

# **CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 184**

**Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

**‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’**

## **Welcome**

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

## **Scripture Passages**

*Matthew 3: 1-12*

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, <sup>2</sup> “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” <sup>3</sup> This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

<sup>4</sup> Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, <sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>7</sup> But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit worthy of repentance. <sup>9</sup> Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>10</sup> Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

<sup>11</sup> “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will

baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

## Reflection

The New Testament was written in Greek, because at the time, Greek was the common language around the Mediterranean. Most of our modern translations are done from the Greek. But one of the great early Christians, Jerome, realised that by his time, the fourth century, Latin had replaced Greek, and so he set about translating the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, into Latin. Good for him, and I don't know enough to quarrel with him, except that he translated the Greek word that means *repent* as *do penance*. Which is a bit different, I think. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, has the message, *Repent*, which ought to mean something like *turn away from your sins. Clean up your act. Straighten up and fly right*. Not doing penance, which is the religious equivalent of writing lines, or detention. In some churches, you make your confession to the priest, and he pronounces you forgiven, and then he gives you a penance to do - usually lots of prayers to say, as if making you say prayers was a sort of punishment. Like phoning the grumpy uncle you don't especially like. But repentance is a serious business, because it faces us with stuff inside ourselves we'd rather not look at. I've got one of those magnifying mirrors in my bathroom that makes me look like an Egyptian mummy. Repentance should be like that - looking closely at yourself and seeing all the nasty bits.

Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas, which is a celebration of the birth of Jesus, Son of God, into our world, and bearing in mind that Jesus said he would come back, a time of reminding ourselves of that, and being prepared.

John was Jesus' warm-up act. We're preparing to celebrate the coming of Jesus into our world - God coming to live among us, starting from a baby.

John was preparing his people for the ministry of the Messiah - the grown-up Jesus on a mission to preach, heal, and show God's power and love active in the world. Whether he knew this would end in Jesus' death we have no way of knowing. Could John have foreseen the Resurrection, and what that means for the whole world?

What concerned John was that his people, the Jews, should be ready for the arrival of Jesus - no more the carpenter from Nazareth, but a powerful, inspired figure. And he reaches back into the scriptures to the prophecies of Isaiah; *he* is the one shouting in the desert, make way for the Lord! And this being ready, making way, he summed up in one word - Repent!

John told people to repent, to be baptised as a sign of repentance, and they would be forgiven. For John, forgiveness is dependent on repentance. But since Jesus died, and rose, taking our sin with him on the cross, that's turned around. Our sins are forgiven. So now we must repent.

Let's put ourselves in the position of those first century people who went out into the wilds to hear what John was about. John wanted us to come to terms with the fact that our behaviour falls short of what God wants from us. I nearly said expects, but God knows we're human. So we have to look at our lives, and face up to what we're really like; are we the people we could be, and the acid test is, if Jesus comes back tomorrow, will we be pleased to see him?

So. Repentance. The standard view, upheld by our Book of Common Prayer is that God forgives those who truly and earnestly repent.

When you were a kid, caught out.

"Say you're sorry."

"Sorry."

"Say it like you mean it."

"*Sorry.*" Is that truly and earnestly enough?

But here's a bit from the prophet Ezekiel. Chapter 36.

*You will live in the land I gave your ancestors. You will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from everything that defiles you. I will command the corn to be plentiful so that you will not have any more famines. I will increase the yield of your fruit trees and your fields. **And then** you will remember your evil conduct and the wrongs you have committed, and you will be disgusted with yourselves because of your sins and iniquities.*

See? God's goodness and love for us should make us realise what horrible people we've been sometimes. Accepting we're forgiven means accepting we need forgiving.

This is the challenge of Advent. Whether you believe Jesus is really coming back, soon, or whether you think it's a distant future, or if you're honest and admit you haven't any more clue than a cat, we need to be ready. And that means, in John's terms, examining our lives, our thoughts, our priorities, and honestly asking ourselves whether our behaviour is fit for Jesus to see. Not just like putting a lick of paint over a shabby shed, but if necessary, build a new shed.

And get ourselves into good habits - become kinder, more loving people, forgiving as well as being forgiven. Getting closer to God in prayer - re-reading the love letters he sent you to remind yourself how much he cares, how much you owe him, and how little you pay him back.

I keep saying *you*, but I mean *we*. As much as anyone, if not more, We need to make this Advent a time of preparation and self-examination. And then our resolution for 2023 can just be *keep it up*.

Ron

## Points for Prayers

- Understanding the true meaning of repentance and being open to being changed by God so that we become more like Jesus
- All those facing hardship this winter, needing to choose between food and heating
- Our continued contributions to foodbanks such as the Lord's Larder
- Climate emergency and the Earthshot Prize
- Conflict between Russia and the Ukraine
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- For the Deanery in considering Pastoral Reorganisation
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton and its residents
- For teachers, children and parents of North Cadbury church school and other local schools

## Hymn

An Advent hymn which celebrates the ministry of John the Baptist is 'On Jordan's bank, the Baptist's cry.'

## Services for this week and next

Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> December	9.00 am Communion, Yarlinton
Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> December	11.00 am Group Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 11 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 11 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 11 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Matins, Blackford

Sunday 11 <sup>th</sup> December	11.00 am Patronal Sunday Worship, Holton
Sunday 11 <sup>th</sup> December	4.30 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 and January editions of Excalibur have now been published online at [camelotparishes.co.uk](http://camelotparishes.co.uk).

## **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)*