

# CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 136

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2021

**'Virtually Church but with some way to go...'**

## Welcome

Welcome to this edition of Cutting Edge Camelot. On this Sunday in Advent we remember in particular the ministry of John the Baptist on which Ron reflects below.

## Scripture Passage

*Luke 3: 1-6*

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, <sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, <sup>4</sup> as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.

<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth;

<sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

## Reflection

This week, John the Baptist is on the menu, so our theme is repentance, because that was what John's message boiled down to. It was about cleaning up our act, ready for the coming of Jesus. But that was then and this is now, two thousand years later, give or take, and we need to think about Jesus coming back, because he said he would. Now I don't know any more than you when this might happen, and maybe like me you sometimes wonder whether it will happen at all. And I have no idea how it might be - will it be the end of the world, or will Jesus come back to us individually? There is a theory that the whole second coming thing is a metaphor for death - Jesus will come to us in our death.

Now that's thoroughly muddied the water for you and shown my ignorance, let's get on. For the next few minutes, I'm taking the view that Jesus is coming back, somehow, sometime. A royal visit is rumoured, but dates and times are yet to be announced.

The trouble with being the Queen is that, for all your privilege, prestige, authority and wealth, you're no more free than a criminal with a tag. I wouldn't swap places with royalty for anything. It has been mentioned that if you're the Queen, everything smells of fresh paint. She never sees places as they really are. Even in the present circumstances, we can go for walks, go shopping, stick our heads in the pub, but Her Majesty can't go anywhere without equerries, detectives and ladies in waiting. If the Queen was coming here, and we had notice, we wouldn't say, like we might of anyone else, *she must take us as she finds us*. We'd lay on the best we could, and we'd maybe clean up a bit. Sweep the leaves. Pick up the litter.

Here's a royal visit being announced, and the people are told to make urgent preparations, and not just to put on a show. Renewal from the inside is what's called for. The gap between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New is about four hundred years, and there was a

deafening silence from heaven. People were saying God had lost interest in his people, and he'd said his last word on every subject. But then the voice of prophesy was heard again - and remember, prophesy isn't necessarily telling the future, but just telling what God says - and it's from a man in the desert. John. He dresses like a beggar, and eats the absolute minimum to keep alive. I've never seen a film that did John the Baptist justice. The worst was King of Kings, in the 1960s, where John was played by Robert Ryan. He was barely awake, speaking his lines as if they were just that - lines. John was a wild man - a fanatic by most peoples' standards. For a start, he had never shaved or had a haircut. Beside him, our lockdown hair would have looked like military buzzcuts.

By the Jordan, where the people once crossed over into the Promised Land, and new life, John reveals the climax of God's plan. The Jordan was hugely symbolic. We know the Israelites passed on dry land through the waters when they left Egypt, but we sometimes forget they also passed dry-shod through the river Jordan when they reached the end of their forty years' wandering, to finally get to the country God had given them. So that was what made you a citizen of the new country, that passage through the river. For hundreds of years, the test of Jewishness was *did your ancestors make that walk across the river?* But John challenged people, not to count on their history, their heritage, their ancestry, but to make the individual commitment to God and his kingdom, and passing through the Jordan themselves was a symbol of that.

Maybe for the same reason, John doesn't proclaim Jesus' coming in Jerusalem, but out in the countryside. (In his time, anywhere that wasn't built on or actively farmed was called wilderness.) People who want to hear God's word have to go to the trouble of going out into the dry wilderness to hear it. And many of them do.

But going out into the desert is just the start of a much longer journey. As John speaks of God's rule to come, their curiosity has to become

commitment. They need to recognise that being Jewish on the backs of their ancestors isn't enough. They have to go back into the river on their own account. But even that isn't the end of it. Being washed clean of the past is to be accompanied by repentance, a determination to put aside the attitudes and ways of behaving that aren't appropriate to the kingdom of heaven. In the ministry and teaching and person of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is drawing near.

The cost of changing can be demanding. If you want to lose weight, you've got to eat less, or exercise more. For the Pharisees and Sadducees, it means admitting that they aren't the righteous people they thought they were, and really humbling themselves before God. These are people who thought they had a pass into heaven just for being Jewish. No dice, says John. Only a genuinely holy and renewed life is evidence of a heart fit for heaven.

Hearing God's word carries a challenge, and John's appeal to the crowd is urgent. This is a special offer, limited time only. And John tells them that their choices will have consequences - failure to show the results of godly living is opting out of the kingdom. The time of repentance is a time of reckoning. Those who turn away from Jesus the Saviour will face him one day as Jesus the Judge.

If we were to welcome our Queen here, we'd spare no effort to get things right. When we sense that God is speaking something new into our lives, isn't it worth making the time to listen, even if it means putting other things aside?

As we welcome Jesus into our lives, we receive his forgiveness, but also the responsibility of demonstrating the difference that forgiveness makes in us. The Christian life involves the Holy Spirit's refining fire, as well as the cleansing water of baptism. We might be tempted to rest on the laurels of our Christian background, or our church membership. But the kingdom of God doesn't carry passengers.

Don't put off putting right the things you know God is urging you to put right. Time is precious, and it's limited. Make the most of every opportunity to prepare for Jesus when he comes. If you knew he was coming this afternoon, what would you have to do to be ready to meet him?

*Ron*

## **Points for Prayers**

- Finding ways during Advent to prepare for Jesus when He comes
- COVID plans for winter in the light of the new variant and our own planning for the Christmas period
- Continued thanksgiving for the care, skill and courage of NHS workers and that they will not be overwhelmed by the demands on them in the winter period
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- Bishop Ruth and the rest of the Diocesan staff as they take on additional responsibility in this vacancy in See
- For the choice of a new Bishop, someone who shares God's heart for this Diocese
- North Cadbury Church School and other local schools
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton now reopened and for its first residents
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

## **Hymn**

A traditional Advent hymn celebrating the ministry of John the Baptist is 'On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry'

## Services for next two Sundays

Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> December	9.00 am Communion, Yarlinton
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> December	11.00 am Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> December	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> December	4.00 pm Carol Service, South Cadbury

## Excalibur

Excalibur is back in paper form. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church in the Camelot Parishes. The December/January edition of Excalibur has now been published online at [camelotparishes.co.uk](http://camelotparishes.co.uk) and on each parish's A Church Near You webpage.

## The Parish Office

If Rob is not in the Office during normal office hours please contact him via email ([office@camelotparishes.org.uk](mailto:office@camelotparishes.org.uk)) or on 01749 850934.

*Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family*

*We pray that 'we might live in love,  
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5:2)