

Virtual Church News

Sunday 6 December

2nd Sunday of Advent



Welcome to Virtual Church News. Hard copies will be circulated to those without access to email/social media. If you know of anyone without email who you think would benefit from a hard copy, please call Jacqui on 356993 or email stjameschurchbiddenham@gmail.com

A Reading for the Week

Mark 1:1-8

¹The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ²as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"- ³"a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the LORD, make straight paths for him.'" ⁴And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Services in Church

Our 9.30am Sunday services in church will be as follows:

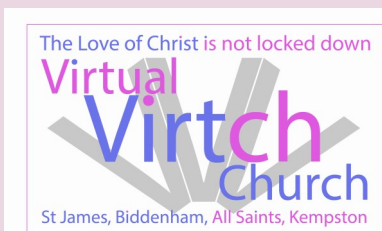
- Sundays 6, 20 Dec - All Saints
- Sundays 13, 27 Dec - St James

For details of our Zoom services see below.

Virtch

Zoom services are held at 11am on Sunday and 6pm on Wednesday.

Simply go to Zoom and enter meeting ID 998 074 6039.



Message from Rev Eric Lomax

What is your experience of life and what is your experience of faith? For many people religion can be judgmental. It can be a closed door to those who are not part of the club who do not follow the rules. People who walk through the doors of a Church do not necessarily feel that they are amongst friends.

In the same way people in life may experience isolation, fear, illness, loneliness, poverty, hunger and rejection. For them the voice of God seems silent. It is hard believing in a god for whom there is no evidence of existence. Such a god does not speak to them or provide them with any answers that they cry out for. They would cry out if they felt that somebody was listening.

Churches also can be places in which the voice of God is misrepresented, instilling in people an over emphasis on judgement, condemnation, fear. This god only makes them feel inadequate or places the burden of guilt upon their shoulders.

Our reading today is from the beginning of Mark's gospel. The first sentence introduces us to a new concept of God which is quite simply an emphasis on good news. The word Gospel means good news and the author immediately associates that good news with Jesus Christ; This is the good news of Jesus Christ the son of God. I wonder how many of us in normal times walk into a church and expect to hear good news. This would be such a step forward in the witness of the church when good news is such a rare commodity in the modern world.

Mark's gospel does not begin with the Christmas Story. We have no angels, we have no shepherds or wise men. We do not have Mary and Joseph or a Virgin birth, but what we do have is a wilderness. 'There is a voice crying out in the wilderness,' we are told.

The wilderness is such an important theme in the Bible. When Adam and Eve sinned for the first time they were cast into the wilderness, and when the Israelites were set free from slavery they wandered around in the wilderness for 40 years.

Continued on next page

Message from Rev Eric Lomax continued

The wilderness was a place of isolation that fell outside the grace and the love of God. It was a place that was filled with danger and uncertainty. In the story of Moses we are reminded that even in the wilderness God is with us. He gave his children the commandments in the wilderness and he fed them with bread from heaven. God is not absent from the wilderness. He is there with us.

At the time that Mark's gospel begins God had seemed silent for many years. There had been no prophets and Israel had been invaded by multiple foreign armies. The Israelites felt alone and abandoned by him. They had understood the Covenant (promise) that God had given them as meaning that he would liberate Israel from foreign invaders, and through a promised Messiah, God would again set Israel above their enemies establishing a Kingdom of justice and peace. Sadly, however, God had been silent for so long that this was unlikely to happen. For Israel this was a time of wilderness, a time of hopelessness, and a time of despair

The Israelites' vision focussed very much on themselves. To them, it was the gentiles that belonged in the wilderness. It was the Israelites who were to be recipients of the promise of God. God's message was just for them.

There was minimum provision for what were known as proselytes. Proselytes were Gentiles who were permitted into the Jewish faith. Some Jews saw a kind of Baptism as a way into this. To join the club, they had to undergo ritual washing or baptism. Then, if that was not enough they would have to be circumcised and follow every detail of Jewish law. This, however, was rare, so if you were once an outsider then you were always an outsider.

Mark's Gospel then introduces us to John the Baptist. John is described as a voice crying in the wilderness and he very much mirrors the Old Testament Prophets.

John is in the Wilderness, outside Jewish territory, so his audience is the Gentiles. He does something unusual in that he makes the proselyte route the norm rather than the exception. He preaches repentance for the forgiveness of sins and seals that with Baptism. This is a message for the outsider. There is a new Israel and God accepts all, not just the religious people. Unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees at the time his belief draws in the outsider and accepts all.

Of course the religious come to hear what is going on and instead of John speaking to them as if they are on the same team he actually turns his guns

on them and condemns their hypocrisy; 'Do not be so judgemental,' the other gospels quote him as saying, 'Do not speak of yourselves as being Children of Israel, because God can raise up children of Israel from these very stones.' (Matthew 3:9)

It is here that John the Baptist talks about the source of this good news. He says, 'There is one who comes after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.' He then goes on to say, 'I baptise with water, but he will baptise with the Holy Spirit.'

This is the key. John was very much about washing people so that they could become part of Israel. Jesus however was going to bypass the religious expectation altogether. He was inviting the outsider to be filled with a Spirit of life and truth. That kind of Baptism is about transforming your heart and not just making you religious.

This is Good News, because whatever your experience of life is, there is Good News for you, and with the loving Spirit of God, a) you will be accepted completely by God, whoever you are and whatever you have done, and b) your life and circumstances, whatever form they take, can be transformed by the Spirit of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God bless,

Eric

Shine a light of hope!



Christingle Celebration

4pm Christmas Eve (via Zoom)

Email stjameschurchbiddenham@gmail.com, call/text 0778 6886 710 or message us on Social Media and we will deliver your Christingle to you.

Join us for our Christingle Celebration when we will make our Christingles and celebrate the light of Jesus together, or make them in your own time.

St James's Church, Biddenham
All Saints Church, Kempston
Raising funds for The Children's Society

Church Services etc. on TV/Radio

If you don't have access to the internet, try tuning in to the following on Sunday:

- 8.10am on BBC Radio 4 - Sunday Worship. Cities of Promise - a place for nature.
- 1.15pm on BBC 1 - Songs of Praise. Young Chorister of the Year final.
- 3.00pm on BBC Radio 3 - Choral Evensong from Salisbury Cathedral.

Wednesday 9 December:

- 3.30pm on BBC Radio 3 - Choral Evensong from Durham Cathedral.

Discovery Group

This bible study group meets via Zoom on Thursday evenings at 8pm. For further details, contact john.c.lambert@gmail.com

Daily Hope

Music, prayers, reflections and full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a free telephone line. **0800 804 8044** Available 24 hours a day.



A free phone line of hymns, reflections and prayers

For the Children (& young at heart!)

In this week's reading we hear about John the Baptist. The story is all about John the Baptist appearing in the wilderness to prepare the way for Jesus, just as Jesus prepares the way to God.

Activities

Play a game with your family as though you are travelling home from the wilderness, just like John the Baptist. The aim of the game is to get from one side of the room/garden to the other. Each person takes turns to roll a dice. They step forward one pace towards 'home' for an even number, two paces for an odd number, but if they roll a six then they have to take one step backwards. The game continues until everyone has safely reached 'home'.

Think about the 'wilderness'. Where is a 'wilderness' place for you? Is it perhaps a local wood or forest or a big open space? What are the dangers and beauty of a wilderness space? Then think about the word 'home' and what it means to you. What things are important about your home and what makes it a special place?

Song

Blessed be Your Name

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnWKehsOXu8>

Prayer

We praise you Jesus, for coming to our home, this world your Father created in order to show us the way home to God. We thank you for John who lived homeless in the wilderness to prepare the way for you. As we do our best in our earthly homes we remember our heavenly home which awaits us and praise you for opening up the way. Amen.



Christmas

with **St James's and All Saints Churches**

Sunday 20 December

4.00pm Nine Lessons and Carols

Christmas Eve

4.00pm Christingle

11.30pm Midnight Communion

Christmas Day

10.30am Family Service

All services will be held via Zoom
To join, just go to Zoom and enter meeting ID 998 074 6039

Unfortunately we will not be able to hold our usual events and services in church this year

Hymns/Songs of the Week

Colours of Day

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mw-7CJhlp0>

Long Ago Prophets Knew

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S63rjDtYRYg>

A Song of Peace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRYu8R0vDzc>

How Lovely on the Mountains

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n82_H4yabC4

Please pray with me

Dear God and Father,
we thank you for the love you have given through our Lord Jesus Christ.
We offer ourselves to you, so that you can genuinely transform our lives.
Come to us,
heal us,
and redeem us.
Amen.



ST JAMES'S CHURCH



**Biddenham Tea Towels
Mugs/Coasters
Jotters**

Contact Jane: 359014

**Village Christmas Cards
Marmalade/Jam
Jelly/Chutney**

Contact Sue: 342373

Christmas Handicrafts
Contact Trissa: 950612

**Also on Sale Outside St James's Church
after Sunday Services (approx. 10.15am)**

There will be no Christmas Bazaar this year

Rev Eric Lomax Contact Details

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Mob: 07805 879537

Email: Rev.ejlomax@gmail.com

Please include in your prayers

- Everyone involved in the roll-out of the vaccine starting this week.
- All those in our communities, including the sick, the bereaved, those who are lonely or anxious.
- All those working in the NHS and care homes along with their patients/residents.

Prayer Group

Join our prayer group at 8pm on the 1st/3rd Thursdays of the month via Zoom. Everyone is welcome. Contact us for login details or if you have any prayer requests.

Bedford Foodbank

Please don't forget that we support the Bedford Foodbank, who need our donations now more than ever.

Donations of food can be placed in a box in St James's Church Porch, taken direct to the Foodbank (off Manton Lane) or put in the boxes in the supermarkets.

Alternatively please consider making a financial donation. Further details can be found on their website: <https://bedford.foodbank.org.uk/>



Community Support Groups

Do you need support? We can help with shopping and companionship (via regular phone calls). Can you volunteer to help? Let us know if you are DBS checked (for any organisation). It doesn't matter if you aren't, we still need your help, but safeguarding is important!

Biddenham:

If you need support, ring 01234 815393 (daytime only) or email help@biddenham.org.uk with your name/phone number/address.

If you can volunteer, please email help@biddenham.org.uk

Kempston:

If you need support or can volunteer to help, contact:

Rev Eric Lomax: 328452 or 07805 879537

Alison/Brenda Walker: 851597

Alan/Anita Lowe: 857212 or 07751 659695