

**The Rectorial Benefice of the East Vale  
Morning Prayer  
Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 | Advent 3**

**Hymn**

**Longing for light, we wait in darkness  
Longing for truth, we turn to You.  
Make us Your own, Your holy people  
Light for the world to see.**

**Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in Your church gathered today.**

**Longing for peace, our world is troubled  
Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.  
Make us your living voice.**

**Christ, be our light!...**

**Longing for food, many are hungry  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us Your bread, broken for others  
Shared until all are fed.**

**Christ, be our light!...**

**Longing for shelter, many are homeless  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us Your building, sheltering others  
Walls made of living stone.**

**Christ, be our light!...**

**Many the gift, many the people  
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another  
Making Your kingdom come.**

**Christ, be our light!...**

**The Lighting of the Advent Candle**

*Advent 3: John the Baptist*

Blessed are you, Sovereign Lord, just and true: to you be praise and glory for ever! Your prophet, John the Baptist was witness to the truth as a burning and shining light. May we, your servants, rejoice in his light, and so be led to witness to him who is the Lord of our coming Kingdom, Jesus our Saviour and King of the ages.  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

God our Father, you gave to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age a son called John. He grew up strong in spirit, prepared the people for the coming of the Lord, and baptised them in the Jordan to wash away their sins. Help us, who have been baptised into Christ, to be ready to welcome him into our hearts, and to grow strong in faith by the power of the Spirit. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the light who is coming into the world. **Amen.**

**Lord Jesus, Light of the world,  
John told the people to prepare  
for you were very near.  
As Christmas grows closer day by day,  
help us to be ready to welcome you now.**

**The Collect**

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 and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

*First Reading*

*(Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11)*

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a

garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*Responsorial Psalm*

*(Psalm 126)*

**R/ The Lord has indeed done great things for us.**

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with songs of joy. **R/**

Then said they among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has indeed done great things for us, and therefore we rejoiced. **R/**

Restore again our fortunes, O Lord, as the river beds of the desert. Those who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. **R/**

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed, will come back with shouts of joy, bearing their sheaves with them. **R/**

*Second Reading*

*(1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)*

A reading from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

This is the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

*The Gospel*

*(John 1:6-8, 19-28)*

**Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**Give thanks to the risen Lord.**

**Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**Give praise to his name.**

**God has proclaimed the just reward:**

**'Life for all men, alleluia!'**

**Alleluia! Alleluia!...**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Listen to the gospel of Christ according to John.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptising.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

**Come, let us praise the living God,  
joyfully sing to our Saviour.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!...**

**The Homily**

**Fr David**

'When God made X, he broke the mould' is a familiar phrase often attributed to someone with distinctly unique characteristics. We all have a unique identity, and to know one's identity or to have an identity is important for most people, and to have our identity respected and valued is also greatly important to many of us. Our identities are multi-faceted, often made up of many factors and layers.

Issues pertaining to identity and respecting identity often come to the fore. For example, there has been a lot of talk over the years around gender identity and that whole question of whether or not someone can or should change or decide their gender. Someone asked me what my thoughts were regarding this subject and my honest answer was, I really don't know what I think about it all. I've never felt the need to grapple with the question of gender identity myself, but I do have friends who have. I do think though, that as with so many dilemmas of this nature, there are no black and white answers, there are lots of grey areas.

For example, we know so much more now about the development and formation of the human person, especially in the womb. We know that certain conditions and factors in the womb can cause us to develop in different ways. We're aware that the balance of hormones can have an effect on us, with the presence of too much testosterone or oestrogen, or too little of either, even. We know that some children are born with the genitalia of both genders, giving parents the difficult decision to make of whether they will raise the child as a boy or a girl. Science suggests that these biological complexities can and do have a bearing on someone's identity. I can't begin to imagine how greatly troubling painful and distressing it must be for someone if they don't have confidence in who they are, and all they might experience as a result, especially mental health struggles. Whatever we think about these issues, we must always act compassionately and be tender in our handling of other people's struggles.

When it comes to the question of identity, in John the Baptist we find someone who is very confident in who he is, or perhaps more specifically, who he is not. He is a very distinct and unique character, we heard last week, 'John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.' I get the sense from the gospel writer that he may have been considered an 'eccentric' of his day! Despite his eccentricities, John had confidence in his identity. So much so, that he could answer the priest's and the Levite's questions about himself in the gospel reading today, with a high level of certainty about who he was and who he was not.

When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?', he declared openly, 'I am not the Messiah'. 'They asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said.'

John was able to speak of who he was in relation to Jesus and he was aware of his vocation, to make Jesus known. At different points in our lives, we might ask ourselves questions like 'who am I?', 'what is my purpose?', 'where am I heading?' Like John, we can only really fully understand who we are in relation to Jesus. He's the one who knows us better than we know ourselves. We are his and he created us for himself.

The current Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, discovered a few years ago that the man he thought was his Father, wasn't. DNA tests revealed who his actual Father was. Naturally, this came as a shock to him and a discovery like that could cause someone to question

themselves and their identity. We could be forgiven for thinking 'I don't know who I am anymore'.

However, Archbishop Justin released a statement following the revelation, in which he said this, 'I know that I find who I am in Jesus Christ, not in genetics, and my identity in him never changes.' What he means by this is, that Jesus enables us to understand that ultimately, God is our father and we understand who we are through our relationship with him, because God is the one who gives us our identities. Our baptism shaped our identity, our rebirth, and from that point we identified as Christian. Therefore, that is the most important part of our identity, which informs every other aspect of our lives. St Paul wrote in the letter to the Galatians, 'in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'

Like John the Baptist, we need to have confidence in our identity, knowing who we are in relation to Christ. Today, on this third Sunday of Advent, 'Gaudete Sunday', a Sunday when we are encouraged to rejoice, let us rejoice together that our individual identities in Jesus Christ make up our corporate identity as his body, the Church. That together we make a beautiful family, bound together not by blood, but by faith, and let us live together content in the knowledge that our heavenly Father cherishes us regardless of how we identify and in the same way we ought to cherish one another.

### Hymn

**I cannot tell  
why he whom angels worship  
should set his love  
upon the sons of men,  
or why, as shepherd  
he should seek the wand'ers  
to bring them back  
they know not how or when.  
But this I know,  
that he was born of Mary,  
when Bethl'em's manger  
was his only home,  
and that he lived at  
Nazareth and laboured,  
and so the Saviour,  
Saviour of the world is come.**

**I cannot tell  
how all the lands shall worship,  
when, at his bidding,  
ev'ry storm is stilled,  
or who can say  
how great the jubilation  
when all the hearts on earth  
with love are filled.  
But this I know,  
the skies will thrill with rapture,  
and myriad, myriad  
human voices sing,  
and earth to heaven,  
and heaven to earth, will answer:  
'At last the Saviour,  
Saviour of the world, is king!'**

### ***The Intercessions***

For grace to know and follow the truth, let us pray to the Lord.

Make the church a powerful witness to the light that has come into the world, after the example of John the Baptist. Through preaching of the word, and through the water of baptism, may God's people be gathered into one body. We pray particularly for Bishop June, and in our parish cycle of prayer on the feast of St Lucia (St Lucy) we pray that the light of God will shine for us with her in the midst of our darkness, and we pray too for the staff, pupils and their families of St Nicholas Church in Wales primary school.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Make us your messengers among our friends and neighbours, and all with whom we share our lives. Where material wealth and comfort abound in a spiritual wilderness, bring the light which reveals the true joy of living.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Bring freedom to those who are unjustly held captive and those who are imprisoned in their own despair. Comfort and raise up to new life those whose hearts are broken by sorrow.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Have mercy on all who suffer in body, mind or spirit. Let the light of hope shine through their darkness and give them comfort in their affliction.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for those who have heard the message of salvation and passed from the world into the full knowledge of Christ. Keep us constant in faith until we too shall come to him.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

In a moment of stillness and guided by the light of Christ, let us offer our own prayers to our loving Father...

**Merciful Father  
accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

### ***Hymn***

**Mine eyes have seen the glory  
of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage  
where the grapes of wrath are stored.  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning  
of his terrible swift sword;  
His truth is marching on.**

***Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah!  
Glory, glory, hallelujah! His truth is marching on.***

**He has sounded forth the trumpet  
that shall never call retreat.  
He is sifting out the hearts of men  
before His judgment seat;  
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him  
be jubilant, my feet;  
Our God is marching on.**

***Glory, glory, hallelujah...***

**In the beauty of the lilies  
Christ was born across the sea,  
with a glory in his bosom  
that transfigures you and me.  
As He died to make men holy,  
let us die to make men free,  
While God is marching on.**

***Glory, glory, hallelujah...***

**He is coming like the glory  
of the morning on the wave,  
He is wisdom to the mighty,  
he is succour to the brave.  
So the world shall be his footstool,  
and the soul of time his slave,  
Our God is marching on.**

***Glory, glory, hallelujah...***