



# Birstall & Rothley Methodist Churches



December 13th, 2020

*This act of worship has been prepared for use at home and online.*



*If using this service at home,  
you will need a drink (a glass of water or a cup of tea/coffee),  
and a piece of cake or a biscuit.*

## Lighting the Advent Candles

Jesus said, 'No one more important than John the Baptist has ever been born;  
yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'

***Amen. Come soon, Lord Jesus!***

*Three red candles are lit*

Jesus is the light of the world.

***A light no darkness can ever put out.***

## Hymn

StF 185: 3<sup>rd</sup> verse & chorus only

Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin ;  
doubt shall not darken his witness within ;  
hell has no terrors, and death has no sting ;  
love is victorious when Jesus is King :

*Come let us sing : praise to our King,  
Jesus our King, Jesus our King :  
this is our song, who to Jesus belong :  
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

Words: Charles Silvester Horne (1865-1914)

## Prayer

God in this season  
suspended between hope and fulfillment,  
let us never forget what you have done.  
May we be overwhelmed by your mercy,  
which flows in wave after wave.

May we be honest about the darkness within us,  
and perceptive of the light around us.  
May we make straight the path for the Lord,  
that together we may see God's glory revealed.

Speak to us, Lord.  
Speak to us in the waiting, the watching,  
the hoping, the longing,  
the sorrow, the sighing, the rejoicing.  
Speak to us by your Word in these Advent days,  
and walk with us until the day of your coming.

***Amen.***

All seeing God,  
you watch over every instant of our life,  
showing us the glory of your creation  
if we should but pause to look;  
showing us the generosity of your Spirit  
if we should but hold out our hands to receive;  
showing us your work that needs to be done  
if we should only use our eyes and ears.  
Turn us away, loving Lord, from our insistent self  
and lead us to see more clearly  
what you give and what you ask of us this day

***Amen***

**Old Testament Reading:** Isaiah 61:1-4

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 brokenhearted, 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.

**Hymn**

StF 171

Hark, the glad sound! The Saviour comes,  
the Saviour promised long;  
let every heart prepare a throne,  
and every voice a song.

He comes, the prisoners to release,  
in Satan's bondage held;  
the gates of brass before him burst,  
the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,  
the bleeding soul to cure,  
and with the treasures of his grace  
to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace,  
your welcome shall proclaim,  
and heaven's eternal arches ring  
with your beloved Name.

*words: Philip Doddridge (1702-51)*

### **Gospel Reading:** John 1; 6-8, 19-28

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 baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

John answered them, "I baptize 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 baptizing.

### **Time to Reflect**

It's ironic that John, the herald and witness, began his testimony with a whole string of negative statements:

"I am not the Messiah"

"I am not Elijah"

"I am not the Prophet"

If the religious authorities were beginning to get excited by the thought that John might be the Messiah, then clearly John needed these messengers to go back and tell them clearly that they were wrong!

John knew what he was not - he didn't over-state his own importance, or his own role. He knew his limits, and wasn't going to usurp someone else's place. But he also knew who he was, and what he had been sent to do - and so he made two positive statements, as well as the negative ones.

First, he said, "I am the voice crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord."

He was to bear witness. That was his role, and didn't try to minimise it or play it down. And because his task was to witness to the One they were waiting for, he shifted the focus from himself with his second positive statement, "Among you stands one you do not know, the One who is coming ...."

John's answers are a pretty good template for us. When people wonder who we are, they will try to fit us into a pattern, or a pigeon-hole, so that they know what to expect from us. But we might well find ourselves saying, "No - that's not who I am at all."

But we can't just leave it at that - they need to know who we are, and what we bring.

In these strange times, it can be difficult to know where we fit in, and what we offer. Many of the things that we used to do have ceased (or at least paused), and we may be uncertain about how God might be asking us to serve him now.

Well, first you can be sure that you are God's child; a precious member of God's community. Whatever is happening around you at the moment doesn't (and can't) alter God's love for you.

But, like John, don't try to play down the gifts and skills that God has given to you, and instead ask how you might use them. Phone calls, prayers, writing cards or letters, making jam, leading worship, preparing children's crafts, decorating windows or doors ... all these things (and many others) show others who we are, and reinforce what we say.

John told people that he was the Herald, and he showed them in his preaching and baptising.

How do we show our friends and neighbours that we are God's people?

*Take a time to sit quietly*

## **Prayer**

O God, we wait for so many things:

for the time when we can meet with our children and grandchildren, meet our friends for coffee and a chat, meet together for prayer and to lift each other up.

We pray for ourselves, and all who wait;

Come Lord Jesus,

***and hear our prayer.***

As we wait, we pray for our nation, and all nations,

that your peace will be known in every corner of the earth.

Come Lord Jesus,

***and hear our prayer.***

We pray for the sick, the suffering, the bereaved, and those in distress;  
that you will heal all injuries, comfort all grief, and settle all wrongs.

Come Lord Jesus,

***and hear our prayer.***

We pray for those who rejoice this week

that they might be filled with joy and gladness.

Come Lord Jesus,

***and hear our prayer.***

Come among us O God, and hear our prayers;

so that when your Son Jesus comes to us, we will recognise and adore him.

***Amen.***

*IF YOU ARE SHARING THIS SERVICE ONLINE OR IN CHURCH,  
PLEASE GO TO PAGE 6*

*OTHERWISE, PLEASE CONTINUE ON THIS PAGE*

**Sing or Read:**

Be present at our table, Lord;  
be here and everywhere adored;  
thy creatures bless, and grant that we  
may feast in paradise with thee.

*The Love Feast cake (or biscuit) is eaten in silence,  
and the glass of water (or cup of tea) is drunk.*

*Offer your own prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God;  
prayers for those in need,  
and end with the Lord's Prayer*

**Hymn**

**StF 676**

I'll praise my maker while I've breath,  
and when my voice is lost in death,  
praise shall possess my noblest powers;  
my days of praise are never past  
while life and thought and being last  
or immortality endures.

Happy are those whose hopes rely  
on Israel's God! He made the sky,  
and earth, and sea, with all their train:  
his truth for ever stands secure,  
he saves the oppressed, he feeds the poor,  
and none shall find his promise vain.

The Lord pours eyesight on the blind,  
the Lord supports the fainting mind,  
he sends the labouring conscience peace;  
he helps the stranger in distress,  
the widow and the fatherless,  
and grants the prisoner sweet release.

I'll praise him while he lends me breath,  
and when my voice is lost in death  
praise shall employ my noblest powers;  
my days of praise shall ne'er be past  
while life and thought and being last  
or immortality endures.

*words: Isaac Watts (1674-1748)*

**Blessing**

The blessing of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you this day.  
May the sun be bright upon you;  
may the night call down peace;  
and when you come to his household  
may the door be open wide for you. **Amen.**

*THE CHURCH SERVICE CONTINUES HERE:*

**The Communion Prayer**

God be with you.

***And also with you.***

Lift up your hearts.

***We lift our hearts in prayer.***

Let us give thanks to God.

***It is good to give God thanks and praise.***

Let us pray:

Blessed are you,

Breath of Peace,

Giver of all life,

Source of Love that knows no boundaries.

Your song of wisdom rang out before the world began;  
throughout the ages, your song has awakened hope for a world where:  
those considered last and least are first and most;  
violence is overcome by the power of your ancient love;  
and all people work together for peace.

You bring our longings to birth,  
and send prophets to awaken us to your Advent among us.

We thank you for those who, like Mary,  
have the strength and courage to bring your love to birth in the world;  
for those who, like the shepherds, dare to seek out the Child of Bethlehem;  
for those who, like the wise ones, actively challenge violent and oppressive powers.

We praise you that your everlasting light is shown to us  
in womb and tomb,  
in cradle and cross,  
in tenderness and compassion.

We join in the Advent prayer of all your people,  
and, as we wait and watch for your coming among us,  
we proclaim your goodness:

***Holy, holy holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is the one who comes in the Name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.***

We remember all with whom you would have us share your feast.

We pray for all who are in sorrow or in pain...

all who are ill or alone...

all who are close to our hearts...

all who live with fear, oppression, or hunger...

all whose lives have been blighted by violence, racism, or poverty...

all whom the world counts as last and least.

We pray for the church and its many ministries,  
for nations as they strive for peace and justice,  
and for an end to violence.

God of hope, make this bread the means of our rebuilding,  
this wine the medium of our transformation,  
this table the foundation of our renewal,  
and this community the place of our rebirth.

**Amen.**

At this time, we remember Jesus,  
Who on the night before he died,  
took a loaf of bread,  
gave you thanks, broke it, and said,  
“Take and eat; whenever you do this, remember me.”

Likewise, after supper, he took the cup, saying,  
“This is the new covenant; remember me.”

Gracious God, Breath of peace, Source of love,  
we pray for your Spirit.

**Make us, while many, one.**

**Make us, though broken, whole.**

**Make us, despite death, alive.**

And so we pray:

**Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

*as the bread is broken:*

The body of Christ,  
**the Bread of life.**

*As the cup is raised:*

The lifeblood of Christ,  
**the cup of blessing.**

Let us eat and drink together,

*The bread and wine are shared*

Let us pray:

**We thank you, God,  
for breaking into our world  
and pouring into our lives and our experiences.**

**We thank you, God,  
for this meal of thanksgiving  
and the stories of love, grace, and hope that it tells.**

**Amen.**

**Hymn****StF 598**

Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast;  
heaven's own fare has fed the last and least;  
Christ's own peace is shared again on earth:  
God the Spirit fills us with new worth.

No more doubting, no more senseless dread:  
God's good self has graced our wine and bread;  
all the wonder heaven has kept in store  
now is ours to keep forevermore.

Celebrate with saints who dine on hight,  
witnesses that love can never die.  
"Hallelujah!" Thus their voices ring;  
nothing less in gratitude we bring.

Praise the Maker, praise the Maker's Son,  
praise the Spirit, three, yet ever one;  
praise the God whose food and friends avow  
heaven starts here!  
the Kingdom beckons now!

*words: John L Bell (b.1949) and Graham Maule (1958-2020)*

**Blessing**

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us in this week  
May the love of God steer us in our actions this week  
and may the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be beside us this week

***Amen***