

Sunday Update
13th December 2020

John 1:6-8; 1:29-36

6 There was a man who was sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the one I meant when I said, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." 31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.' 32 Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit." 34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.' 35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!'

Have you ever been called as a witness in a court case? Perhaps you saw something happen, a crime being committed, or an accident happening, and the police came to ask you what you saw. They took a statement from you and you were asked to sign it; you are now a witness! Then later, you are summoned to court to deliver that statement in person and are open to questions about what you saw; you might be asked to justify your statement. You are a witness and have committed yourself to your testimony; this is what you saw and you commit yourself to the truth! Once I have been asked to be a witness in a case at the Sheriff Court; some men were arrested in our back garden on a Saturday evening, but the first I knew of it was when the police turned up at our door on Sunday! We didn't hear or see anything. They asked if I knew these people; was I related to these people? That was my witness statement, to counter any potential argument that Mr X was visiting his uncle! I was nervous about it, because although my testimony was limited, what might I be asked when the case came to court? I was called to attend the Sheriff Court twice, the first time only for the case to be adjourned and the second only for the defendant to plead guilty!

We are thinking today about the Bible character we call John the Baptist! His parents were Zechariah and Elizabeth, "*both well on in years*" according to Luke 1:7. John's birth was promised by an angel visiting Zechariah whilst he was on priestly duty in the temple and his disbelief resulted in 9 months of silence. The promise made by the angel was of someone who "*will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts Of the fathers to their children... to make ready and people prepared for the Lord.*" (Luke 1:17) 9 months later, John is born and his father gets his voice back. His next appearance in the Bible story is as an adult, living in the desert, wearing camel-hair clothes and eating locusts and wild honey. More importantly, he is preaching a message of repentance, calling people to turn back to God and away from sin; as an outward display of that turning, he baptised people in the Jordan River; so we call him John the Baptist!

John – a different one, this time the disciple and follower of Jesus, now the apostle – writes his gospel account of Jesus and His ministry. In the prologue to his gospel (chapter 1:1-18) John gives is a feel for some of the big themes that are going to appear later. He writes about Jesus as "light" and "life" and in later chapters he will come back to these themes and show us what Jesus does for us. In verse 4, he combines these 2 themes, writing about Jesus: "*In Him was life, and that life what the light of men.*" (John 1:4) The rest of the piece is all about Jesus and what He will do and how He will bring the grace

of God to bear on the lives of people across the world, the Son of God coming to live in our world to save us. John the Baptist gets a mention: *“There was a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.”* (John 1:6,7) Just as the angel promised, John has a job to do in the story of Jesus and he comes to do it; by his preaching and his baptising, he is a witness to Jesus.

The word for “witness” gives us our word “martyr” but it quite simply means someone who bears witness to something they have seen or what they know. Needless to say, John’s preaching and baptising ministry provoked a great deal of interest, even among the authorities, and they wanted to know John is and what he is doing. John knows both who he is, and who he is *not*! He knows that he is not Messiah; *“he himself was not the light...”* (1:8) He is the voice, preparing the way for the coming of the King, the Messiah, One greater who is still to come. John knows that he is not worthy to tie the sandal- straps of the Great One still to come. His whole ministry is aimed at pointing people to Jesus and preparing people’s hearts to meet Jesus when He does appear; his work is aimed at helping people believe in Jesus. He spent his life doing this work.

Not that it was all plain sailing: Matthew chapter 11 and Luke chapter 7 tell the story of John in prison. He had been arrested by Herod for telling the world that Herod was wrong for taking his brother’s wife to his own bed. From his prison John sent two of his own disciples to ask Jesus *“Are you the One who was to come...?”* (Matthew 11:3), a question that seems to be full of doubt and uncertainty; what he sees and hears of Jesus don’t seem to match John’s expectations of Messiah. Jesus’s answer points to what He is doing, resonating with the description of God’s saving work, especially in Isaiah 61. This is what God sent His servant to do; Jesus is completing that God-given mission. Is John reassured? We don’t know. His life’s work has been to prepare people to meet Jesus, to prepare their hearts and minds to believe Jesus as Messiah, as the God-given Saviour for the world.

We are witnesses! For us John is the model witness. He is called by God as a witness; he points people to Jesus; his great desire is that other people believe in Jesus and find light and life for their own lives. We are witnesses to Jesus with the same ideals for our time and our world. John’s methods were unique, but his desire is something we are challenged to share. That is true for us as individuals and it is true for the church as a whole. Our Christian calling is to point people to Jesus so that others might believe in Him. No matter who we are, none of us is Messiah; no matter how good the church, your church is not the Saviour of the world. Our witness is never “look at me; see how good a Christian I am!” Our witness is never “look at our church; see how good our church is!” Our witness, as individuals or as a church community must always be “look at Jesus, see how good and great He is; He gives life and light!”

I suppose that our first thought about the idea of “witness” is all about speaking; we should be able to tell people about Jesus. Yes, we should! We should be able to explain, in two sentences, what we believe about Jesus and why. Don’t try to tell your whole life-story! Remember, it is not about you – it is about Jesus! There are other ways to be witnesses: we bear witness to Jesus when we embody the values that He teaches, the values of His kingdom. These are expressed in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) amongst other places, and when we live by these values we bear witness to the importance of Jesus in our lives. We bear witness to Jesus by doing good things for other people, no matter who they may be. These are all individual ways of witness. As a church, we bear witness to Jesus by welcoming anyone and everyone into our church life, and by making sure that our priorities and values as a church are shaped by Jesus and His grace. Our message has always to be “come to Jesus”, not as it so often is “come to Church!”

Jesus is the life-giver; Jesus is the light of the world. John was a witness to that life and light. Our calling is to be witnesses, to point people to Jesus. Share the light with someone this Christmas, by something you say, something you write, or something you do!

Prayer: Father, we thank You for the ministry of John, for his witness to Jesus; we thank You that he was the voice preparing the people to meet Jesus, preparing the people to meet their King! Help us to be pointed to Jesus by the witness of others and help us to be witnesses, pointing people to Jesus by our words, by our way of life, by our good deeds.

*Day by day, dear Lord of you
Three things I pray:
To see you more clearly,
To love you more dearly,
To follow you more nearly,
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For a world crying out for something of value to believe in, light in the darkness of fear and anxiety; help us to point people to Jesus. Forgive us when we have been too scared to stand up, or when our values have not been Jesus' values and we have obscured Him from view. Help us to share the light with someone this Christmas and open their hearts and minds to believe in Jesus.
- For Churches the length and breadth of the country, trying to find ways of telling the story of Christmas to people they meet; give them energy and insight to be creative in telling the story, and faithful to the truth of the story. Bless their witness by the open hearts of those who hear.
- For effects of lockdown again, new measures and their impact; pray that they work to curb spread of Covid, let numbers go down again and people be safe; let our society be open again and let us be free from fear and anxiety. For the plans centred on Christmas, that the nation will stay safe and people will respect the need to keep other, more vulnerable, people safe.
- NHS staff as the numbers in hospital are high again; for care home staff such as Lorimer House, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the vaccine, giving thanks that it is becoming available; for wise use of the first doses, given to people in greatest need across the world.
- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some coming to the end of furlough, going back to work; others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; people for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.

- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen. (Some of the links look a bit different this week, but they should all work as usual!)

Who is He in yonder stall ["Who is He in Yonder Stall?" - BYU Men's Chorus - YouTube](#)
 Since the day the angel came [Thorns In The Straw - Graham Kendrick - Lyric Video - YouTube](#)
 Light of the world (Here I am) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBKzCpkXJR4>
 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoPlwPUYWaw>
 Tell out my soul [Tell out my soul \(in full\) - YouTube](#)

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerigpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the "sermons" tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.igpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS The next issue of "EVERY DAY WITH JESUS" Booklet for November and December 2020 is now available and please contact Ian Aitken for a copy. Also, new issues of the "WORD FOR TODAY" Booklet and "WORD 4u2TODAY" Booklet for Young People for November and December 2020 and January 2021 and "OUR DAILY BREAD" for December 2020 and January and February 2021 are also available and please contact Michael Merriman for a copy.. Let the Bible feed you.

Christmas Events:

Service for Remembering on Sunday 13th December at 3pm; a quiet time for reflection with music, readings and prayers for people who have been bereaved.

Family Carol Service on Christmas Eve at 6.30pm; bring a tea-light to bring some sparkle to Christmas Eve as we hear our favourite carols and find hope in the coming of Jesus.

Christmas Extravaganza – Sunday 20th December at 10.30am; our morning service with a whole lot of extras!

Christmas Day Service for all the family at 10.30am; bring a present to the service; let's rejoice in the coming of Jesus to the world to bring light and joy.

All of these services will take place on Zoom: here is the link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83064379290?pwd=UUx4QmRJZ1hhdHp3VnpCbkpjcllxZz09>

Bring some sparkle to Christmas:

The Star: download a star from www.jgpc.org.uk and colour it in, then place it in your window; when you're walking through the community see how many stars you can find; Christmas is not cancelled!

The Pebble: find a pebble and draw a character from the nativity story, then place the stone on the steps at the front door of the church; let's see what we can create there to remind the world that Christmas is not cancelled.

The Nativity Trail: some members of the nativity cast have been let loose in the shops and businesses in Juniper Green; see if you can find them; there is a guide to download on the church website.

#CommunityChristmas



We've a story

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. The third candle represents joy. You may want to light a candle in your home as you say this prayer together, then leave it lit as you do the rest of the activities together. (Remember to blow it out at the end!)

Jesus, you are joy even in the saddest times. Help us to praise you when we are upset or grieving. Shine joy into our hearts we pray.

Amen.



Play together...

Who am I?

Write different characters/famous people's names onto sticky notes. Stick a note onto each person's forehead or back without letting them see. Their task is to work out who they are by asking yes or no questions.

Question...



How would you define joy?

What brings you joy?

What's the most joyful message you've ever received?



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in John 1:6-8, 29-36. You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1%3A6-8%2C+29-36&version=GNT>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.



Talk together...

- How difficult is it to work out who someone is or what they do just by looking at them?
- If you had seen John, wearing his camel hair clothing and eating locusts and honey, who would you have guessed he was or what he did?
- What was John's job?
- How did John know who Jesus was?
- Why do you think John wanted people to focus on Jesus and know who he was?
- Was John's message a joyful one? Why/why not?
- Discuss some times when you have felt Jesus with you.
- The Bible says that Christians have God's spirit living inside that helps us to live God's way and be like Jesus. Are there ways to tell that a person has God's spirit in them? What are the clues to Jesus' presence?
- What do/could we do that helps other people to find out about Jesus?

Praise together...



God is with us, Casting Crowns:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhzWypOp-E4&feature=youtu.be>

Pray together...

Dear God, thank you for the story of John who came to prepare the way for Jesus. Thank you for the people who tell us about Jesus. Would you help us to be your messengers on earth, sharing your love and kindness with those we meet. Help us to speak to others about Jesus. As we enter into the Christmas season, let us not forget that Jesus came to the earth as part of your big plan to save and forgive us all. Amen.

Make together...

Message in a bottle. John's message was a joyful one, he told people that God's rescuer was here. How does a good message make you feel? When was the last time you received one? Think of someone you could encourage and write them a "good news" message. Put the message in a bottle and decorate the bottle with stickers or other decorations. During the next week pass your bottle onto the person it's for.

Do something...

Darken the room as much as possible. Turn on a torch and shine the beam at different points in the room. What can you see? Then slowly turn on more lights one by one (more torches, lamps, Christmas lights etc.) What happens when each one is turned on? What appears and disappears? Jesus said he was the light of the world. He also said that we are like light for the world. Matthew 5:16 says "...your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise **your Father in heaven.**" What we do should reflect Jesus and lead people to him, how can we do that this week?