

### **Advent 3: John the Baptist**

Our Reading this week comes from the beginning of the Gospel of John. Read John chapter 1, verses 6 – 8 and 19 – 34. This first chapter of John's Gospel is affirming the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ as "*the Son of God*" (verse 34) and the chief witness is John the Baptist.

**Verses 6 – 8:-** These verses are a summary of the mission of John as the "Forerunner". He was "*sent from God*". In the Gospel of Luke there is a fully detailed description of the miraculous birth of John and the prophetic words of his father Zechariah. Luke chapter 1, verses 57 – 80 are worth reading, this includes the prophecy of Zechariah we know as the Benedictus. Notice that this includes the promise of "*light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, . . .*" (verse 79). A message for a dark and fearful world this "Covid Christmas". Remember, John "*was not the light, he came to bear witness to the light.*" (John 1, verse 8). Every thing that John the Baptist did and said pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour of the world.

**Verses 19 – 23:-** John the Baptist can be seen as the last representative of the Old Testament order of prophets. The first words of the Gospel of Mark emphasises the "*beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God*" and goes on to quote from Isaiah and to describe the ministry of John as "*the messenger*". (Mark 1, verses 1- 4). When the authorities in Jerusalem sent representatives to question him, John was very straight forward with them. He simply claimed to be the one prophesied by Isaiah. (chapter 40, verses 3 – 5).

**Verses 24 – 28:-** The questioning of the priests and Levites led to John giving a strong witness of the greater One who was about to manifest himself. The baptism of Jesus by John had already occurred. (see verses 32 – 33). Christ the Messiah was already there, standing among the common people and the religious leaders of the day did not know him! John readily acknowledges his own inferiority to the Christ, the Son of God. (verse 27). The baptism of John was a symbolic washing after the confession of sins following his call for repentance. The ultimate work of purification rested with the one who was still an unknown to the authorities. John counted himself unworthy to be his servant.

**Verses 29 – 34:-** "*The next day . . .*" introduces a new situation. The deputation has gone and Jesus appears on the scene, maybe at a distance coming towards him. John the Baptist now becomes specific about the person and work of Jesus. "*Behold the Lamb of God , who takes away the sin of the world!*" (verses 29). The ministry of John was a call to repentance. The ministry of Jesus was concerned with sin's removal. Christ was God's Lamb. History, the story of the Passover (Exodus 12, verse 3 - 14) and prophecy (Isaiah 53, verse 7) unite in providing the background to this title. In the Gospel of John the sacrifices in the Temple are always in mind. In John 19, verse 14 we are given an exact time for the condemnation of Jesus. The "*sixth hour*" was midday. This was the time when the passover lambs were prepared for slaughter in the Temple. The testimony of John the Baptist, pointing to Jesus as the Passover Lamb, sacrificed for the sin of the world became a central part of the teaching and faith of the early church. - See Acts 3, verses 18 – 21: Acts 8, verses 32 – 35: 1 Corinthians 5, verse 7: 1 John 1, verse 7 and Revelation 5, verses 6 – 14, etc.

As we celebrate a different kind of Christmas, we wait expectantly for Christ's coming again in glory!

*Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness,  
and to put on the armour of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life,  
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;  
that on the last day, when He shall come again in His glorious majesty  
to judge the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through Him who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever, Amen*