God is real and active. God often spoke to the Hebrews in the past in different ways – in dreams, by sending angels or through events.. He gave them his laws and taught them by the prophets.

The phrase 'in the last days' [v.2] often meant the time of the Messiah. The writer uses it here to show that the Messiah has come. The Hebrews were always expecting this person to come and bring a new age to them. He will be their king and will overcome all their enemies. But they did not understand the real nature of Jesus as the Messiah or Son of God.

The writer gives 7 facts to show how great God's Son Jesus is:

- 1. God appointed his Son to own everything.*
- 2. God created all that there is in space and time by his Son.*
- 3. The Son shines with God's light.*
- 4. The Son shows us what God is like. When we come to know Jesus, then we also come to know God. Jesus said, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:19), and 'I and my Father are one' (John 10:30). God is the Father.*
- 5. The Son Jesus maintains all things (Colossians 1:17). Having made the worlds and all things, Jesus Christ is still in control of them. His word of power maintains all things in their proper place. He has control of time and directs the future. He will cause all things to complete his plan. He made all things and he owns all things in heaven and on earth.*
- 6. The Son Jesus gave his life to make us clean from all sin.*
- 7. Jesus was greater than all the angels.*

The people, to whom this letter was sent, may have considered demoting Christ from God's Son to a mere angel. Such a precedent had already been set in the Qumran community of messianic Jews living near the Dead Sea. They had dropped out of society, established a religious commune, and included the worship of angels in their brand of reformed Judaism. The Qumran community had even gone so far as to claim that the angel Michael was higher in status than the coming Messiah. These kinds of doctrinal aberrations could explain the emphasis in Hebrews chapter one on the superiority of Christ as the Son Of God over the angels.



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*Your light is the only light I need,
as I travel through life's mystery .
Your word the only voice I hear,
that still small voice that leads me
to the place where I should be.
Your presence is the only company I need,
as I walk this narrow road.
Your fellowship the warmth I crave,
to help me on my way*

Tuesday 12th January

Hebrews 2. 5 - 12

Christ Became Like People to Save Them

⁵ God did not choose angels to be the rulers over the new world that was coming. That future world is the world we have been talking about. ⁶ It is written some place in the Scriptures, “Why are people so important to you?

Why do you even think about them?
Why do you care about the son of man?
Is he so important?

⁷ For a short time you made him lower than the angels.
You crowned him with glory and honour.

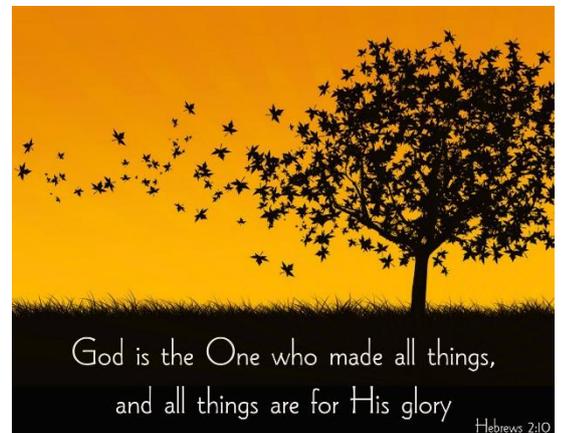
⁸ You put everything under his control.”

If God put everything under his control, then there was nothing left that he did not rule. But we don't yet see him ruling over everything. ⁹ For a short time Jesus was made lower than the angels, but now we see him wearing a crown of glory and honour because he suffered and died. Because of God's grace, Jesus died for everyone.

¹⁰ God—the one who made all things and for whose glory all things exist—wanted many people to be his children and share his glory. So he did what he needed to do. He made perfect the one who leads those people to salvation. He made Jesus a perfect Saviour through his suffering.

¹¹ Jesus, the one who makes people holy, and those who are made holy are from the same family. So he is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. ¹² He says, “God, I will tell my brothers and sisters about you.

Before all your people I will sing your praises.”



Again, we're emphasising that Christ is greater than the angels. God has not given authority to angels over the world to come, they are to serve and not to rule [v.5].

God's purpose for the world to come is that humans, and not angels, should rule it [v.6-8] as stated in the Old Testament in [Psalm 8:4-7]. God made humans to be a little lower than the angels who have great authority and power. But God has a greater plan in mind for human beings. The writer uses the words from Psalm 8:4-7 as a prophecy. They tell us what God will bring about, but the writer sees the words as first referring to Jesus.

When God first made a man, he gave him power over all creatures (Genesis 1:28). The first man, Adam, failed to rule as God intended, because he did wrong so humans lost the right to rule. But God has not taken back the first promise and his promise for humanity is not yet complete. But we see Jesus, the Son of God who became a human being. He came to earth and lived as a man, and so became a little lower than the angels, just like us. God raised him from the dead and gave him a royal crown of great honour and power. In Jesus, God has begun to carry out his promise that human beings should rule.



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Jesus makes us holy when we trust in him. He brings us into the family of God and calls us his brothers and sisters. In the Old Testament the Messiah says that he will tell the name of God to his brothers and sisters (Psalm 22:22). To the Hebrews the 'name' meant more than just a name - it meant the whole person. Jesus is the Messiah and he showed men and women the nature of God. As a human among humans, Jesus praised God with them in the temple of the Jews in Jerusalem and their other holy buildings. Now as we praise God, Jesus in spirit is there with us. He promised that when two or three of those who follow him meet together, he too will be there (Matthew 18:20).

*Lord Jesus Christ, we exalt You
as the Name above every name;
the only One worthy of sitting
at the right hand of the Father.*

*You are the Lord of hosts,
and the King of the angels,
who Scripture tells us
worship around Your throne.*

*We admit that sometimes we lose our way,
letting other messages and messengers captivate us
in ways that belong only to You,
who truly are the final Word of God.*

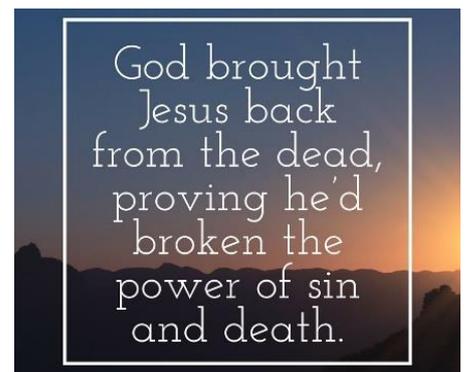
*Once again, we ask You
to open the eyes of our hearts
not only to the hope to which You have called us,
but also to the glory of who You are.*

*All this we pray, through Your name, Jesus,
which is greater than any other name,
to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
be all honour and glory, now and forever.
Amen.*

Wednesday 13th January

Hebrews 2. 14 - end

¹⁴ These children are people with physical bodies. So Jesus himself became like them and had the same experiences they have. Jesus did this so that, by dying, he could destroy the one who has the power of death—the devil. ¹⁵ Jesus became like these people and died so that he could free them. They were like slaves all their lives because of their fear of death. ¹⁶ Clearly, it is not angels that Jesus helps. He helps the people who are from Abraham. ¹⁷ For this reason, Jesus had to be made like us, his brothers and sisters, in every way. He became like people so that he could be their merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. Then he could bring forgiveness for the people's sins. ¹⁸ And now he can help those who are tempted. He is able to help because he himself suffered and was tempted.



For Jesus to help us he had to be the same as us and take a human body. Jesus had to take our sins upon himself and by his death he was able to accept our punishment. The death Jesus speaks about is more than the death of our body, it is the death of our spirit as well. This means a future without God. For those who accept Christ, the death of the body is not the end; it is the way to a new life that never will die.

Jesus became a human being so that he could take us by the hand and lead us to God [v.16]. He did not become an angel or come to earth to help angels. He came to this world to save the children of Abraham - all those who are Jews by birth. The Bible calls all who believe in the one true God the children of Abraham (Galatians 3:7-9).



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So Jesus had to be like us in all things and to live life as a real man. He had to face the same problems that we do. The devil tested him and he suffered in life as we do, but much more than we have to suffer. The suffering that Jesus had makes him able to help any who are in need. When the devil or the things of this life test us, we can look to Jesus. He will give us the strength to do what is right. If we fail to do what is right, he understands. When we turn to him and confess that we have failed, he is able to make us right with God again.

*This morning
and all mornings,
as we face the day
daunted by expectations
others place upon us,
weighed down by burdens,
unsure of outcomes,
opposed,
alone,
afraid,*

*remind us
that you faced all this
and more,
that we might loose
the chains that bind us,
rise above and beyond
the troubles of this world,
and know peace
in your embrace.*

Thursday 14th January

Hebrews 3. 7 - 14

We Must Continue to Follow God

⁷ So it is just as the Holy Spirit says:

“If you hear God’s voice today,

⁸ don’t be stubborn as you were in the past,
when you turned against God.

That was the day you tested God in the
desert.

⁹ For 40 years in the desert, your people saw
what I did.

But they tested me and my patience.

¹⁰ So I was angry with them.

I said, ‘Their thoughts are always wrong.

They have never understood my ways.’

¹¹ So I was angry and made a promise:

‘They will never enter my place of rest.’”

¹² So, brothers and sisters, be careful that none of you has the evil thoughts that cause so much doubt that you stop following the living God. ¹³ But encourage each other every day, while you still have something called “today.” Help each other so that none of you will be fooled by sin and become too hard to change. ¹⁴ We have the honour of sharing in all that Christ has if we continue until the end to have the sure faith we had in the beginning.





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The writer now moved from the example of Abraham to Moses. Moses was true to God and trusted in him but most of the people who came out of Egypt with him failed to trust in God. As a result, God did not take them to the promised land. Instead he led them in the desert for 40 years. Although they saw God's great works, they still refused to obey him and tested God's patience. God was so angry that he declared that they would never know his rest. So it was that all the adults who came out of Egypt died in the desert ([Deuteronomy 2:14](#)). Only a couple of them, Caleb and Joshua, did go on trusting in God and entered the promised land.

The rest of God points to a future of peace and plenty. It is a place where God will bless and keep his people forever. It is the promised land, where the Messiah is king. It is the place that will be home to all who trust in Jesus. ([Verses 7-11 are from Psalm 95:7-11](#)).

The writer warns us to take care that we do not turn away from God [[v.12-14](#)]. We need to help each other to be strong in our belief in Jesus. Each one of us needs the strength that comes by sharing our lives with others who trust God, encouraging each other to be true to God. We must always grow in that sure and certain faith.

*For all whose journey
has only just begun,
who tread carefully
and heavy laden
along unfamiliar paths,
seeking guidance
from fellow travellers,
fearful of losing their way,*

*speed their journey, Lord,
keep them from harm,
and bring them safely
into their promised land,
your Kingdom where,
at last unburdened,
they might find their rest in you.*

Friday 15th January

Hebrews 4. 1 – 5 & 11

4 And we still have the promise that God gave those people. That promise is that we can enter his place of rest. So we should be very careful that none of you fails to get that promise. **2** Yes, the good news about it was told to us just as it was to them. But the message they heard did not help them. They heard it but did not accept it with faith. **3** Only we who believe it are able to enter God's place of rest. As God said,

"I was angry and made a promise:

"They will never enter my place of rest."

But God's work was finished from the time he made the world. **4** Yes, somewhere in the Scriptures he talked about the seventh day of the week. He said, "So on the seventh day God rested from all his work."

5 But in the Scripture above God said, "They will never enter my place of rest."

11 So let us try as hard as we can to enter God's place of rest. We must try hard so that none of us will be lost by following the example of those who refused to obey God.





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God has promised a place of rest that will last forever, open to all who walk in God's way. The promised land of the Hebrews is to us a picture of that place of rest. The adults who came out of Egypt failed to enter it because they did not trust God. We must take care not to miss our chance to enter that place of rest.

The Hebrews heard the good news of the promises of God [v.2] but they did not accept the word of God. It was for this reason that they died in the desert and did not go into the new land.

The Jews believed that they were the people of God [v.3-5]. Because they were the children of Abraham by birth, they were sure that they would go to heaven. God has said, however, that the people who did not have belief in him would never enter his rest (Psalm 95:11). God has spoken to us in his Son, Jesus Christ, who is the only way to life with God.

God rested after he had made the earth and the sky (Genesis 2:2). So the place of rest that we speak of has been ready since then. It remains open for us to enter and to be at home with God.

We must be eager to enter this place of rest [v.11]. We must make sure that we get there by coming to know God in Jesus. We must be careful that we do not fail like the people in the desert.

*Your footsteps are not easy to follow,
for they lead not only to green pastures
where we find nourishment and rest,
but also desert and wilderness places
where we are vulnerable and alone,
and crowded and uncomfortable spaces
where we feel threatened and distressed.
Your footsteps are not easy to follow,
but you have walked this way before
and are never far from any one of us,
your Spirit guiding and instructing,
your arm supporting, your love supplying,
on this necessary path we tread.*

Saturday 16th January

Hebrews 4. 12 - end

¹² God's word is alive and working. It is sharper than the sharpest sword and cuts all the way into us. It cuts deep to the place where the soul and the spirit are joined. God's word cuts to the centre of our joints and our bones. It judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. ¹³ Nothing in all the world can be hidden from God. He can clearly see all things. Everything is open before him. And to him we must explain the way we have lived.

**The word of God is living and active.
Sharper than any double-edged sword,
it penetrates even to dividing soul and
spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the
thoughts and attitudes of the heart.**

- Hebrews 4:12 -





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Jesus Christ Is Our High Priest

¹⁴ We have a great high priest who has gone to live with God in heaven. He is Jesus the Son of God. So let us continue to express our faith in him. ¹⁵ Jesus, our high priest, is able to understand our weaknesses. When Jesus lived on earth, he was tempted in every way. He was tempted in the same ways we are tempted, but he never sinned. ¹⁶ With Jesus as our high priest, we can feel free to come before God's throne where there is grace. There we receive mercy and kindness to help us when we need it.

It is normal for God to speak to us through the Bible. His words are alive and full of power. God's word goes right into our inner life. It is like a sharp sword that cuts on both edges. Our lives are completely open to God and he knows all that there is to know about us. There can be no secrets hidden from God.

God sees and knows all about every living thing. One day we must stand before him and give an account of our lives. He will judge us by what we have done and by what we accept about Jesus his Son.

We have a great chief priest, Jesus, who has gone on our behalf to the place where God lives. The chief priest of the Jews was only a man who stood before God in the temple on earth. Jesus, as our chief priest, is the Son of God. He is always there with God himself.

When Jesus came to earth, he lived as a human. He knows how weak we are, and when we suffer, he suffers with us.

So here is a chief priest whom we can trust. He took our sins away when he died on the cross. He is now with God representing all who trust in him. So we do not need to have a chief priest on earth to go to God for us. We can be bold to approach God himself, because of the work of Jesus. We can always look to him for help when we need it. In his love he will be kind to us, for he knows how weak we are. He will pardon all our sins and make us clean again. He will give us the strength that we need to help us in difficult times.

*When travelling is hard;
mountains to climb,
rivers to cross,
storms that assail,
and in our own strength
we know that we shall fail,
Lord, reach out your hand
to guide us safely,
and without stumbling,
toward our journey's end.*

We have a God who loves us, and has a plan and purpose for all our lives. It is understandable therefore that at times we feel the need to seek reassurance that we are following the right path on our journey of faith, as we seek to do God's will.

God listens. God answers.



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NOTICES:

Mission Community Proposals: Archdeaconry Events: Reminder



This is a reminder that people in our diocese – church officers, members of our congregations and our lay and ordained leaders - are invited to events in each of our archdeaconries to discuss our proposals for creating Mission Communities across the diocese, which were set out in the Briefing Document published in October.

The date for our area is:

Bolton

Wednesday 27 January 2021, 19.00-20.30

All these events will take place via zoom. For further information, including how you can take part, click [here](#).

Dear Friends,

Hope you are all safe and well and having a good week. The news about this third lockdown didn't come as a great surprise to anyone, I'm sure. With the relaxation of rules over Christmas coupled with the new variant it was expected. Once more we're required to stay indoors as much as possible and not mix with anyone outside our household or support bubble. Only going out to exercise or take essential journeys. There's that sense of, "so near and yet so far". The vaccine is being rolled out but we can't relax yet. However we can see there is light at the end of the tunnel and we must hold on to that sense of hope when we feel down. It really won't last forever.

Last night I attended the licencing of Revd Malcolm our new Associate Priest in the Team with special responsibility for St James. We managed it in person at St James' Daisy Hill which was great. Bishop Mark (Bolton) and Archdeacon Jean led the service. Revd Carol welcomed everyone at the start. Malcolm's wife Katie and son Tom sat at the front and in the choir stalls and sanctuary there was a representative from all our parishes along with colleagues from Malcolm's former team, and in church as many of St James congregation as could be safely seated. It's always a pleasure to be present when a new ministry is begun. I hope Malcolm will be in no doubt as to how delighted we are to welcome him and how much we're all looking forward to sharing in his ministry and discovering what plans our Lord has for St James and the wider team. Roll on the day when we can really get together and celebrate Malcolm's coming. Malcolm is a real gift from God which we must cherish and bear in mind he is self-supporting and has his work responsibilities as well as his ministry. This is a wonderful opportunity for St James to grow in its shared ministry with Malcolm as its focus to guide and to enable. It's all very exciting and the welcome from Steph Gregory, the Lay Chair of St James' PCC voiced the enthusiasm that exists in the parish and its willingness to serve alongside Malcolm. Please pray for Malcolm and St James as he settles in and gets to know people. That will be a challenge in these lockdown days!

Malcolm's service ended with a reading from the Gospel of Matthew when Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19-20). That's our commission too as God's



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people but the words at the end of that passage are some of the most hopeful and reassuring in the whole of the New Testament. Jesus said, “ And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Whatever we do, wherever we are God is right there beside us. He has not left us cope on our own. Thank you God, thank you Jesus for sending us your Holy Spirit. thank you for the new life you give us in baptism and the hope and peace of your love all our days. Amen.

Keep safe everyone and God bless,
Angela.

Next Sunday: Second Sunday of Epiphany

Readings: I Samuel 3. 1-10 / Revelation 5. 1-10 / John 1. 43-end

11:00am Holy Communion Service at St. Bartholomew's church Revd Carol Pharaoh

Do contact us if we can offer any help or support at this time.

Team Rector: Revd Carol Pharaoh 01942 85925 | carol.pharaoh@gmail.com | www.westhoughtonchurches.org.uk

Team Vicar: Revd Angela Wynne 01204 468150 – revawynne@gmail.com

FACEBOOK – locate us by searching Westhoughton parish Follow us on twitter @Wparishchurch
@Westhoughtontowerbellringers

Material for the news sheet should be sent to Joan Warner by Wednesday morning 01942 818821 | joan.warner35@outlook.com

To receive these pewsheets, newsletters or special events leaflets electronically, please e-mail
westhoughtonparish@outlook.com