

Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church 2020

Sit comfortably in a quiet place and prepare, start with a brief period of silence, turning your mind and spirit towards God. You may want to have a cross or candle in view as a focus.

Advent candles StF 165 (first 2 verses) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5sSARpY2-o>

Prayer

Lord, may this time together prove to be a time in which your blessing will be with me/us.

Hills of the north rejoice StF 169 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYi6pKL4i5o>

Prayer

Loving God, we praise you again for this season of Advent, this time of preparation, thanksgiving, challenge and reflection.

Open our hearts to all you would say now and help us to listen.

We praise you that in the fulfillment of your eternal purpose you came to our world in Christ, revealing the extent of your love, showing us the way of life, allowing us to know you for ourselves.

Open our hearts to all you would say now and help us to listen.

We praise you that you came again in Christ to his disciples after his resurrection, bringing joy where there had been sorrow, hope where there had been despair and faith where there had been doubt.

Open our hearts to all you would say now and help us to listen.

We praise you that through your Holy Spirit you make Christ real to us each day, filling us with his power, his peace, and his love

Open our hearts to all you would say now and help us to listen.

And we praise you for the promise that Christ will come again to establish his kingdom, to begin a new era, to bring us and all your people life everlasting

Open our hearts to all you would say now and help us to listen.

Loving God, forgive us that so easily we lose sight of that message of Advent, allowing its wonder to be swamped by our busy preparations for Christmas, by concerns which are so often unimportant, by our carelessness and disobedience in discipleship.

Open our hearts to all you would say now and help us to listen.

Forgive us that we forget your promises, we frustrate your Spirit, we lose sight of your love.

Open our hearts to all you would say now and help us to listen.

Meet with us, we pray, through this time of worship, through your living Word, through the fellowship we share, and through the risen Christ
Open our hearts to all you would say now and help us to listen.

So may we truly celebrate the Advent of your Son, and be equipped to serve him better, to the glory of your name. Amen

Lords Prayer

Isaiah 11:1-10

Matthew 3:1-12

On Jordan's bank StF 182 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AinYDslXwHg>

Address

I never fully took John the Baptist to heart until I joined the Territorial Army. Then and only then did I begin to truly understand John's role in the Christmas story. For it was there I was introduced to the Quarter Master and his staff and a few extra volunteers who went ahead a few days earlier to prepare the eventual venue for the rest of the Battalion/Company/whatever to arrive. When we arrived we would find our beds complete with a pile of sheets, pillows, pillow cases and blankets neatly stacked on top of the mattress. We still had to make the beds though we wouldn't get 3 star treatment, but at least everything was there to do the job in hand. It gave me some insight to what John had been sent to do.

John the Baptist, as he was to be known to history, was closely related to Jesus' mother Mary, as John's mother, Elizabeth, and Mary were cousins it is believed. Theologians have pointed out over the years that John was sent as Isaiah had phrased it as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness”. Compare for yourself in Isaiah 40:3:

*“Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting, “Clear the way through the wilderness for the Lord!
Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God”*

Isaiah goes on talking about making the way easier – filling in the valleys, levelling the mountains, straightening the curves, smoothing out the rough places. It doesn't mean John had to do all the work he just had to encourage others to get it done. He was, as is described in the Bible as an exhorter, just like the Army PTI's who run alongside new recruits and tell them “You can do it, come on!”

Because the scriptures promise that the Messiah would be heralded as coming by a proclamation by one of the prophets of old, tradition had it that it would be Elijah. Since that would be the case there would be no mistaking the Messiah when he did come. The probability is that many were unaware that John the Baptist was the forerunner forecast of old, therefore in the eyes of many of the Pharisees Jesus was not seen as the Messiah. They wanted things to be extremely obvious, easy to see – so those like Peter who recognised Jesus as the Messiah would be regarded as apostate. It is no wonder then that many a 21st Century Jew still awaits Elijah's arrival to herald the Messiah. As my mother used to say “You can never see what's right underneath your nose”.

When my brother and sisters and I were much younger than now I remember our parents receiving letters from family members who lived in the North-East and South-East, we were living in Staffordshire at the time. The letters often intimated that they would like to visit maybe in the Summer of the following year, if that was at all possible. Of course my parents would get excited and reply back in a very positive manner that of course it would be lovely to see them. Then gradually over the next 12 to 18 months letters would fly backwards and forwards making further

plans about when, how long, how many, when would they leave, what would they like to do. More and more excitement would build up in expectation until the arrival of aunts, uncles and/or cousins just when they said it would happen. What happens today though? More often as not it's a phone call or an email with very little notice, then extreme busyness with less time to build up the expectation of imminent arrival. I remember some years ago, one busy day, just as we were preparing to have a meal when the phone went. At the other end of the line was one of Ellinor's aunts asking how she might find us, she'd travelled up from Swindon, was in Stockton Town Centre and thought she'd visit us before travelling on the visit family further North. At the time I didn't drive so explained about the local bus and arranged to meet her at the nearest bus stop! In the meantime we had to find the best china, where we used mugs for tea Norah had to have a cup and saucer, panic stations – where were they? (We did find them in time)

We today need to take on board John's role in life, for how will people know that this Jesus will come again if we don't tell them? How willing are you to do that? Or are you afraid? Afraid of being a voice crying out in the wilderness?

Intercessions

Lord Jesus Christ, at this time supposedly of goodwill among all, we pray for peace in our world – an end to division and discord, hatred and hostility, death and destruction.

Prince of Peace, hear our prayer

Lord Jesus, we speak of peace but in our hearts we do not believe it possible. When we look at our world we see little hope of an end to its troubles. We are sceptical, uncertain, filled with doubts, cautious about expressing any optimism. Even where there are signs of hope, moves towards reconciliation, we know it will take many years before we dare believe it is really possible. But, we pray in this Advent season, renew our ability to look forward, rekindle our belief in the future, and restore our capacity to hope for better things.

Prince of Peace, hear our prayer

Help us – as we remember your coming, as we serve you now, and as we look forward to your coming again – to anticipate your kingdom through the service we offer and the lives we live.

Prince of Peace, hear our prayer

Teach us to work for that day when your throne shall be established, your justice prevail and the earth be filled with the knowledge of you as the waters cover the sea.

Prince of Peace, hear our prayer for your name's sake.
Amen

Come thou long expected Jesus StF169
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwa0a94wTCw>

The Grace