

# RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

## 6 December 2020—Advent 2

**John the Baptist.** Importantly the description of John's ascetic lifestyle, his clothing and food, lead us to think of him as the last of the prophets, or perhaps a transitional prophet guarding the doorway from one epoch to another. The location of his baptising in the Jordan and its eastern shore had long been associated with the prophets Elijah and Elisha. (2 Kings 2) It is no accident that here, where centuries earlier the Israelites had crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land, John's ministry paved the way for the crossing from the old to the new covenant by the Lamb of God. John's preparatory ministry of repentance for the forgiveness of sins through water now becomes the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the body and blood of the Messiah and the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Start as you mean to go on.** Within the first eight verses of Mark we see all the building blocks that make up the good news of Jesus that follows. Everything is set up to enable a meeting and an ongoing relationship with the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. Confession of sin; Repentance; Forgiveness; Baptism in water; Baptism in the Holy Spirit—all the ingredients necessary to prepare for the Lord Jesus to live and to minister in and through our lives. The ongoing story will tell us that the Son of God born into the world, will live and work demonstrating the glory of God, before being crucified—the Lion of Judah becoming

the spotless Lamb of God that was slain—the perfect sacrifice purging the consequences of sin forever; the unending story telling us that Jesus was raised from the dead, the first of all those who put their faith and trust in him who will live forever—guaranteed by the mark of the Holy Spirit's baptism. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.' (John 3:16-17) Jesus will return but he is patient, 'not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.'

### SUGGESTED SONG

O Holy Night  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o75x425h7Xo>

### BLESSING

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. (Isaiah 40:10-11)

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and always. Amen.

<https://rydebaptist.xyz>

Dear Friends,

What a difference a week makes. We are now out of 'lockdown' and into the new Tier 1 restrictions. News over the last seven days has confirmed that there will now be a vaccine arriving in time to begin combatting Covid-19 Coronavirus before Christmas. Good news indeed. Well, the headline is of course better news than the reality because it will take several months to roll out the necessary two doses of vaccine where it is most needed, before the rest of us can be protected. Yes it is good news, but the waiting patiently and the going on taking precautions needs to carry on. We are in a form of limbo or virtual space where gratification is yet again delayed, and this is well suited to the present season of Advent. We wait and prepare for something that has already come, whilst also eagerly awaiting something promised but yet to be.

Living in 'now and not yet' time and space is a major feature of the Bible. It can be seen in the way the Prophets proclaim present and future truth in one breath, broadcasting the judgement, forgiveness, redemption and future promise of God's people in the turn of a single phrase. Sometimes this makes it

difficult to work out exactly what they are talking about, but it is always fascinating and intriguing. It can be seen in the call to commemorate and celebrate the birth and life of Jesus who lives and reigns and is present in the lives of his disciples, yet whose coming again we long for with pregnant expectation.

Partly this has to do with the way time works. Peter reminds us that 'with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.' Things happen when God speaks, something that is understood from the very beginning of the Bible, but these things are only revealed when the time is right. Through Isaiah, God speaks tenderly to Jerusalem—tenderness is a necessary healing tone because Jerusalem and the people it represents are broken and wounded—telling her that her sins are paid for and her slavery over. But the promised Redeemer Messiah is yet to come. Israel's redemption is now and not yet. It will be 700 years or so before the Messiah's birth and the promised voice will be heard crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord.'

2,000 years later and we hear the very same voice, and we have the very same task to complete before Jesus returns.

Zoom is the safest way for most people to meet at this time and will continue to be the main way that we will be able to meet for a little while yet. Our Zoom Sunday Service is at 11.00am today as there will be a short service in our building at 9.30am; our Zoom Prayer Meeting is at 7.00pm on Monday. The Zoom links will be sent to those who have signed up to receive them. If you are reading this sheet on your computer or device you can also click on the readings and songs. There is lots more information on our website which you can find at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

## CALL TO WORSHIP

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. (Isaiah 40:1-2)

## BIBLE READINGS

[Isaiah 40:1-11](#)

[Mark 1:1-8](#)

[2 Peter 3:8-15](#)

## SUGGESTED SONGS

Across The Lands

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVpkR4gYIlg>

The Lion And The Lamb

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0U45AL9RWU>

## IN THE BLEAK MID-WINTER

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him,  
Nor earth sustain;  
Heaven and earth shall flee away  
When He comes to reign:  
In the bleak mid-winter  
A stable-place sufficed  
The Lord God Almighty,  
Jesus Christ.

## FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Each week for our prayers during Advent we will use a verse from Christina Rossetti's well-loved Christmas carol. The thing that is most striking about the second verse is the contrast between the vastness of the majesty of God that even heaven cannot contain him, and the meekness and vulnerability of his place of birth. A similar contrast is found in the way the Bible describes Jesus as the Lion of Judah on one hand, and the Lamb of God on the other. (Rev 5:5, etc) 'Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity' would seem to sum this up well. Reflect on who it was that Jesus the Son of God was born among, what he had given up in order to bring his people back into a relationship with him, and the extent to which he must love us to go to such extreme measures. Turn your reflection into worship and prayer.

## SUGGESTED SONG

Meekness And Majesty

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gtt52JEW\\_Zo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gtt52JEW_Zo)

## MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

Anyone who went to a good theatre production of Godspell in the 1970s will remember the haunting notes of the opening solo chorus from the voice of John the Baptists, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, Prepare ye the way of the Lord', repeated over and over and over again. It became a classic of its age and, although the rest of the production disappeared behind its hippie costumes and makeup, it was certainly memorable and reminds us that the work of retelling the story of Jesus and the invitation of the Gospel needs to be done in and for each new era and generation.

**The Good News.** Mark's Gospel begins very abruptly, making some commentators believe that part of it may have gone missing before being included in the New Testament—with an editor adding a few words of introduction. However, the fast pace of the rest of the Gospel certainly fits with verse 1 being so quick out of the starting blocks. It goes rapidly from zero to one hundred percent in a blink of an eye. The theme is immense. It is about the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, and it is about the good news that links him with the promise of the Prophet Isaiah around 700 or so years earlier. The word 'beginning' is powerful. It all starts here. And it marks the birth of a new form of literary genre too, 'Gospel'—which is translated 'good news'—a type of spiritual biography.

**The Messengers.** Rather than a birth narrative (actual in Matthew and Luke, whilst more spiritual in John), Mark begins before the arrival of Jesus with the one God sent as messenger to announce his arrival. This had been forecast for many centuries, not just through Isaiah, as Mark wrongly states, but also through the prophet Malachi. The quote is a combination of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. There are many witnesses to the one who will bear witness to the coming Messiah. This is well-signposted ahead of time. It shouldn't be a surprise. The road needs to be made straight, the path must be levelled, in preparation for the Son of God.

**Road Works.** We are used to Island Roads suddenly closing down our usual route (not all of us can read the small print in the County Press or have access to websites) now that there is a maintenance plan in place. Our roads were under-invested and poorly-maintained for many decades; our potholes developed lives and characters of their own! When there is going to be a royal visit or procession, even more focus and attention is paid to the state of the roads. One of the striking features of the Judean wilderness and the terrain around Jerusalem is that it is undulating and very hilly, only much further south becoming straight and flat as the significantly named King's Highway (relating to King Solomon) heads off into North Africa. There's work to be done.