

# **CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 185**

**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

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

## **Welcome**

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

## **Scripture Passages**

*Isaiah 35: 1-10*

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus <sup>2</sup> it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,  
the majesty of our God.

<sup>3</sup> Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.

<sup>4</sup> Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
“Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,  
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.”

<sup>5</sup> Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

<sup>6</sup> then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;

<sup>7</sup> the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

<sup>8</sup> A highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
the unclean shall not travel on it,  
but it shall be for God's people;  
no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.

<sup>9</sup> No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there,  
but the redeemed shall walk there.

<sup>10</sup> And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

### *Matthew 11: 2-11*

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup> and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

<sup>6</sup> And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

<sup>7</sup> As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind?

<sup>8</sup> What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup> What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

<sup>11</sup> "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

## **Reflection**

Advent is a season of hope. A time when we look forward with anticipation to Christmas. We each have our own expectations, good or bad, of what it will be like.

As we continue to look at the ministry of John the Baptist we realise that he, too, must have had his expectations of what would happen when the long awaited Messiah came at last. We don't know exactly what these were. Perhaps, like others, he thought that Jesus' ministry would be a political one resulting in the restoration of the kingdom of Israel freed from the oppression of foreign rule. And again John had spoken of the coming Messiah as one who would baptise with fire, signifying a fiery and refining judgement. Perhaps he expected this to be the keynote of Jesus' ministry.

But whatever John did or did not expect of Jesus in His ministry it does seem clear from today's gospel passage that he was disappointed in the reports that were reaching him in prison of what Jesus was doing. This was not what he had expected.

He expresses his doubts and uncertainties in the following question with which he sends his followers to Jesus, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'

The question centres around Jesus' identity. Can Jesus really be the promised Messiah or should we really still be waiting for someone else? That someone, by implication, would be greater and perhaps do more spectacular works than John had heard that Jesus was doing.

As we think of John in his prison wrestling with disappointment and with expectations that had not been met, we might wonder whether John's expectations were fair or reasonable.

In other words, could it be that John needed to adjust his expectations so that they were in line with the actual realities of Jesus' ministry?

For our expectations can be reasonable or unreasonable. When a new person, for instance, takes over a job from a much loved predecessor there can be the expectation that he or she will do the job in exactly the same way and that nothing will change. But is that a reasonable or an unreasonable expectation? Why should we expect someone to be exactly like someone else and to have the exactly the same gifts? Should we not rather adjust our expectations so that the new person is welcomed and celebrated for who he or she really is?

On the other hand, expectations can be perfectly reasonable and justified. We rightly expect, for instance, that someone with whom we have a relationship will behave with honesty, integrity and compassion. And if these expectations are not met then our disappointment is entirely justified.

However, Jesus' character matches up to and indeed surpasses all our reasonable expectations. The fruit of the Spirit is described as being 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Galatians 5: 22-23). And Jesus' life and ministry exemplified these qualities.

No, the problem lay rather in the nature of John's expectations of Jesus. It was these that needed to be adjusted.

And this is what we learn from Jesus's response to John. In effect, Jesus tells John's envoys to go back to John and to tell him to have another look at what people have already seen and reported to him. So it is not the evidence which needs to be adjusted or changed but the interpretation of that evidence. John has already heard in prison about what Jesus has been doing but he has failed to see that these are exactly the kinds of things that should be expected of the Messiah.

John has been blinded to this through his own disappointed expectations. However, he needs to go back to scripture to understand this truth. He would surely have picked up the very clear scriptural allusion in the description that Jesus gives of His ministry, 'the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them'.

This mirrors in almost exact detail the signs of the Messianic age as depicted in our passage from Isaiah, 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.'

Isaiah then follows this up with a portrayal of how the desert miraculously becomes a fruitful place through the breaking out of waters and streams. The abundance of these waters is both a natural and spiritual sign of God's coming. The presence of the Spirit which Jesus comes to bring us is often described in terms of water. So, for instance, Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman of the water welling up to eternal life which He gives (see John 4:14).

And just as the description of Jesus' ministry is intended to strengthen John the Baptist in the temporary uncertainties of his faith, so too in Isaiah this

demonstration of God's power and beauty is intended to strengthen those who may be wavering in their faith. The encouragement is given to 'Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees'. And fear is addressed by a message of hope and encouragement to 'Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God".'

So John needed to revise his expectations of Jesus and His ministry and to go back to scripture in order to re-evaluate the reports that had been reaching him about Jesus.

As we come up to Christmas I wonder what our expectations of Jesus are and whether these too might need to be revised in the light both of our own experience and of the witness of scripture. We will hear this witness so often in our nativity plays and, in our Christmas and carol services.

How do we see Jesus? Some might think of Him as some kind of magician who can effortlessly wave all our problems away. And others may see Him always as a baby in a manger but never growing up to face all the difficulties of life.

If we see Jesus like this perhaps we will join the ranks of those many people who think 'Well this is a wonderful story and it would be lovely if it were true. But it's the kind of story which we tell our children, it's like a fairy story. But sadly we have to grow up and as we do so we recognise that such stories are not real and we grow out of them'.

However, when we go back again to scripture we learn very quickly that we are not dealing with a fairy story. The Holy Family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus are not exempt from the ordinary pressures and misunderstandings of everyday life. So Joseph rather than immediately accepting that Mary's unborn child comes from the Holy Spirit instead takes a much more pragmatic attitude. He plans to cancel the forthcoming marriage. However, as he is a compassionate man, the telling detail is added that he plans to do

so quietly so as not to subject Mary to public disgrace. And it takes the direct intervention of an angel to convince Joseph not to cancel the marriage (see Matthew 1: 18-20).

And though the image of a baby in a manger has now been romanticised through countless renditions of 'Away in a manger' it was in reality doubtless an uncomfortable place to give birth and certainly a marginalised one when compared with those other visitors to Bethlehem who were safely lodged at the inn.

And Jesus and His family were certainly no strangers to pain and suffering even from the start of His life as the account of the flight of Joseph, Mary and infant Jesus as refugees into Egypt to avoid Herod's massacre of the innocents reminds us (Matthew 2: 13-14). This does not often find its way into our Christmas readings.

So perhaps when we go back to the Biblical accounts of Christmas with fresh eyes and hearts we find not a magician who wishes our problems away but someone who is there alongside us to guide and comfort us in whatever hardships or difficulties we may face in life. A person whose nature is summed up in the name Emmanuel which means 'God is with us' (see Matthew 1:23). And surely this is no fairy story that we put aside and grow out of as we grow up but a reality which satisfies our deepest needs for purpose and meaning.

*Tristram*

## **Points for Prayers**

- Recognising Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us
- All those facing hardship this winter, needing to choose between food and heating

- Those seeking to help those facing hardship through projects such as the Lord's Larder and other foodbanks, community fridges and the provision of warm spaces
- Cold weather, its dangers and disruptions
- 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 as they celebrate Christmas
- For teachers, children and parents of North Cadbury church school and other local schools as they celebrate the approach of Christmas and the end of term

## Hymn

Another Advent hymn that we are singing today is 'Hills of the North rejoice.'

## Services today and Carol Services

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
Thursday 15 <sup>th</sup> December	2.00 pm Carol Service, North Cadbury School
Saturday 17 <sup>th</sup> December	6.00 pm Camelot Carol Service, North Cadbury
Saturday 17 <sup>th</sup> December	6.00 pm Carol Service, Bratton Seymour



Sunday 18 <sup>th</sup> December	4.30 pm Carol and Crib Service, Holton
Sunday 18 <sup>th</sup> December	6.00 pm Carol Service, Galhampton
Monday 19 <sup>th</sup> December	6.30 pm Carol Service, Blackford
Tuesday 20 <sup>th</sup> December	6.00 pm Carol Service, Compton Pauncefoot
Thursday 22 <sup>nd</sup> December	6.00 pm Carol Service, Yarlinton
Saturday 24 <sup>th</sup> December	4.00 pm Christmas Tree Service, North Cadbury
Saturday 24 <sup>th</sup> December	5.30 pm Carol Service, North Cheriton

## **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)