

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 237

Sunday 7th January 2024

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

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passage

Mark 1: 4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Reflection

Blessed is the man that expects nothing, said Alexander Pope, for he shall never be disappointed. Cynical perisher. But I know people who make that

their philosophy. A lady I know who has been happily married now for years told me once that she never expected to meet a decent man, or to have a happy relationship, so her John coming along was a real bonus. If you expect the worst, the results aren't often as bad as you expected. But then that sort of attitude might prevent you from getting the good things that you might have had if you were a bit more open. What if Sue had looked at John and kept thinking *where's the catch?*

So what expectations do we bring into the new year? 2024! Change is going to come to us here in Camelot as Tristram retires, and we have no idea yet what will happen, whether Camelot will stay together, or be split up. Some people will be looking forward to a change. Some people will be afraid of change.

At the time Jesus was baptised in the Jordan, the Jewish people were full of expectation. Their ancient scriptures promised them a Messiah, a new king, descended from the great King David, who would liberate them from the occupying Romans and give them independence. Some people weren't looking forward to this - people who were working with the Romans, and getting well paid for it, and people who might not have liked them, but were afraid of upheaval and change. The people the Bible refers to as the Herodians wanted nothing to do with a Messiah. They were doing well under the existing regime.

But that didn't affect most people. The Herodians were a small minority. Generally, people looked at the prophesies of men like Isaiah, and maybe it was wishful thinking, but they bought into the idea of a new world ushered in by a promised king.

If you're old enough to remember, the years just after the last war were of austerity, rationing, and general gloom. And then the new Queen, Elizabeth, seemed to usher in a new age of hope, and things did indeed get brighter, and gradually the country became more prosperous. We were the

New Elizabethans. Now, bless his heart, nobody has suggested that King Charles will mark the start of a new, brighter, more prosperous age. The best we can expect is more of the same. I look forward to being proved wrong.

The predictions of the Jewish Messiah were couched in poetic language, and it doesn't always do to take poetry literally. Hunger wasn't going to come to a magical end. Sickness and death were never going to be banished from the world. Some things, as politicians are forced sometimes to admit, are aspirations rather than actual manifesto pledges. Even those who accepted that the words might be symbolic had a deep feeling that they were living at a turning point in history, one of those watersheds that mark the end of an old era and the emergence of a new world order where everything is different.

Jesus' cousin John preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and the crowds flocked to him, wondering whether this was to prepare them for the new age. As the people were filled with expectation, everyone was wondering about John. Luke tells us there was speculation whether he was the Messiah himself. But John squashed that sort of speculation - the one coming after him would be a giant by comparison.

And now people began to wonder whether Jesus was the Messiah, but they were still fixated on the idea that he'd be a military leader, who would drive out the Romans.

But it was much better that the people should be on tip-toes, expectant like children waiting for Christmas, than that they should have been cynical. At least they were expecting something good. The voice from heaven spoke to Jesus, *you are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*

One of my digressions here. King David wasn't his original name. David was the name Elhanan, son of Jair of Bethlehem took when he became king.

Jair became known as Jesse, which means “root” because he was the rootstock the royal line grew from. David means “Beloved”, so God saying Jesus is “the Beloved” is saying, *this Messiah, this new David - it's you!*

This was big stuff. Jesus went off on retreat to sort his ideas out. As we used to say, he got his head together. Then he came back preaching, teaching, attracting followers, and right up to Palm Sunday the crowds heard him quite gladly. They wouldn't have been so eager to receive his teaching if they hadn't already been in a state of expectation that something new was about to happen. Hope is a great thing. Much better than hopelessness.

Samuel Johnson was a bit of a curmudgeon, and when one of his friends married again soon after his first wife died - a wife he'd never been happy with - Dr Johnson described it as *the triumph of hope over experience*. That's where that saying comes from. Hope needs to triumph. If you're an optimist, you will sometimes be disappointed, but sometimes optimists have a joy that pessimists don't have because they aren't looking for it. Hope is a reasonable attitude, especially when it's founded on a firm faith in God, who wishes us well, and will bring us through all our trials to the joy and bliss of heaven at last.

The Jewish people didn't get the type of Messiah they were looking for. After the time of Jesus, some of them followed more promising Messiah wannabees who mostly came to sticky ends. But the ones who were prepared to follow Jesus down unexpected paths received blessings better than they'd hoped for. And that's the message for us. If you expect great things from God, often the outcome of your efforts on his behalf will be greater than you'd dared to dream. But if you expect nothing, then that's precisely what you'll get.

When you came here this morning, were you “filled with expectation”? This sermon might not be perfect, but there's always something you can learn

and enjoy, if you come with an open mind and a hopeful heart - if you come with faith that God wants to meet you in his house each week - if you're willing to listen to what he's telling you to do. But if we turn to prayer expecting to be disappointed, inevitably we will be, and it won't be God's fault, it'll be ours.

And in everyday life, what do we expect from Jesus? What sort of Messiah do we want? Someone who will put our world to rights, overthrow our enemies and make our carbon footprint smaller than a mouse's? Or one who will give us everything we ask for, like Aladdin's genie? Someone who will bail you out of every tight spot?

My favourite author, Robert Farrer Capon wrote a book called *The Third Peacock*. You won't find a better book about God and the problem of evil, because it's only ninety-two pages long. In it, he says that if your car breaks down, what you really need in the passenger seat is a friend who will get under the bonnet and tinker away, and get you back on the road. Failing that, what you want is a friend who will sit on the kerb with you, and agree that life stinks. Which sort of friend is Jesus? Mostly, we have to admit, Jesus is the sitting on the kerb sort. But the promise we have from Jesus is that whatever the world throws at us, whatever we have to face, he'll always be with us.

Ron

Points for Prayers

- Expecting great things from God
- Thanksgiving for services and meetings over Christmas
- For continuing conflicts including those in Israel, Gaza and the Ukraine
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved

- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton and its residents
- For teachers and children of North Cadbury church school during the Christmas holidays

Notice of Prayer Event

On January 12th 2024 at 12 noon, [UCB](#) and [Premier Christian Radio](#) are working together to call the nation to prayer. We believe there is extraordinary power when God's people unite in prayer and together, we want to see something ignited that will transform lives across the nation.

On the morning of the 12th, both stations will broadcast reflections and worship culminating in a joint call to pray the Lord's Prayer together at 12 noon.

"On 12th January 2024, as we approach what's often dubbed as 'Blue Monday', we invite you to join us for a special moment of unity and hope across all our radio station - at precisely 12 noon, we will unite our voices in reciting the Lord's Prayer, a shared proclamation of our faith and a powerful symbol of Christian unity. As we usher in the new year, it's an opportunity to collectively pray for 2024 and to share the hope that Jesus brings into our lives.

In challenging times, it's crucial to remember that while we may experience 'Blue Mondays', we are never alone; our faith in Christ binds us together. Let's stand together against despair and depression, lifting each other up in prayer and illuminating the winter darkness with our shared faith. Tune in, join in, and let's make this day not blue, but filled with the light of Jesus' hope.

Hymn

An appropriate hymn for the New Year is 'God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 7 th January	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 7 th January	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 7 th January	11.00 am Group Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 14 th January	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 14 th January	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 14 th January	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 14 th January	11.00 am Sunday Worship, Holton

Excalibur online

The December and January edition of Excalibur has now been published online at camelotparishes.co.uk. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church in the Camelot Parishes.

The Parish Office

If Rob is not in the Office during normal office hours please contact him via email (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)