

15th December, 2024

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's

Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn:

Angels from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
ye who sang creation's story
now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Come and worship, come and
worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Shepherds, in the field abiding,
watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing;
yonder shines the infant light:

Come and worship, come and
worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Sages, leave your contemplations,
brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great Desire of nations;
ye have seen his natal star:

Come and worship, come and
worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Saints before the altar bending,
watching long in hope and fear
suddenly the Lord descending
in His temple shall appear.

Come and worship, come and
worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

The Sermon by Val Lucas, Philippians 4.4-7 Luke 3:7-18 – Being changed

Change is difficult, research shows 1 in 3 people would avoid change altogether if they could. We like familiarity, certainty and control over our circumstances. Old habits are hard to break. People may feel uncertain, anxious, uncomfortable and overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity that accompanies change. But without change we can miss out on so many opportunities and blessings.

John the Baptist, was instrumental in beginning the process of change. John came to show us two things. Firstly to show how God wanted people to change and live with one another and Secondly to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah, and the amazing change Jesus brought and still brings to the World.

Firstly, how does God want us to live? Life for people in biblical times was tough, living under the oppressive Roman government, poverty was high, violence, slavery, fear and corruption was part of everyday living. People wanted change, they wanted the Romans out.

After 400 years of silence from God, no prophets had spoken, people flocked to see and hear John. He didn't need social media or advertisements, the attraction was his way of life. He lived in the wilderness eating only locusts and honey, he was clothed in camel hair and had a passion for God and repentance. He was not a crowd pleaser, he didn't want to be liked by authorities, religious leaders or indeed anyone. He confronted them all. He talked about judgement and that every tree that did not produce good fruit would be chopped down and thrown in the fire. Gods' judgement was imminent. No one could rely upon being part of the family of Abraham, there was no special dispensation, genealogy meant nothing. All would be judged as individuals.

This shocked those listening to John and they asked him what they should do. He told them to repent, to turn around. John's agenda was not to start a revolution but to change people.

He preached a simple message, be kind, share what you have with others especially those who are cold, hungry and poor. If you have two cloaks give one away.

Standing in the river he baptized those who repented with water as a sign of their repentance. When the people went through the baptism of water with John he expected them to come out of the water with a desire to change their behaviour, to treat all people fairly, justly, kindly, and show respect and understanding. To be generous and above all love their neighbour as God has asked them to do. If people change then society changes as well. As a society experiences cultural change, new behavioural patterns, norms and values emerge.

John had gained the people's attention, their behaviour had been exposed and they had grasped the need to change and live differently. To be passionate about God and follow his ways. Everyone listening knew what was expected of them, they knew the 10 commandments by heart. They were willing to listen.

Many wondered if John was the promised Messiah that they had been waiting so long for. John quickly put them straight. Someone is coming who is greater than I am. So much greater that I'm not worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal. John was preparing the way for Jesus. In this John fulfilled the old testament prophecy, the voice of one crying in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Those around him would know these words and would begin wondering and expecting further change ahead.

John explained that he baptized with water but the one who was to come would baptize all people with the Holy spirit and fire. John was preparing the people for a different way, the holy spirit would come and change people lives. Their understanding and experience of the Holy spirit was God giving it to special people for a significant purpose and for a specific amount of time. These were the people they had been taught about and knew their stories off by heart. Joshua, Gideon, Samson, King David, Ezekial. A difficult concept for those listening to imagine that they too were being promised this same Holy spirit as them. Such a big change in their thinking and understanding of the Holy spirit. John was telling them the Messiah, the person who is going to come and bring such changes would be coming soon.

John warned that those who did not listen or want to change would be delt with severely. The wheat represents those who are repentant and the chaff those who will not understand and change their ways. John talks about the never-ending fire for those who are not repentant whereas those who listen and change their behaviour will be taken to safety into the Messiah's barn.

This was such a lot for those around to take in but what they did understand from John was that they needed to change, that the messiah was coming soon and he would bring with him a baptism not of water but the holy spirit and fire.

We today know the change Jesus brought to the world and it is indeed mind blowing. As the message bible says "He will change you from the inside Out".

Jesus is unlike any other person who ever walked this planet. Jesus changed the life and destiny of every person he encountered who saw in him the uniqueness of God's son, our saviour.

We meet Jesus and we are changed. Never to be the same again.

As we read in Phillipians we experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand and this peace will guard our hearts and minds. It's a peace that will change the way we think and act when confronted by the challenges of everyday life, no matter how difficult the circumstances may be.

This morning we may feel that we relate to a baptism of water, we understand morally what John says, we know we need to change, we know we have more than others but we are still holding onto our possessions, our old way of life, not quite doing our job the best we could do. We may be frightened of change, stubbornly resisting it and refusing to accept help offered. Martin Luther wrote three changes

are necessary, change of the heart, the mind and the purse. Of these three the purse is the most difficult to change.

Christmas is a great time of preparation. Preparing food, presents and so on, but sometimes we need to take time to prepare our hearts so we can accept more and more of the Holy Spirit. In the next few minutes of silence, we pray that we may be filled more with the Holy Spirit and experience a change in those areas we know we need Jesus's help in.

3rd Sunday of Advent: O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you are alive and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: *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 forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, St Andrews and The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

At the Church of the Good Shepherd

- December's Tea and Chat, Tea and Bowls and Coffee and Questions will join for a Christmas get-together on December 18th, 2pm to 5pm.
- Tea and Praise for Christmas: Sunday, December 22nd at 3pm in Church.
- January's Tea and Chat: January 15th at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- January's Tea and Bowls: January 15th at 2pm in the Church.
- January's Coffee and Questions: January 22nd at 10.30am in the Church Hall.
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.

For Further information:

This paper and all parish details are on the website at <https://www.parishofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>