



Heacham Parish Church



12th December 2021 – 3rd Sunday of Advent

Welcome to Sunday Worship as we continue through the season of Advent, a time when we reflect on what it is to make ourselves ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas and make ourselves ready for his second coming.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

The Lord be with you **and also with you.**

Hymn: Darkness like a shroud (Arise, shine) (MP 110)

1 Darkness like a shroud

covers the earth,
evil like a cloud
covers the people;
but the Lord will rise upon you,
and His glory will appear on you,
nations will come to your light.

*Arise, shine, your light has come,
the glory of the Lord has risen on you;
arise, shine, your light has come –
Jesus the Light of the world has come.*

2 Children of the light,
be clean and pure;
rise, you sleepers,
Christ will shine on you:
take the Spirit's flashing two-edged sword
and with faith declare God's mighty word;
stand up, and in His strength be strong!

Arise, shine....

3 Here among us now,
Christ the Light
kindles brighter flames
in our trembling hearts:
Living Word, our lamp, come guide our feet –
as we walk as one in light and peace,
justice and truth shine like the sun.

Arise, shine....

4 Like a city bright,
so let us blaze;
lights in every street
turning night to day:
and the darkness shall not overcome,
till the fulness of Christ's kingdom comes,
dawning to God's eternal day.

*Arise, shine, your light has come,
the glory of the Lord has risen on you;
arise, shine, your light has come –
Jesus the Light of the world,
Jesus the Light of the world,
Jesus the Light of the world has come.*

Prayers of preparation

**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.**

The lighting of the Advent Candle

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.

Prayers of penitence

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:
The first commandment is this:
'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.'
The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'
There is no other commandment greater than these.
On these two commandments hang all the law and the
prophets.
Amen. Lord, have mercy.

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.

Confession

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.

**For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us, forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.**

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in life
eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Collect

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

Bible reading – Luke 3:7-18 read by Pam

A reflection – by Pip

Have you ever been on the receiving end of a warning? I am pretty sure that most of us have. Warning is a good word to use to describe the reading today. The reading starts with rather a stark warning, it really packs a punch. “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?” I am not sure if you are allowed to call people vipers these days, probably infringes a whole load of rights.

Clearly John the Baptist did not care for such social niceties, protocol, or political correctness. He had an urgent mission; he possibly knew that time was short. Being to the point was necessary.

Israel and its people had fallen a long way from the heady days of the exodus and entry into the promised land. The years has passed with exile, oppression, and occupation. The people of God were compromised. They had followed foreign gods and made treaties with other nations. They had not trusted the Lord to deliver them in times of distress. They had built up rules and regulations which bore no resemblance to the spirit of the law Moses had given. They were a people who were uncertain of their heritage, sound familiar?

John made his entrance on to the stage when Israel was under the tyrannical rule of an unstable Tiberius. People where, no doubt, bending rules to live in the situation. Expediency was probably the order of the day, so it is no surprise that John the Baptist follows his warning with instructions. People who came out to see him were told, “to produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” In a way it was a challenge to the seriousness of the response to his call. Baptism was a renewal process,

marking a new start, a turning around. Genuine repentance is always accompanied by action. John tells his listeners that they cannot assume that their ancestral heritage would save them. It did not exempt them from personal responsibility. It is the same today, living in a country with a Christian heritage does not make us automatically right with God, it is no get out of jail free card.

Advent is a good season to take stock. We started on the first Sunday with John, not the Baptist, asking us if we were ready. Veronica urged us last week to be more prayerful. This week it is about action. In the reading it is clear that the stakes are high. John says, "the axe is already at the root of the tree, and every tree that does not bear fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

Loving Jesus, being part of His family, means we are fruit bearing people. It means we allow His in-dwelling Holy Spirit space to work in our hearts. Showing us our wrong doings. We pay attention, and with His help turn away from things that hurt us and harm others. It means we love as Jesus did. We express the evidence of the presence of Jesus in our lives in as many ways as we possibly can. Action means we display the fruits of the spirit even when we do not feel like it!

When the crowd says to John "what should we do then?" He told them plainly, no sugar coating, no get out clause. Share what you have, do not cheat, be content.

So, what do we do as we live post John the Baptist, in the knowledge of a risen Lord?

John the Baptist is a good example to follow. He was a man who was focused. He was a man of God. People wanted to be with him, to hear what he had to say. John's testimony about Jesus drew people to him, even though he himself was a little

strange with his diet and wardrobe. John said, "I have seen, and I testify that this man is the son of God."

Do we make ourselves attractive to others? Do people look at us and trace an outline of Jesus, or do they see as much of him as a cloudy day. We are not John the Baptist with a specific mission, but we are children of God. Our mission is to point people to Jesus with the strength that He enables. We are "a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God so that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light."

We can all make a difference in a weary world that has lost sight of the light. We recognise, like John knew, the position of centre stage belongs to Jesus. John said, "the friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine and is now complete. He must become greater, I must become less."

Friends, all of our actions should show that we have Jesus at the centre of our lives, and because of that our joy is complete. Are we there yet? Have we reached the place where our first thought is to ensure that all the glory goes to Jesus? Every time there is a success, every time things fall into place, every time it just could not get any better. They are the give glory to God moments. It is the joy of hearing the bridegroom's voice.

The truth is when it comes to actions, fruit, and giving God the glory, sometimes we see the moment and sometimes we don't. John the Baptist had moments of doubt too. Remember his prison cell message "Are you the one to come or should we expect someone else?" Like us, John was human. From the despairing place of the prison cell, with death on the horizon, he needed reassurance. He needed a word from the lord,

spoken into his situation to ease it, to help him make sense of it. What was the answer? "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

Let's make space to reflect on all our current circumstances, they will very much be reflected in our actions. If we are in a good place at the moment we can share joy and completeness in Christ, as John did in the early days. If, like John in the latter days, things are difficult, challenging and trying then we need to ask for the Lord's help. We need to remind ourselves "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

Wherever we are at, whatever 2022 holds for us, our action is to remain ready, prayerful, and prepared to take action. So, we can remain faithful witnesses to the loving saviour who is lord of all our lives. In a time of silence let's just stop and commit next year into His precious hands. Let's ask for help to face every difficulty and challenge and also ask for help to be able to recognise and embrace the "give glory to God" moments that will come along in amongst all of the challenges. The lord of heaven and earth will be with us in them all. Amen.

The Nicene Crede

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

Prayers of Intercession - Led by John W

Hymn: Lo, he comes with clouds descending (MP424)

- 1 Lo! He comes, with clouds descending,
once for favoured sinners slain:
thousand thousand saints attending
swell the triumph of His train;
 hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
God appears on earth to reign.

- 2 Every eye shall now behold Him
robed in dreadful majesty;
those who set at nought and sold Him,
pierced, and nailed Him to the tree,
 deeply wailing . . .
shall the true Messiah see.

3 Now redemption, long expected,
see in solemn pomp appear!
All His saints, by man rejected,
now shall meet Him in the air.
Hallelujah . . .
see the day of God appear.

4 Yea, amen! let all adore Thee
high on Thy eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory,
claim the kingdom of Thine own;
hallelujah . . .
everlasting God, come down!

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,
scatter the darkness from before your path,
and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

Hymn: Tell out, my soul (MP631)

1 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of His word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His name!
Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His holy name, the Lord, the Mighty One.

3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of His word!
Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

Dismissal

As we await our coming Saviour,
go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen

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