

Bulletin for Sunday 5th December 2021

Good Morning, Friends, on this, the second Sunday in Advent.

With the emergence of the new Covid variant the URC has issued fresh guidance, reminding us that we should wear masks in crowded and enclosed spaces, including our churches (where risks of transmission are relatively high). This is an act of respect and love for our neighbours, and I noticed last week that most had already taken it on board. For a link to the advice, see the end of this Bulletin.

We pause as we prepare to worship..... and then praise God as we sing:

Hymn: Of the Father's love begotten (R&S 181)

Prayer: God of love, in all places and evermore,
as we continue to journey through Advent,
with all its traditions and expectations,
we are thankful for the prophets of 'old time'
who brought us your word and showed us the way.
We ask your blessing on everything that we do,
and everything that we give, in your service,
now and always. In Jesus' name. Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Malachi ch. 3: verses 1-4 & Luke ch. 3: verses 1-6

Reflection: Luke is concerned to pinpoint exactly when John the Baptist began his prophetic ministry, and what the political context was. It's a reminder that we all live and learn and develop our faith in the real world, with its pressures and its opportunities. John heard God's call in the wilderness (which probably gave him a bit more freedom to say and do controversial things), and began baptising people in the Jordan. This baptism was a sign that - in response to his preaching - they wanted to change their way of life, and give more priority to their relationship with God; in other words, to repent. At the same time John seems to have impressed on people that someone - Jesus - will soon be coming with a more important message; a message which will be for all people.

Whether it was his own understanding or not, John's teaching was soon compared to that of the much earlier prophet, Isaiah, who had said that the Messiah would be preceded by 'a voice crying in the wilderness... prepare the way of the Lord'. Isaiah had emphasised that the Messiah would be for all - not just for the rich or powerful or just for the Jews. Making the way ahead straighter and more level would, of course, improve access for all. Advent is about preparing us all for an encounter with Jesus. He, the Messiah born in a manger, is a great leveller and a sign for

everyone that, regardless of who we are or what we do, we are all equal (and equally loved) in the sight of God.

Hymn: On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry (R&S 134)

Prayer: God of compassion, our salvation and refuge indeed,
we remember, and pray for, those in the news this week:
for people suffering from floods, droughts, or storms.....
for families where Covid has caused illness and separation...
for those risking their lives to flee to places of refuge...
We hold before you those in need, sick or bereaved,
especially amongst our own communities and neighbours;
and we pray for our friends, families and all those we love.
Loving God, hear all our prayers,
spoken and unspoken, in Jesus' name. Amen

Hymn: Hail to the Lord's Anointed (R&S 127)

Blessing: May the road we journey on be level and straight,
and may we ourselves help to make it so for everyone.
May the blessing of God
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us and with all those we love
now and always. Amen

There will be a ' Sunday at Six 'service on Zoom at 6pm - all welcome.

Please continue to remember that we all have a part to play in caring for each other and doing what we can to keep everyone safe from Covid, which includes wearing masks (see URC advice at <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3984-omicron-synod-moderators-provide-updated-advice-to-churches>) and letting us know if you have a positive Covid test after recently being in church. Sadly it's impossible to make our churches completely risk-free.

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