

SERVICE SHEET
13th December
3rd Sunday of Advent

Canticle - A Song of God's Descending

- 1 I love you, O Lord my strength. The Lord is my crag, my fortress and my deliverer.**
 - 2 In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried out to my God for help.**
 - 3 He heard my voice in his temple and my cry came to his ears.**
 - 4 He parted the heavens and came down and thick darkness was under his feet.**
 - 5 He rode upon the cherubim and flew; he came flying on the wings of the wind.**
 - 6 He made darkness his covering round about him, dark waters and thick clouds his pavilion.**
 - 7 From the brightness of his presence, through the clouds burst hailstones and coals of fire.**
 - 8 The Lord also thundered out of heaven; the Most High uttered his voice with hailstones and coals of fire.**
 - 9 For you will save a lowly people and bring down the high looks of the proud.**
 - 10 You also shall light my candle; the Lord my God shall make my darkness to be bright.**
 - 11 As for God, his way is perfect;**
- the word of the Lord is tried in the fire; he is a shield to all who trust in him.**

Psalm 18.1,6,7,10-14,28,29,31

**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 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
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen

Old Testament Reading.

Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-end

The servant of the Lord said:

¹The 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;² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;³ 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.⁴ 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. ⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.

Psalm 126

¹ When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

² **Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.'**

³ The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

⁴ **Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.**

⁵ May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

⁶ **Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.**

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.

John 1.6-8, 19-28

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.¹⁹ This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?'

²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.'

²¹ And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.'

²² Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' ²³ 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. ²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

²⁵ They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' ²⁶ John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.'

²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.



Sermon

Credible witnesses – those who are willing to stand up and give testimony – as honestly and truly as they can – these people are the very heart of any court or judicial system - at least one that hopes to bring justice and legal redress for victims and the innocent. Some legal systems are notorious for the presentation of false witnesses – and of course that occurs too in the trial of Jesus himself.

True witness is important because on the evidence of witnesses, a person may be convicted or go free. Their life may be changed forever.

Character witnesses offer testimony to positive or negative personality traits. They can speak about the person's reputation and conduct in the community. They offer evidence that corroborates or dispels the image presented of that person during court hearings.

Of course, the testimony or witness of one person alone is not usually enough. It can give a one sided or biased picture. We know that any incident or person can be seen from a number of different perspectives and for a full picture to emerge we need more witnesses.

It is also important that a witness does not become the main focus. They may be centre stage for a while as they give their testimony but in the end their role is to serve the court and the essential focus is on the issue at hand or the person in the dock.

As John the gospel writer says – John the Baptist comes as a witness – not to himself but to the life and light of all creation. He himself is not the light but like a true witness he points beyond himself so that “all might believe through him”.

His testimony is not to something small or insignificant but to the greatest event imaginable – the coming light of God into the world. The same Word of life that brought all creation into being is coming to us as the Word made flesh. He gives this testimony to those in authority – and it confuses them. So, priests, Levites and Pharisees are sent to question him.

It is easy to understand why those key religious figures are confused – after all John does not appear or act as a credible witness. For a start, what we know of his appearance and his manner make him an edgy person – someone in whose presence you might not feel entirely comfortable. He is far away from the court witness in a smart suit, clean shirt and sober tie.

So, they question John as to his credentials. If they are to believe his testimony, they want to know who he is – where he is from – where he stands. It becomes a kind of parlour guessing game. Are you the Messiah? – No. Are you Elijah? – No. Are you the prophet? – No.

Alright then, give us a clue who are you?

And John replies

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,

‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”

as the prophet Isaiah said”.

He refuses to be placed in any of their categories or meet any of their expectations.

This is not about whether he is the Messiah – or Elijah or anyone else. This is about whether his testimony is true. If he agrees to any of the characterisations they want to put upon him, John opens himself to being rejected simply because what he is saying and doing does not fit with what others expect.

No – you cannot be the Messiah – the Messiah is going to act like this and bring about our liberation – we don't see how baptising ordinary people is going to help that.

Sorry, but you really cannot be Elijah – you are not doing any miracles as far as we can see.

The answer that John does give about himself

- the voice of one crying out in the wilderness- might seem to be evasive but it is indeed true witness – if only they will stop and see and hear.

It's true because it points very directly to what John is saying – be ready, there is one coming after me – I don't know who he is yet, but he is already among you – I am not worthy to untie his sandal. John points away from himself and witnesses to the one who is to come. John is not the focus of attention.

He says of himself, he is the voice crying in the wilderness – and that is where he is, that is where he is preaching and baptising – but the wilderness is also the desert of the nation and its life – the wilderness of people struggling to live in hope and expectation. His testimony cries into that dry and dusty land and brings a foretaste of what is to come, through the refreshing water of baptism for renewal and a new beginning.

By using the words of Isaiah, John also counters another possible rejection of what he speaks out about. You are only one witness – how can we believe you? By calling Isaiah to witness to him, John is placing himself in that great company and tradition of God's prophets down the centuries – if you want corroboration of my witness – he seems to say- look to the witness of the prophets – we speak and stand together.

John is a faithful and true witness and he is part of a great company of witnesses who testify to the faithfulness of God and to his mercy and his justice. John's words and actions might not be comfortable or what we expect, but they are testimony we can rely upon.

So, as we hear John's words in this Advent season, the question arises for each of us. How true a witness are you or I? Can the testimony of our lives be relied upon to point to the God we believe in and his Son Jesus Christ whose coming we long for and wait for?

Do our words, our actions and our inmost thoughts corroborate or negate our testimony? These are serious questions for self-examination and as such they are truly Advent questions. These are questions and reflection for a time of waiting and hoping and expecting fulfilment.

When people look at us – individually and as a church – they might well be attracted to our company – or they might be repelled. If the latter, we might want to think about that a bit too. But the most important thing is what they see and hear and report of us –like it or not these Christians are faithful witnesses to their faith and their call to be disciples. Their testimony about God's love and care is something they live out. Their witness to justice and the needs of the poor – is true and reliable. Their willingness to stand up and speak for those who have no voice or who are ignored – is a proper witness to our shared humanity.

And if we feel alone in this life of witness – for we cannot always be together and support each other - then these words written long ago to Hebrew Christians should ring in our ears:

"Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily clings to us. And let us run with perseverance the race that is set before".

The cloud of witnesses is all around us and among us. So let us run the course of this Advent, determined with God's merciful help to be faithful witnesses – not to ourselves or our church but to the one who is Lord of creation – who comes to us in human flesh and brings light to everyone – that all might believe in him and through him have life.

Revd Preb Simon Baker

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST JOHN

Pat Crowe, Jo Hearn, Ann Kinson, Allan Law

Those who have died

Eileen Fletcher

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST MICHAEL

Those newly in need of prayer

Robert McAllester-Jones, David Edge, Martin Dewes, Chris Clayton,

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, 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

Bill Hill, Muriel Colley, Samuel Lamburn, Audrey Egleston and Yvonne Harper

Post Communion Prayer

We give you thanks, O Lord, for these heavenly gifts;
kindle in us the fire of your Spirit
that when your Christ comes again
we may shine as lights before his face;
who is alive and reigns now and for ever.

Amen

CHURCH NOTICES

Sunday 13th December

3rd Sunday of Advent

WORSHIP BY ZOOM

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

Next regular services

Sunday 20th December 6.00pm

Sunday 3rd January 2021 6.00pm

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

NO CHRISTMAS CARDS

Because of Covid-19 restrictions it will not be possible this year for anyone to bring Christmas cards to church to hand out or be collected by other members of the congregation.

You might like to donate any money you save on cards to the church or a charity. *Simon Baker, Rector*

READERS FOR 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 SERVICES

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 9pm Christmas Eve, Midnight Mass, 8.00am Holy Communion or 10.00 Christmas Communion.

<https://www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/christmas-services-2020.html>

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

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84473780555?pwd=WmRCdWM5VU84eGZDK0RQdIEFRpUT09>

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 Christmas Eve Service

11.15pm Midnight Service

Christmas Day 25th December

8.00am BCP Holy Communion

10.00am 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 Holy Communion

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 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!

CHURCHES TOGETHER CHRISTMAS DAY CELEBRATION Due to the current circumstances, it will not be possible to host a Christmas Day lunch at Wade St Church. Instead chilled meals and /or a Christmas stocking will be delivered to people's homes. If you could help with deliveries between 12:15 and 2:15, or if you could telephone an allocated guest between 4pm and 7pm on Christmas Day for about 15minutes, please contact me and I can give you more information and I can pass on your details. Thank you.

Brenda Liptrot 01543251863

CHRISTMAS CHARITY COLLECTION DATES 2020 @ St MICHAEL'S

Christmas Charity collections for Sunday 13th December

St Michael's will collect 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.

Brenda Liptrot

PARISH DIARY

Sunday 13th December

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

Monday 14th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
6:00pm	Floodlights in memory of Jean Eastwood	St Michael's

Tuesday 15th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
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Wednesday 16th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
9:00am	Magazine Distribution	St Michael's
6:00pm	Choir Rehearsal	St Michael's

Thursday 17th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
12:45pm	Funeral Samuel Lamburn	St Michael's

Friday 18th December

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
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Saturday 19th December

Sunday 20th December

8:00am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10am	Holy Communion	St Michael's
10am	Holy Communion	St John's
2:00pm	Distribution of Christingles	St John's
6:00pm	Carol Service on Zoom	Zoom

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. Thank you for your cooperation Barbara Homewood Tel 255909

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.
Maggie and David_01543 255308

CHURCHES TOGETHER www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/churches-together.html