

ST. JOHN THE DIVINE, RASTRICK

# Welcome to Morning Worship on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

6<sup>th</sup> December 2020

*Click on the underlined links to take you to safe content on the internet.*

*If you are able light a candle as you start the service and if others are in the house encourage them to reading some of the service with you.*

## *Introduction*

### **Lighting of the Advent Candle**

We light the second candle which reminds us of the prophets, who foretold the birth of Jesus, and whose spoken words are part of God's written word, the Bible.

O God, rejoicing, we remember the promise of your Son. As the light from this candle, may the blessing of Christ come upon us, brightening our way and guiding us by his truth. May Christ our Saviour, bring life into the darkness of our world, and to us, as we wait for his coming. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

O Lord, open our lips

**All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.**

Reveal among us the light of your presence

**All: that we may behold your power and glory.**

Blessed are you, Sovereign God of all,  
to you be praise and glory for ever.

In your tender compassion

The dawn from on high is breaking upon us

To dispel the lingering shadows of night

As we look for your coming among us this day,

Open our eyes to behold your presence

And strengthen our hands to do your will

That the world may rejoice and give you praise.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**All Blessed be God for ever.**

## *Prayer of Penitence*

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.

**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**

**Hymn: [O come, O come Emmanuel](#)**

**The Liturgy of the Word - [Click Here](#)**

First Reading: 2 Peter 3: 8-15 read by Anne Johnson

Second Reading: Mark 1: 1-8 read by Roger Ellis

*Reflection prepared by The Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Gibbs Bishop of Huddersfield*

### **The Gospel about Jesus Christ**

**Mark 1:1-8**

One of the things that we sometimes miss, because of our familiarity with the story of the New Testament, is the sheer excitement that the gospel writers felt about the message they were trying to communicate to their hearers. Familiarity may not exactly breed contempt, but it can certainly reduce our sensitivity to the radical nature of the New Testament's message and lead us to overlook the full force of what its writers are saying to us.

I think this is especially true of the opening of St Mark's Gospel. We are used to listening to the prologue of John's Gospel as the last lesson at our Carol Services, while the stories of Jesus' birth in Luke and Matthew all get heard as part of the cycle of Christmas readings. Mark on the other hand is the poor relation. He doesn't begin with either the engaging imagery of the shepherds and the stable, or with John's majestic account of the Word made flesh.

No, Mark begins his gospel without preamble or preparation, and his initial focus is not Jesus at all, but the rather unattractive, demanding figure of John the Baptist, hair shirt and all. It's all a bit odd, a bit unexpected, even shocking.

And that is precisely the kind of effect that Mark intended to produce. Because for Mark the entry into the world of Jesus Christ, God's Son, is a completely radical

departure from the old, as God himself breaks into our world, and ushers in a totally new era in the relationship between God and human beings. In Jesus, Mark says, the Messianic age is born, and John is the herald of that age.

Mark wants to stress the utter newness of what has happened in Jesus, while at the same time making the link to what God has done before in the history of the Jewish nation and in the Old Testament. His perspective is very different from that of Matthew, who wanted above all to stress Jesus' identity as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. Matthew focuses on continuity – Mark by contrast emphasises the new and radical nature of what God is doing in Jesus.

So Mark opens his gospel with these words: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” This is more than a simple introduction – something leading on to the next thing – it is also a statement about what he wants to say in the whole of his gospel. This is to be the *gospel* – the good news – of Jesus who is the Christ. *Christ* here isn't a surname, it is a declaration that this Jesus is God's Chosen One, the Messiah, through whom he will work out his purposes in relation to mankind. And more than that, this Jesus is declared to be “the Son of God.” So right at the outset Mark lays out his stall. The Jesus of whom he will speak is both God's anointed Messiah *and* his own Son.

John the Baptist is introduced here crucially to set the *context* for the coming of Jesus. Mark describes him in terms actually taken from the prophets Malachi *and* Isaiah. The “messenger” of Malachi 3 proclaims the coming of judgement, while Isaiah's “voice crying in the wilderness” speaks of salvation and deliverance. And these twin themes are carried on in John's own message: “he preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” (v.4).

In the *content* of his preaching John is the forerunner of Jesus, who proclaims essentially the same message from the beginning of his ministry: “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel,” (as he says in v.15). But there is one crucial difference. John promises a new age that is yet to come. Jesus on the other hand *launches* that new age by his preaching and by his ministry.

This radical difference is emphasised above all by John's words in verse 8: “I baptise with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.” This is the promise of the new age. That God's Messiah will plunge people into an utterly new experience of the reality of God, by baptising them with his Holy Spirit.

It is the *newness* of what God is doing in Jesus that Mark wants to stress above all to his hearers. He wants us to see that Jesus is not just a continuation of the line of the Old Testament prophets. He is in fact God's Son and Messiah, calling us human beings to a completely new level and reality of relationship with God. One that is energised and empowered by the gift of God's Spirit in an utterly new way.

Mark is bursting to get this idea across. Bursting for us to see that God has done something radically new in Jesus, and that he wants us to share in what he is doing. This is the age of the Holy Spirit, and God wants us to share in that gift.

And the same message is the one we need to hear today. Jesus did indeed come in continuity with and in succession to the prophets of the Old Testament. But he is far more than a prophet. He is God's Messiah, God's Son and the one who inaugurates the dawning of the new age of the Holy Spirit – as a result of which we can enter for the first time into a real, living and personal relationship with God.

To grasp that message is to be prepared for the coming of the Messiah. It may mean recognising that our old conceptions of God are inadequate and facing up to our need of both repentance and forgiveness. It means welcoming Jesus Christ into our lives as Messiah and entering into a living relationship with him that could well turn our lives upside down.

Because following this Jesus is no easy option: He is every bit as radical and demanding as John. And baptism of the Holy Spirit of which John speaks represents the filling of our life with the power and presence of God. There are no half measures here!

Are we ready for Jesus Christ really to come into our lives and into our churches – or would we rather keep him at arm's length? Have we perhaps grown over-familiar with the story of Jesus' coming, and missed something of the full force of what he came to say and do?

Now, in a way, you are about to experience a new beginning in the life of your two parishes here in Rastrick, with the arrival of Michelle as your new priest. This will be an opportunity for you to look afresh at the ministry of your two churches, and especially at what you have to offer to the people of these parishes. And there are two things of which I am pretty certain.

The first is that if the church is going to have any chance of reaching and attracting especially those of a younger generation (as you have said you want to do), then it cannot just be by doing what we have always done. And the second is that what we offer above all must be the possibility for people to enter into a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ, that is brought alive by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is what John the Baptist promised, and that is what Jesus came to bring. Amen.

**Hymn:** [On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry](#)

**The Creed**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**

**born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again.  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*Prayers of intercession prepared by Soo Sykes*

Heavenly Father we offer up to you our prayers. We pray for all those around the world who are suffering, for the many thousands who have contracted Covid 19 and for those who are caring for them. We pray for doctors, nurses, healthcare workers and Carers wherever they may be. Help us to make right choices when we are going about our daily life, may our examples be seen by others and show them our loving kindness to humanity.

We pray for those whose illness takes them on a different route, for those whose treatment has been put on hold because of the virus and for those who are still needing to start their treatment. We pray for those who are named on our prayer list. Give them hope and courage in their lives and for those who look after them may they have strength and patience.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for your church throughout the world. We pray for all who minister to us, for all bishops, priests and lay people. May the wisdom they share give us hope and direction. We pray for the appointment of our incumbent; may she bind together the two parishes and help to direct us on a right path.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

Father at this period of advent when we are preparing for the coming of our Lord let us remember that Mary and Joseph found themselves without shelter when they travelled to Bethlehem. Let us pray for all homeless and displaced people. Let us who have plenty share with them in some small way.

Lord in your mercy

### **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for the departed. For David Williams who was close to our church. For all those known only to ourselves and for the many who have died this year. Give their families and friends support and love to carry on, give us the right words to use to offer condolences and may they know your love at a time they need it most

Lord in your mercy

### **Hear our prayer**

Finally, Lord we pray for ourselves. We need all the help we can get. We are floundering around not knowing which way to turn next. We eagerly await the vaccine that will help to eradicate this terrible virus but, in the meantime, we need to continue to do the right thing and put others needs first. We are weak but your mercy is strong, and we hope you will continue to support us.

**Heavenly Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

### *A Prayer for Church Growth*

#### **God of Mission**

**Who along brings growth to your church,**

**Send your Holy Spirit to give**

**Vision to our planning**

**Wisdom to our actions**

**And power to our witness.**

**Help our church to grow in numbers,**

**In spiritual commitment to you,**

**And in service to our local community,**

**Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

Awaiting his coming in glory, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**Our Father in heaven,**

**hallowed be your name,**

**your kingdom come,**

**your will be done,**

**on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins**

**as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours**

**now and for ever. Amen.**

*The Collect for today*

Almighty God,  
purify our hearts and minds,  
that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again as  
judge and saviour  
we may be ready to receive him,  
who is our Lord and our God. **Amen**

**Hymn**      [Make way, Make way](#)

**Final Prayer**

Father in heaven,  
who sent your Son to redeem the world  
and will send him again to be our judge:  
give us grace so to imitate him  
in the humility and purity of his first coming  
that, when he comes again,  
we may be ready to greet him  
with joyful love and firm faith;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

*Our service ends with the Grace,*  
**The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,**  
**and the Love of God,**  
**and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit,**  
**be with us all evermore. Amen.**