

17th December, 2023

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe,

light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

See, amid the winter's snow,
born for us on earth below,
see the tender Lamb appears,
promised from eternal years.

"As we watched at dead of night,
lo, we saw a wondrous light;
angels singing 'Peace on earth'
told us of the Saviour's birth."

Refrain:

[Refrain]

Hail! Thou ever-blessed morn!
Hail, redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."

Sacred Infant, all divine,
what a tender love was Thine;
thus to come from highest bliss
down to such a world as this! [Refrain]

Lo, within a manger lies
He who built the starry skies;
He, who throned in height sublime,
sits amid the cherubim!

Teach, O teach us, Holy Child,
by Thy face so meek and mild,
teach us to resemble Thee
in Thy sweet humility!

[Refrain]

[Refrain]

Say, ye holy shepherds, say,
what your joyful news today;
wherefore have ye left your sheep
on the lonely mountain steep?

[Refrain]

The Sermon by Timothy James

Read 1 Thessalonians 5.16-24 and John 1.6-8,19-28. Stay Faithful

Interwoven with the gospel's proclamation of the coming of the Word into the world, the gospel writer states simply: **"There was a man sent from God whose name was John"** (v.6).

Three things emerge about John:

1. He is sent as witness to Jesus the Messiah.
2. He brings good news of forgiveness for sins.
3. He symbolises his mission through water baptism.

1. He is the first witness

John's gospel is a book of witnesses (positive and hostile) about who Jesus is (there are about 50 uses of word in the gospel). The other gospels emphasise John the prophet and forerunner. The 4th gospel says he came to point to Jesus – to bear witness to the light.

"John's role as the primary witness to Jesus, the Messiah ... the first human witness to this unique relationship between the Father and the Son" (Paul S. Berge, *WorkingPreacher.org*).

Witnesses take responsibility for the truth of their testimony.

People asked John who he was; but he constantly pointed away from himself and towards Jesus.

2. His message was of repentance for forgiveness

Look at Zechariah's prophecy in the Benedictus (Luke 1:76-77):

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, **to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins**".

John's father is rejoicing that God has raised up a mighty saviour from the house of David, who will enable his people to serve him in holiness; but he sees his son's role as giving knowledge of this, as involving forgiveness.

God brings salvation; but forgiveness follows repentance.

3. He baptised

Although John does not use the name Baptist, John's distinctive message was expressed by water baptism. Baptism has at least two significances:

- The coming of God's
- The coming of judgment

If judgment gives you cause for concern, the passage from I Thessalonians contains an important reassurance and a direction: God will keep us safe at judgment; so we need to work with him on our holiness.

So what about us?

Put **your own name** in v6: "there was a man/woman sent from God called **N**. S/he came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all may believe through him/her".

If this is so, what are the implications?

"Like John, **God commissions us to bear witness** to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the one who has come in the flesh, the one who is here with us and the one who will come again in his reign as Lord of all" (Paul S. Berge, *WorkingPreacher.org*)

It is easier to talk about ourselves than about Jesus, and people will prefer to hear us talk about ourselves (perhaps so they can talk about themselves?). But like John we are sent to be witnesses to Jesus: to point and say "Look!"

Our testimony needs to be as clear as John's: we need to be clear about the need for repentance, and the offer of forgiveness; and we need to be clear about the Holy Spirit, and about Jesus' return as judge and saviour.

Prayer

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.

Third Sunday of Advent: *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.*

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Tea and Chat & Tea & Bowls: Wed Jan 17th at 2pm. Church & hall.
- Coffee and Questions: Jan 24th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Christmas Day Celebration at 9.30am
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays.
- COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.