



SERVICE SHEET
6th December
2nd Sunday of Advent

Canticle A Song of Christ's Appearing

**Christ was believed in throughout the world
and taken up in glory.**

**Christ Jesus was revealed in the flesh
and vindicated in the spirit.**

**He was seen by angels
and proclaimed among the nations.**

**Believed in throughout the world,
he was taken up in glory.**

**This will be made manifest at the proper time
by the blessed and only Sovereign,**

**Who alone has immortality,
and dwells in unapproachable light.**

**To the King of kings and Lord of lords
be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.**

1 Timothy 3.16;6.15-16

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Collect

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us,
and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness
we are grievously hindered
in running the race that is set before us,
your bountiful grace and mercy
may speedily help and deliver us;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and for ever.

Amen

Old Testament Reading.
Isaiah 40.1-11

¹Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.⁴Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.⁵Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'⁶A voice says, 'Cry out!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass.⁸The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever.⁹Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'¹⁰See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Psalm 85.8-end

⁸ Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

⁹ **Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.**

¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

¹¹ **Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.**

¹² The LORD will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.

¹³ **Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.**

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Gospel Reading.
Mark 1.1-8

¹The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight"',

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

Sermon

It might appear as though the story of John the Baptist is something of a false start. The gospel story – the real story is about Jesus – isn't it? After all that is how the start of Mark's gospel reads- *The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

So why are we now presented with this strange wild figure, preaching from the desert? Why indeed, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ are we reading about someone quite different? Can't we get on with the real story?

But John the Baptist, strange and wild figure though he may be, is part of the real story. We need to understand him a little so that we understand the context for Jesus' ministry and teaching – we need to listen to what he says because he speaks for God with a challenge and starkness both for his own time and our own. If we are going to get ready for the coming of Christ and be open to what he will do – we need to get ready with the rather uncomfortable figure of the prophet John.

John's story, and indeed the story of Jesus, begins long before the time either of them was born. Centuries before, the people of Israel, the Jews, had been overrun by the forces of the Babylonian empire.

They had been occupied many times -by Egypt, by Assyria, - but this time it was different.

The Babylonians destroyed the nation – literally pulled it to pieces – they dismantled the fortified walls of Jerusalem – razed the Temple to the ground. More than that, they deported en masse the royal family, the nobles, the merchants, the civil service, anyone of any importance – was taken back to the heart of the Babylonian empire and forcibly re-settled there. All that was left were handfuls of farmers and peasants and a few people scratching a living in the ruins of Jerusalem.

This was disaster on a grand scale – not only was the nation no more – but the promise of God that these were his people and he looked out for them – this seemed to have been wiped away too– was Babylon stronger than God? – they must have suspected that it was so.

"By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion" the people in exile sang in their psalms of lament.

And yet gradually through the words of prophets called to speak for God in those disastrous times – there began to come a message that God would act again and restore his people. They were not forgotten.

These prophets gradually moved on from what their predecessors had been saying – that the whole series of occupations and defeats and finally exile had been God's just punishment. A punishment for the fact that the nation had become rotten, deaf to the call of godly living, unconcerned for its purpose to shine as a light in the world.

The new prophets did not abandon that criticism – they re-echoed it – but now with something new – comfort, comfort my people, your God is coming – speak to Jerusalem that her penalty is paid.

Just as it must seem impossible that God would allow his people and his holy temple to be destroyed – so now it must seem equally impossible that God could restore them again. And yet – as Babylon itself fell to the expanding Persian empire that is what happened. For their own political reasons, the Persians restored deported peoples to their home-lands, and so the remnant of Israel returned to what became again a promised land.

They came with a challenge to rebuild and restore and renew – but not just the walls of the city and its housing not just the structure and institutions of a nation and not just the temple itself.

The prophets spoke loudly – the spirit of the nation needs to be restored too and the only way to do it is to work according to God's agenda – to really be his people – his returned from exile people – not just to return but to return with repentance and a new vision. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" – Isaiah cries out to them.

This is Isaiah's vision from out of the desert, the wilderness. This is a place of seeming emptiness – even the place of lost confidence – the place where dreams and hopes come to dust – but it is also the place where everything is stripped away and we can see things with a greater clarity - in its harsher, searching light. In this light Isaiah – and John the Baptizer coming after him – read the signs of the times and call the people – call us – to repentance and renewal.

And Isaiah's hope is that as God's people come under God's rule – God's grace and mercy will flow out from the nation – overflow to the nations around and they too will see God – "and all flesh shall see the salvation of our God".

Such are the high hopes and the great challenge to God's people as they came home from exile. Over the years that followed, the centuries that followed, the vision and the hope died again – the nation was never truly independent – occupied by Alexander the Great, and then by Rome. The worship in the rebuilt temple became the focus of religion and the offering of animal sacrifices the focus of that.

The ritual of religion for the sake of identity in beleaguered times, the drawing closer in stricter observance to religious law – in the face of foreign domination – the increase of the sense of us against them – of the holy people against those whom God will judge – all of this eroded the vision of a people living with joy under God's rule – whose purpose was to shine as a light to the nations around.

Would God act again as he had done in the days of exile? By the time John the Baptist appears this is a matter of high expectation – God would act through a great figure – the Messiah. Many see this in terms of revolution – throwing off the yoke of Rome – establishing a Kingdom in Israel that would at last be free of foreigners – for us and not for them.

John is – as we read about him in the gospels – most clearly like a prophet of the time of exile. The people are lost – as they were then – the nation is not free – they are oppressed by foreigners and by their own religious and political establishment. They are desperate and desperately hoping that God will act. And John, by using the words of Isaiah reminds them of the vision they once had when they were a people most laid low and ground down.

He is:

'the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

*"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight",*

He is a voice crying out in the wilderness – quite literally for that is where he is preaching – he is not in the city, in the temple, he is on the edge in the desert, on the margins, in a place of exile.

And his preaching is about repentance – turn again – in order to return. Using Isaiah's words 'prepare the way of the Lord' – he offers baptism in the Jordan as a sign of individual and personal renewal and recommitment to the vision of being God's returned from exile people.

This is not forgiveness of sins through the rituals of sacrifice – this is not the religious life focussed on the temple – this is about renewing each person’s relationship with their God – this is about each person preparing in their own heart a way for the Lord.

John’s message is a direct challenge to those who run things – to religious and state leaders. He is appealing to anyone who will listen and most especially the ordinary people. More than that he is making it very clear that God has no time for those who have taken comfort in the ritual and establishment of religion. God has no time either for those who assume that the judgment will fall on the others – whoever they are – the Romans – the unbelievers – the ungodly of any kind – those who are not like us. Oh no! the judgment falls first on those who assume that God is on their side. They have taken up the responsibility of that relationship – along with the comfort – and yet have failed to live it through.

Most challenging of all John reminds them of their calling and purpose to be a people from whom God’s mercy and love would spill over to the nations around – all flesh shall see it together. As God acts again for the sake of his people it may well be that those who will see and recognise and respond to what He is doing will be those on the outside now – “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

John the Baptist is not a false start to the real story. He is a part of the story – the story of God’s dealings with the people he calls – the story in ancient times and the story through John’s own time and the story in our time. The importance of John is not that we should seek to be like him but that we listen to what he says if we are to receive the one who is to come – the true messiah.

John’s call for personal repentance, for a renewal of vision, for a personal commitment to the rule of God in our hearts and in the world – are a call to us too.

At this moment in the story of our world, our nation and our church – we are not literally in exile – taken away from our homes and land. But we are in a kind of exile from all the familiar and important things that make up the richness of our lives. We are in our homes (too much we might think) – we are still in our country – but all the things that we are deprived of – social life – meeting others – going out – making plans for holidays – being near those we love when we want to be – all these deprivations make our present life more like a desert – a wilderness.

In this wilderness time, perhaps we can – with Isaiah and John’s words echoing in our hearts and minds – perhaps we can, see in a starker and clear light the things that are most important and worthy of our time and effort. In this Advent season of expectation, as we hope for a return from this wilderness, surely we cannot just unthinkingly return to our old ways. Our horizon must not narrow just to ourselves and what we long for – there are greater concerns – valleys to be lifted up – hills brought low and paths made straight – to echo Isaiah.

How we do this is yet to be seen but we wait for the opportunities that will come – we make ready for the possibilities of God’s renewal of our world and his people. And through the light of the world that shines in us we pray that everyone may see the salvation of our God.

Revd Preb Simon Baker

FOR YOUR PRAYERS**ST MICHAEL*****Those newly in need of prayer***

Tim Wellings, Robert McAllester-Jones, David Edge, Martin Dewes, Chris Clayton, Robert McAllister-Jones

Those in continuing special need of prayer:

Sam Bassett, Mark Berry, Elizabeth Chapman, Dorothy Clayton, Jo Cobb, Dottie Collins, Alison Cox-Toplis, Chris Dickerson, Sonia Doidge, Colin Eastwood, Joseph Harrington, Robert Harris, Bill Hill, James Knight, Matthew and Emmeline and their parents, Ruth and Andrew Martel, Marielouise Oliver, Arthur Palin, Nick Rutter, Anthony Staples aged 6, John Tipper, Sheila Vaughan, Judith Watson, Renee Wellings, Peter and Anne Whatson, Felicity Woodfield, Jamie, Gary and Denise, Julian & Wendy,

Those who have died

Audrey Egleston, Yvonne Harper

ST JOHN

Pat Crowe, Jo Hearn, Ann Kinson, Allan Law

Those who have died

Eileen Fletcher

Post Communion Prayer

Father in heaven,
who sent your Son to redeem the world
and will send him again to be our judge:
give us grace so to imitate him
in the humility and purity of his first coming
that, when he comes again,
we may be ready to greet him
with joyful love and firm faith;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Christmas Services

In the light of new government regulations we have revised our Christmas Services and these are set out below. The changes apply to services at St Michael's.

We have decided to introduce two extra services:

An open air **Carol Singing** which will be held in the churchyard at 6.00pm on 22nd December. This will include well-known carols and a few readings. As we cannot sing together in church, this will be our only opportunity to sing Christmas carols this year. If you wish to attend please note that everyone must maintain social distancing. Please do not park cars on the church driveway or parking for this event. ***The new church parking is available for those with walking difficulties only.*** We are only advertising this event through our notice sheets to limit circulation and avoid any crowd control issues.

Please bring a torch!

The First Service of Christmas

Will be held on Christmas Eve at 9.00pm and will be followed by the Midnight Service at 11.15pm. The content of these services will be similar. By offering an earlier service we hope to relieve pressure on numbers at all our Christmas services.

Registration

In addition we are setting up a registration process on our website for all Services at St Michael's on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, so that you and those coming with you can indicate which service you would like to attend. This will help us manage numbers and seat allocation and will also form the basis of our record keeping of names for track and trace.

All our plans are subject to any further changes in government regulations regarding worship and access to church buildings. Please check the website before coming to church to make sure that the service is taking place and what special conditions there may be.

It may be that many people will wish to attend church this year. For this reason, it would be helpful if regular members of St Michael's congregation could limit themselves to one service over Christmas Eve and Christmas Day ie. Either, First Service of Christmas, Midnight Mass, 8.00am Holy Communion or 10.00 Christmas Communion.

Christmas Services at St. Michael's

Advent 4 Sunday 20th December

8.00am Holy Communion

10.00am Holy Communion

6.00pm Carol Service on Zoom

Tuesday 22nd December

6.00pm Carol Singing in the Churchyard.

Christmas Eve 24th December

3.00pm—6.00pm

Open Church and Distribution of Christingles

The church will be fully decorated for Christmas and there will be a one way path past the tree and the crib ending with a Christingle given to each family to take away

9.00pm First Service of Christmas (Holy Communion)

11.15pm Midnight Service (Holy Communion)

Christmas Day 25th December

8.00am BCP Holy Communion

10.00am Christmas Holy Communion

Christmas Services at St. John's

Advent 4 Sunday 20th December

4.00pm— 5.00pm

Open Church and Distribution of Christingles.

Christmas Day 25th December

9.00am Christmas Holy Communion

CHURCH NOTICES

MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2021 will be £8.50 payable by cheque to P.C.C. of St, Michael and St.Mary ". This will not be collected in the normal way by your deliverer. Please post it directly to me. Details are in the December magazine. Thank you for your cooperation Barbara Homewood Tel 255909

WORSHIP BY ZOOM

Our regular zoom worship is on the first and third Sundays of each month.

Next regular service

Sunday 6th December 6.00pm

This service will include Bisho Michael's Advent Sermon.

You can join the service from 5.45pm. The service will last about 40mins. ***If you have not had a link by Friday at 11am please contact the office office@stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk***

BIBLE STUDY

The Book of Acts: Wednesday 9th December If you would like to join in our Bible Study please contact Angie in the office for the zoom link. Our Bible study sessions will resume some time in the New Year with a different topic.

ST MICHAEL'S & ST JOHN'S CHRISTMAS BAKE AND DELIVER SCHEME

Nominations are now be open for the **Christmas Bake & Deliver Scheme!** If you know anyone in Lichfield or Wall who might be in need of some good cheer and a baked treat, please complete the [nomination form on our website](#), or printed forms which will be at the back of church during times of private prayer. Nomination deadline is **Monday 7th December**. For full information about the scheme visit <https://www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/bake--deliver.html>

If anyone would like to volunteer to bake and/or deliver please let Mel know revdr.melclark@gmail.com. Thank you!

NO CHRISTMAS CARDS

Because of Covid-19 restrictions it will not be possible this year for anyone to bring Christmas cards to church to be collected by other members of the congregation. Also it will not be possible to hand out cards personally either at the start of the service or outside after the service. Both of these would be in danger of breaking the social distancing that we have in place in church and the rule of 6 outside church.

I am sorry that this is rather a Ba! Humbug! notice but it will be safer for everyone if we all restrict our card giving to those that we can post or personally deliver.

You might like to donate any money you save on cards to the church or a charity.

Simon Baker, Rector

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCHYARD CHRISTMAS TRAIL PUZZLE!

A fun, half hour outdoor Christmas activity suitable for age 4/5 plus.

This is available to explore from Advent Sunday (Nov 29th) until Christmas. It consists of four A4 stations which you need to find. They introduce and tell the Christmas story through QR codes, revealing video story clues which give you the password for the final instalment. All stations are in the area around the turning circle at front of church. It requires a QR code reader/app on a tablet/phone with mobile data, and a pencil and paper to note the clues! Have fun, enjoy the reason for the season - and please observe social distancing and all Govt guidance!

CAROL SERVICE on ZOOM. If you who would like to do a reading for the zoom carol service on Sunday 20th December at 6pm, please contact Christine Polhill on 01543 674474 or christine@reflectiongardens.org.uk, Volunteers must feel comfortable with using Zoom.

CHRISTMAS FOOD DONATIONS

Lichfield Foodbank is **now collecting for Christmas hampers.** If you wish to donate, please check the item will be in date till after Christmas.

CHRISTMAS CHARITY COLLECTION DATES 2020 @ St MICHAEL'S

Christmas Charity collections for Sunday 6th and 13th December

St Michael's will collect on both Sundays for

The Angel Tree, a charity that provides toys for prisoners' children, there is an information poster at the back of church. Please put donations in the white envelopes provided, fill the front in if you can gift aid and make cheques out to 'PCC of St Michael and St Mary Lichfield'.

Toys and gifts for women for Pathway, please put unwrapped gifts in the large white box on the table at the back of church. You can also provide wrapping paper if you wish.

Food bank, if people could bring a something extra on top of their normal contributions it would be great.

Christmas Eve Christingle

Open Church

Donations for the Children Society, white envelopes and a collection plate will be available in church.

All the arrangements are subject to government guidelines and may have to be changed. We will keep you informed.

Brenda Liptrot

THE FOODBANK is always happy to receive gifts of

- Tinned meat and fish
- Tinned fruit and vegetables, soup and beans
- Rice pudding and custard
- Instant coffee, tea, sugar, long life milk and fruit juice
- Packets of cereals, biscuits and snacks
- Pasta, rice and pasta sauce
- Jam

Items should be **at least 3 months in date** or the Foodbank is not allowed to issue them.

If anyone wishes to donate but is unable to shop for Foodbank, we shop most weeks and would be able to buy items for them. Just let us know 01543 255308

Maggie and David

CHURCHES TOGETHER There is a new messages on our website from the Cathedral
www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/churches-together.html

PARISH DIARY

Sunday 6th December

8:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10am	Holy Communion	St John's
6pm	Evening Worship	Zoom

Monday 7th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	St Michael's
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Tuesday 8th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
2.30pm	Tuesday Club	Online Podcast

Wednesday 9th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	St Michael's
10.30am	Bible Study	Zoom
2.00pm	Memorial Service: Muriel Colley	St Michael's
6:00pm	Choir Rehearsal	St Michael's

Thursday 10th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
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Friday 11th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
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Saturday 12th December

Sunday 13th December

8:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10am	Holy Communion	St John's

WARNING!!!

If you receive an email from: **Revd Preb Simon Baker** and the email address is either:
onlinechurch954@gmail.com churchvicar8@gmail.com

Please do not reply or open any attachments. I never use that title in any emails I send
and these are not my email addresses.

If you receive any email that asks you to spend any personal money on my behalf please
delete it at once.

Simon