Order of Service for Sunday 13th December: Advent 3

ctrl + click for recording

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness.

Today we light the third candle, the candle of joy

We light this candle to remember in joy and thanksgiving that Jesus came to bring good news and set us free.

Rejoice in the Lord always! Let us remember that true joy comes when the broken-hearted are healed, the hungry filled with good things, and all people live in peace with justice.

WELCOME AND CALL TO WORSHIP

Come, let us rejoice before God.
Let us honour the name of the Most High.
God has looked on us, and brought us
to be a people of light celebrating the light.
Our souls magnify God: blessed is the name of God for ever.
Let us lift up holy hands and be glad.
Amen.

HYMN Joy to the world

PRAYERS

Gathered here today, from many places, we are together on this joyful Sunday of Advent to celebrate the light that we light, to mark that hope is always present among us, even when we do not see it. Let us find hope and strength in this company of friends, lifting up our voices together in a great song of praise to the one who is always with us. **Amen.**

Forgive us, Lord, when we do not look for your coming and do not notice the ways in which you reach out to us. Forgive us, and give us eyes to see that you come to us through the desert, and through the fields of corn;
the crowds, and through the empty places; through temple courts, and through refugee camps; through the busyness of our lives, and the emptiness of our hearts; when we are weak, and when we are strong. You come to us at Advent and at Christmas. Forgive us, Lord, when we do not see that you have come to us. **Amen**

DEDICATION OF TOYS

Loving God we bring to you these gifts of toys which we hope will bring joy to those who will receive them. We know that there are many for whom this festive time is a difficult one and we give thanks for those organisations who make it their mission to spread the joy and hope of this time. We give thanks and we ask your blessing on all who distribute and those who receive these gifts. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen**

READING John 1: 6-8, 19-28

REFLECTION

"Who do you think you are?" a question that is often hurled at people when they are behaving in a way that suggests they think themselves to be more important than they really are. I'm sure that many of us have used the phrase at times when we are frustrated by someone's attitude, an attitude of thinking themselves better than others.

Who do we think we are? It's a question society often puts to the Church. Do we think we are somehow better than others? If so, we are fools. The world can soon tell us we're no better than others and can remind us of the mistakes we have made and let's face it there are many mistakes the church has made over the years. Some of which we are now beginning to realise and trying to do something about.

So what are we, then? Maybe our current situation has given us cause to think about that again, since we can't be what we thought we were with the various restrictions placed on our lives at present. Perhaps its time to start reimagining ourselves.

What are you then? is something society wanted to know about John the Baptist, this vagrant preacher who had appeared in the wilderness, drawing vast crowds. It's not surprising that the authorities wanted to size him up in case he became a threat to their position. But he claims no power for himself. 'I am not the Messiah', he says — not the ruler sent by God to lead the people to a new life and a new freedom. The priests and Levites were probably relieved

to hear that. John wouldn't threaten the delicate power structure they had set up, a carefully balanced relationship with the Roman military rulers. It kept them at arms' length while maintaining authority over their own people.

So what was John claiming to be? Elijah, perhaps, or the prophet? People believed that before the Messiah appeared, God would send Elijah or another prophet (Malachi 4.5). John is not interested in claiming any status, and certainly not in being fitted into other people's preconceived categories. Even though Jesus later said that John was indeed the expected 'Elijah'.

So who does John think he is? 'A voice crying in the wilderness', alerting people to something better which is about to come. He was not himself a light, but a pointer in the darkness, to the light that is coming, reminding people to keep their eyes open lest they miss that light.

Have you ever seen a TV advert which is so clever and funny that we remember it but forget the product it's advertising? John will have nothing of that. He has no wish to draw attention to himself, but to get people to look towards Jesus who will soon make himself known.

That is our task. This is who we are, people whose job is never to draw attention to ourselves, never to put ourselves forward as 'Messiahs', or even as 'Elijahs' or prophets. We are just voices telling people that there is a Saviour who is Jesus Christ; people whose job it is to spread the joy, people who fade into the background, having pointed others to the One who can light up their lives. Thanks be to God. Amen

MUSIC **Carol of the advent**

PRAYERS

We praise and adore you, O God, for your urgency and passion.
We thank you for choosing John to be your
prophet, and for blessing him with words that stir our hearts, and humility that transforms our lives. We thank you too for those who dedicate their lives now to showing your love and joy through the way they live their lives, not through drawing attention to themselves but by living simply and lovingly, quietly in your name

God of all truth and all integrity,
may those in the shadows of despair be blessed with the light of hope;
may those in the shadows of exhaustion be blessed with the light of rest;
may those in the shadows of slavery be blessed with the light of empowerment;
may those in the shadows of loneliness be blessed with the light of companionship;
may those in the shadows of grief be blessed with the light of comfort;
and may all your people, tempted by the shadows of pride,
be blessed with the light of humility.

In a moment of silence we bring before you those known to us who are struggling to find joy at this time…..
We pray all of this in your name and with the words you taught us

LORD'S PRAYER

OFFERING

God of surprises, we join with you in the joy of this season of giving. You gave us a Saviour, Christ the Lord. You give us life and breath, you fill the world with beauty, our hands with bounty, and our hearts with the desire to give. Accept these gifts, and ourselves, in every season. Amen.

HYMN **Make way!**

BLESSING

God of joy and light as we go out into the world may we shine brightly for you as we spread the joy of your love for us all. May we walk in your light and may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy spirit be with us all now and for ever. **Amen**