

St Nicholas Church, Sighthill

Third Sunday of Advent

13th December 2020

Bright Hope
for tomorrow

God is good, all the time

Prayer/ lighting a candle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJhNP20cx24>

Advent Hymn

Christ whose glory
fills the skies
Christ the
Everlasting Light

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcON2Y_hwTY

Approach/prayer

Lord Jesus, You came and come to all. You came and come especially to the poorest and the most vulnerable

Come to us here, Lord Jesus. Come help and heal the poverty of our souls. Come refresh and inspire us even through the weakness of our faith. Come to love and to hold us. Come to give us the courage to always to point to You.

a moment silence

In the stopping, in the pausing, in the quiet - we cannot avoid what we are not, our faults, our lack of faith, our lack of vision and action, our lack of trust in You – all bubble to the surface.

You, Father God, see what we are and still stand by us, offering us hope and above all, forgiveness. Help us here and now to recognise that it was with us in mind that You sent the baby Jesus to planet earth. It was with us in mind that He grew to live and die and to rise again.

Because that's what You think we are worth. May Your love set us free this day and always. These things we ask in the name of that Son, who taught us, when we pray, to say together:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Matthew 6: 9-13 (NKJV)

'When out of Poverty is Born', a Christian Aid Christmas Carol <https://youtu.be/MzwyjnACz0o>

Bible Reading: John 1:6-8, 19-28

'The Testimony of John the Baptist'

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light... This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord", as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you

do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the straps of his sandals.' This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Brief reflection

In the opening verses of the fourth Gospel, John bears witness to the uniqueness of Jesus' identity. He writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (1:1-2). **Jesus is God; Jesus is the Word.** These identities are inseparable, and John is the first human witness to Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Light of the world.

Notably, after reflecting on his life, John introduces his namesake to us as Jesus' primary witness. Unlike other Gospel writers, he does not call him a forerunner of Jesus (although that is his other identity). Also, he does not attach the words 'the baptist' to his name, again as the other three Gospel writers do. He simply describes him powerfully and indeed intentionally as **'a man sent by God... to testify to the light'**.

Furthermore, John later (1:19-28) writes that, when asked about his identity, John himself replies that he is not the Messiah, or Elijah, or the prophet. Rather, he identifies himself as the prophetic voice, like that of Prophet Isaiah, crying out in the wilderness and calling God's people to "make straight the way of the Lord."

And here's the amazing thing about our God. He sent His Son Jesus Christ into the midst of humanity to redeem and restore the world. God also relied on John, a human being, to signpost that momentous and indeed historic fact. However, John was acutely aware of his own limitations. He said, "I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie".

John's role was to 'make straight the way to the one who came as the Messiah', and he did this so well through his identity, in the role God gave him. He was simply the witness to the one God sent. He was also the first person in John's Gospel to bear witness to Christ and to confess that He is "the Son of God" (1:34). These words "Son of God" are repeated at the very end of the Gospel according to Mark, in a confession a Roman Centurion made while standing at the foot of the cross, shortly after Jesus breathed his last. He said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mark 15:39).

We are enjoined to be God's witnesses, as John was, and to use every opportunity to point others to Jesus, the Light that dispels every darkness, especially at this time of great loss, trouble and uncertainty.

Lastly, John based his ministry in the wilderness. It was from this characteristically - untrammelled, solitary underdeveloped, natural, dry, hot and uninhabitable

surroundings that he reached out to a people living in a spiritual wilderness - without a saviour and under the yoke of Rome. My hope and prayer is that God continues to use us, as He used John, to introduce Jesus, the Son of God and Light of the World in the 'wildernesses' of our time. May He remind us all that we are called to be a witness to the true Light - Jesus. May we point others to Him, model Him in and through our life, work and witness, and, like John (10:42), be privileged to see friends and family believe in Jesus and receive the joy, peace and new life He gives freely to all. May God Almighty enrich and strengthen that sense of mission in our lives and give us the grace to live it. Amen

Wilderness Prayer

Lord, as we wait for the land of promise, teach us the ways of new living, lead us to where we hear your word most clearly, renew us and clear out the wastelands of our lives, prepare us for life in the awareness of Christ's coming when the desert will sing and the wilderness will blossom as a rose. Amen

Closing prayer,

Father in heaven, help us hear again the voice of John the Baptist crying out in the desert. Help us make straight the pathways of our own lives so that those paths lead to eternal life with you.

God above, it is easy for us to say, 'love God, do good and avoid evil'. But it is not always easy for us to put these words in practice. Be with us in each and every moment of each and every day, so that we remain close to you, blameless and worthy of your coming.

Help us, Lord, not to dampen the joy of others. Remind us this week to rejoice always and to pray without ceasing. Holy Spirit, guide us so that our lives may be testimony of the wonders and the love of God, and so that others might believe through us. This we ask in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Closing song: Christ is the world's light

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne5MOMp6W_Y

Final blessing

Comfort, joy and peace be yours. Know how blessed You are and continue to be that blessing to all around You. May God Almighty hold you and all whom you love in the palm of His hand, this day and always. Amen

