

who

are

you

?



*7 February, 2021*

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**Let's begin with a time of SILENCE followed by PRAYER**

Listen to the hymn and centre your thoughts on the Christ who came to save

**HYMN            Fairest Lord Jesus**

**OPENING REFLECTION**

God is in our world, which threatens us with uncertainties and darkness.  
God is with us, strengthening our faith and conviction.  
God is among us, embracing the wounded and the broken.  
God is knocking down the walls of division and strife.  
God is the light of our lives, the candle shining in the darkness.  
God is the one who is making all things new.

**God IS!**

**PRAYER**

Loving God! Your touch heals the broken places of our life;  
touch and heal us today...

God of peace! Your Spirit speaks softly into our confusion and despair;  
unburden and reassure us today...

Forgiving God! Your call to repentance promises grace upon grace,  
empty our guilt that we may experience Your mercy today...

In our worship today, we will renew our gratefulness for Your faithfulness  
and will sing of Your unending love, all the days of our lives. **AMEN.**

**HYMN            I will Sing the Wondrous Story**

## READING

## Gospel of John 1:15-37

John pointed him out to the people, telling the crowds, *“This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘Someone is coming who is greater by far than I am—for he existed long before I did!’”* We have all benefited from the rich blessings he brought to us—blessing upon blessing heaped upon us! Moses gave us the Law with its rigid demands and merciless justice, while Jesus Christ brought us loving forgiveness as well. No one has ever actually seen God, but of course, his only Son has, for he is the companion of the Father and has told us all about him.

The Jewish leaders sent priests and assistant priests from Jerusalem to ask John whether he claimed to be the Messiah. He denied it flatly. *“I am not the Christ,”* he said.

*“Well then, who are you?”* they asked. *“Are you Elijah?”* “No,” he replied.

*“Are you the Prophet?”* “No.”

*“Then who are you? Tell us, so we can give an answer to those who sent us. What do you have to say for yourself?”*

He replied, *“I am a voice from the barren wilderness, shouting as Isaiah prophesied, ‘Get ready for the coming of the Lord!’”*

Then those who were sent by the Pharisees asked him, *“If you aren’t the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptise?”*

John told them, *“I merely baptise with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you have never met, who will soon begin his ministry among you, and I am not even fit to be his slave.”*

This incident took place at Bethany, a village on the other side of the Jordan River where John was baptising.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, *“Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the world’s sin! He is the one I was talking about when I*

*said, ‘Soon a man far greater than I am is coming, who existed long before me!’ I didn’t know he was the one, but I am here baptising with water in order to point him out to the nation of Israel.”*

Then John told about seeing the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descending from heaven and resting upon Jesus.

*“I didn’t know he was the one,” John said again, “but at the time God sent me to baptise he told me, ‘When you see the Holy Spirit descending and resting upon someone—He is the one you are looking for. He is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.’ I saw it happen to this Man, I therefore testify, He is the Son of God.*

The next day as John was standing with two of his disciples, Jesus walked by. John looked at him intently and then declared, *“See! There is the Lamb of God!”*

Then John’s two disciples turned and followed Jesus.

## **HYMN**                    **Will You Come and Follow Me?**

### **MESSAGE**

We are delving into the Gospel of John as our first study in 2021. This final Gospel was written by the Apostle John towards the end of the first century after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the dispersion of the Jewish nation.

In the fifty years following Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, several accounts of His life were written, some based on eye-witness accounts, some based on human reasoning, and others based on various political views about Jesus. Accounts of the Disciples’ travels, their speeches, discussions and teachings recorded in the book of Acts, demonstrate how the Disciples filtered out the irrelevant and the unnecessary details, and stuck to the facts.

In writing his Gospel account, John admits the existence of massive volumes of detailed accounts about Jesus (see 20:30-31 and 21:24-25), and in his own humble way, John hints at having sifted through some of this massive volume of detail, in order to present his well-reasoned account of Jesus the Messiah, the

Saviour of the world, underpinning it with the logic of God's history, starting with the creation of time (Genesis 1), the purposeful and timed entry into this world by God's Son Jesus, His teaching about Himself and the restoration of the Kingdom of God, leaving us in chapters 20 and 21 with the sense, *"the story is not yet over folks! Watch this space!"* Jesus tells Thomas, *You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me (20:29)*, alluding to the work of the Apostles and Disciples yet to happen, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

John's introductory chapter weaves between eternity and "time", starting with the language of Genesis 1:1, then referring to the True Light entering the world He was a part of, in creation. Our passage today is about the the one who herald's Jesus as He begins His crucial two-fold ministry of "teaching, preaching and healing" (Matthew 4:23), and discipling the twelve chosen (17:6-20) to whom He revealed the Father, His plans and purposes.

Luke starts with the importance of John, born to Zechariah and Elisabeth, of whom the Angel said will, *turn many Israelites to the Lord ... prepare the people for the coming of the Lord, turn the fathers to their children and cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the Godly (Luke 1:16-17)*

As John's ministry reaches a climax, he says referring to Jesus, *"This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for He existed long before me'."*

This verse poses a problem for us. We live in a time and age when each **successive** generation is considered wiser and better than their preceding generation. We use words like "human progress", "human development" to define ourselves as better than our previous generations and speak disparagingly of our previous generations by implying, they were "primitive peoples", uncivilised, barbaric, ignorant and without "culture", using "primitive tools" which are not as sophisticated, advanced as what we use today, living therefore, a "primitive" life.

Jewish thought and theology taught people to be humble, by accepting those who lived before them, as wiser than themselves. John (the Baptist) speaks with incredible humility when he says, *Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am*, flipping the prevalent attitude on its head: ***although I am before Him, He is much greater than I.***

John interjects by defining Jesus' mission. He (Jesus) brings with Him God's abundance, which comes to us in the form of God's **grace**. To Moses God gave the law. Law by its very nature demands its full penalty be paid when broken or disobeyed, but through Christ God dispenses with the penalty of the law through His **grace**.<sup>1</sup> God does not circumvent the law, nor does he override it or cancel it, for by doing so He would contradict Himself; God chooses to set the law aside in order that we are restored into full and complete fellowship with God, through the person of Christ. The evidence of God's love is His **grace**, which comes to us in the person of His Son, Jesus.

As an aside, John introduces us to Jesus' ministry among the 12 Apostles, *He (Jesus) revealed God to us*, which Jesus acknowledges during His prayer in Gethsemane, *I have revealed You to the ones You gave me from this world (17:6)*

Back to John the Baptist. His testimony conveyed such authority (*someone is coming after me who is far greater than I*) the leadership in Jerusalem were rankled. They sent priests and Temple assistants to ask John, **Who are you?**

John recognised the motive in their question and responded spontaneously and with absolute authority, perhaps even shouting his response at the top of his voice for all to hear. *I am NOT the Messiah!*

The minions from Jerusalem press John for an answer to take back to their superiors who sent them, finally questioning his **right** to baptise!

It is a slippery slope from confidence to authority, to pride and onto hubris, but John displays a perfect balance between being authoritative and being humble.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 3:20; 4:14, 15; 5:20; 6:14; 7:1-6, 7-12, 10, 13; 8:2-3

Having asserted himself as not being the Messiah, John clarifies, *Though His ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal (1:27)*. In other words, *In our culture we respect those who have gone before us, but in this case, even though it appears I have come before the Messiah, I am not worthy to be the lowest of His slaves, those who would untie His sandal straps!*

The opportunity presents itself the very next day, when John **saw** Jesus walking towards him. For the theatre buffs among you, this is the, *(Jesus) enter stage left, (John) exit stage right* moment! *LOOK!! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world - He is the one I have been talking about!*

John's testimony closes this section and we do not hear from him again, only about his beheading by the megalomaniac Herod<sup>2</sup>. Verses 29-37 offer us significant teaching for our lives today.

John was a **reliable witness** because he testified to what he **saw**:

- He **saw** Jesus coming towards him (29)
- He continued to baptise with water, until God revealed Jesus (31)
- He **saw** the Holy Spirit descend like a dove from Heaven and rest on Jesus (32)
- God said, *'The one on whom you **see** the Spirit descend and rest is the One who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.'* (33)
- Finally, a jubilant John says, *I have **seen** this happen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One, His Son, the Messiah."* (34)

We are called to be **witnesses**, not baptisers, not people who convert others to Christianity, not people who read the "times" (not the newspaper!) to speculate when Jesus will return.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 15 and Mark 6

Witnesses are not neutral – they are committed to Truth; this is their testimony, failing which they are unreliable witnesses. John was a reliable witness, and knew who Jesus was because of what he **saw** with his own eyes.

The gospel of John emphasises John's role as a witness. We have a bad habit of defining people by the work they do, so we call him "John the Baptist".

Witnesses give testimony as to what they have seen, in an effort to establish the truth. Beyond that, they are unreliable and operate on hearsay – not evidence.

Jesus said, *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*<sup>3</sup>

Will we be the witness of Truth as revealed by God? To be a witness trusted by God, we have to be committed to one thing: **TRUTH**. What happened when John witnessed what he had seen? He said to two of his disciples, *Look! The Lamb of God!* and they left him and followed Jesus (37). That's what happens when we testify to the Truth! **AMEN.**

**LISTEN I'm Telling the World About His Love**

## **BENEDICTION**

As you respond to God's call to be a witness of His grace, given freely to you through Jesus Your Christ,

Let God strengthen you in body to run and not be weary.

Let Jesus cast away all shadow of doubt and reveal the Father.

Let the Holy Spirit raise your spirit high up on the wings of eagles,  
to see God's Glory which He has promised you in Christ Jesus!

Travel with Him who knows the way to the Father; that is where you belong! **AMEN.**

**HYMN Blessed Assurance ... This is my Story! This is my Song!**

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 1:8