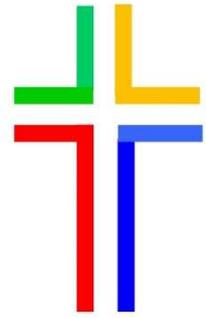


# Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 6 December



This Sunday there will be another new worship video which will be available on our Chapel website [www.weekstmarymethodist.org.uk](http://www.weekstmarymethodist.org.uk) and facebook page [www.facebook.com/ChapelWSM](https://www.facebook.com/ChapelWSM). The first video was well received and we will be producing these fortnightly from now on. Look them up if you can. Sophie is leading worship at the Chapel today.

Today is the second Sunday in Advent, the Sunday when we focus on the Old Testament prophets, on peace, and on the journey of Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem.

## PRAYER

Lord, we give you thanks for the ending of our second covid lockdown, and that if we wish to we can meet again in the Chapel. We also know that these are worrying times and many will prefer to not to mix with other people, and will read our service sheets or

watch the video. But wherever we are, Lord, help us to remember that we share a common community, and a common purpose in setting aside some time to be with you.

**Amen**

## READING FOR TODAY Mark 1:1-8 (NIV)

### John the Baptist prepares the way

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, <sup>2</sup>as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

‘I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way’ –

<sup>3</sup>‘a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
“Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.”’

<sup>4</sup>And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>The

whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. <sup>6</sup>John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>And this was his message: ‘After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup>I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.’

## REFLECTION

Mark is the shortest of the gospels and he wastes no time with lengthy introductions – he gets straight into ‘the good news about Jesus the Messiah’ and introduces us to John the Baptist. For a fuller account of John’s birth and origins we have to turn to Luke; he describes John’s birth to aging parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, and the visit to them by Mary, the mother of Jesus. But none of the gospels say anything about John’s early life – just that when he grew up he lived in the desert or wilderness of southern Judea and then started preaching.

However, all the gospels, including Mark in verses 2 and 3 above, make the specific link with the prophecy of Isaiah in the Old Testament (Isaiah 40:3), that a messenger will appear - ‘a voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord”’.

John was fulfilling Old Testament predictions but he was also the last of the pre-Christian prophets, the last in a long line before the start of the ministry of Jesus. Luke emphasises this by starting his description of John’s actions in a very similar way to the start of the book of Jeremiah.

John was preaching repentance of sins and instigated the practice of baptism, in the tradition of Old Testament ritual cleansing with water, to demonstrate the new beginning of all those who fully confessed. And so John goes around preaching and baptising and eventually, as we know, baptised Jesus.

I have been reflecting on how many people John might have preached to or baptised. There was no rapid communication or way of broadcasting information in those days of course; it could only be by word of mouth. When I looked it up I was really surprised. We know Christ's ministry was short – only three years – but John's was even shorter – probably only a matter of months before he was arrested. We'll never know how many lives he touched directly in those few months but somehow it was enough to fulfil God's plan and prepare the way for the Lord. Amazing really.

So it is with us. We may think we are not having an effect, that our actions are not enough to be significant, that we are not making God's Kingdom a reality. But we never know whose lives we touch and by how much, we may never know what result our example has had. We just have to have faith that what we are doing, like John the Baptist, is in accord with God's plan and that he will use us as he needs to.

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

### **PRAYER FOR OTHERS**

We pray for our leaders and government and the decisions they have to take. We know it is not easy; there are the sickness and deaths occurring now due to Covid to be balanced against deferred treatments for other diseases, and against lives prematurely shortened due to poverty and despair.

We pray for all those agonising this Christmas over the choice of seeing family and loved ones, perhaps for the first time in many months, or of deferring meeting until possible safety after mass vaccination.

We pray for all those for whom Covid isn't the major concern at present, we think of all those in war-torn Yemen, the peoples of Ethiopia wondering where to go to be safe, the displaced persons trapped in the many migrant camps around the world, and all those suffering from natural disasters.

We pray for our own community, for our church members, for others who are housebound, and for all those recently bereaved.

### **HYMN H&P 85, StF 180**

O come, O come, Immanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here,  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O come, O Lord of might,  
Who to your tribes, on Sinai's height,  
In ancient times did give the law  
In cloud, and majesty, and awe.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O Rod of Jesse, free  
Your own from Satan's tyranny;  
From depths of hell your people save,  
And give them victory o'er the grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O Key of David, come  
And open wide our heav'nly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer,  
our spirits by your advent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel.

### **THE GRACE**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more. Amen  
*"Let's approach Christmas with an expectant hush, rather than a last-minute rush."*  
(Anonymous)