

St Martin of Tours  
Epsom

St Stephen on the Downs  
Langley Vale

The parish of  
St Martin of Tours  
with St Stephen-on-the-Downs

Weekly Newsletter  
Registered Charity Number: 1134149

## Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2021 – Second Sunday of Advent

Dear Friends,

Today, we hear two annunciation stories – to Sarah and Mary. The text sometimes reads that these women are mere vessels for the divine plan. But they represent crucial aspects of God's plan of salvation. In their times, women were largely seen as below men in the social order – yet it is to them that God turns to be agents of His plan of salvation. It is those marginalized by society who are often agents of redemption – as true today was it was in the time of Sarah and the time of Mary. They should be honoured by us, not ignored.

**Nick Parish**

### **THIS WEEK**

#### **Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December – Second Sunday of Advent**

- 9.30am – Morning Prayer at St Stephen's – led by Ruth Foxcroft
- 10.00am – Holy Communion at St Martin's, in Church and live streamed – led by Nick Parish
- 6.30pm – Evening Prayer at St Martin's – (in Church and live streamed) led by Judith Mitchell

#### **Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> December**

- 10.00am – Holy Communion – led by Andris Abakuks

### **FUTURE SERVICES**

#### **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> December – Third Sunday of Advent**

- 8.30am – Holy Communion at St Martin's, led by Nick Parish
- 9.30am – Holy Communion at St Stephen's – led by Andrew Haviland
- 10.00am – Choral Mattins at St Martin's, in Church and live streamed – led by Graeme Lodge
- 3.00pm – Beacon Tea
- 6.30pm – Holy Communion at St Martin's, in Church and live streamed – led by Nick Parish

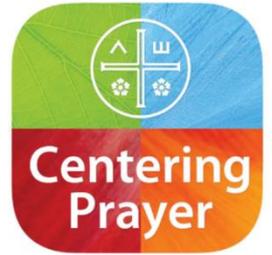
#### **Beacon Tea – 12<sup>th</sup> December**

At the next Beacon Tea (next Sunday) we shall also be singing Christmas carols, so do come! All are welcome.

Please would two or three able-bodied people help at the end of the morning service to move some chairs and move some tables into place? We need to set up the tables near to the piano (carol singing) so 3 chairs from each row on the south side need to be moved out of the way. And I am a bit feeble! Thank you. **Mary Gilbert**

## **CENTERING PRAYER FOLLOW-UP SESSIONS - STARTING JANUARY 18th**

The Centering Prayer Taster Day presented by Lynne Scholefield was well-attended and much enjoyed. Participants came from across the Borough and further afield. The Taster Day was an introduction to the work of Fr Thomas Keating and an experience of the inner prayer method he began. The Taster Day has led to six follow-up sessions in which to establish the practice of Centering Prayer on an individual basis. In essence, Centering Prayer follows Jesus's direction to "Go to your room,,,,,,,"



The six follow-up one hour sessions will be held at St Martin's weekly on Tuesdays, beginning on January 18th and then January 25th, February 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd. Lynne Scholefield has agreed to present both an afternoon session (at 4pm to 5pm) and an evening session (7.30pm to 8.30pm) on each day. Even if you missed the Taster Day, anyone can attend these Centering Prayer learner sessions. It will be good to know how many we shall be, so please speak with Lynne Scholefield or Judith Mitchell or email [stmcenteringprayer@gmail.com](mailto:stmcenteringprayer@gmail.com) to make a booking.

## **STEWARDSHIP**

### **Giving to St Martin's and St Stephen on the Downs**

For general and stewardship giving you can give online giving via the Charities Aid Foundation. Donations can be either a one-off donation or a regular donation using direct debit. To make a donation either:

1. Click on the following link:

<https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/13377>

OR

2. Use your Smart Phone and Scan the QR Code below



There is also a "Donate" button on our website.

### **Cheques to St Martin's**

If give a cheque donation to St Martin's Church, please can it payable to:  
'The PCC of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Epsom'

### **Donation Station**

If you wish to give via contactless payment, please use the donation station in Church. You can give a pre-set amount or choose one. You can also gift aid your donation.

## **OTHER NOTICES**

### **Help the Eco Musketeers at St Martin's Schools**

St Martin's Schools need volunteers to help fold and sort the crisp packets and bread bags they are recycling. If you're able to help support the work of the schools' Eco Musketeers, please contact Rachel Hill via the school office: [office@stmartinsepsom.school](mailto:office@stmartinsepsom.school) Rachel will try to arrange a time when you can be accompanied by other volunteers with enhanced DBS checks if necessary.

## **Evening of Lights**

You are invited to come to one of the Evening of Lights when St Martin's will be lit with candles and the Christmas tree lights. These evenings offer a quiet space for remembering people close to you, and the opportunity to light a candle in their memory. We hope to be able to offer you a hot drink (tea, coffee or hot chocolate) before you leave. The dates are

- Monday 13 December 6.00 p.m. – 8.00 p.m.
- Tuesday 14 December 6.00 p.m. – 8.00 p.m.

There will also be an Evening of Lights at St Stephen's, Langley Vale, on

- Wednesday 15 December 6.00 p.m. – 8.00 p.m

***Mary Gilbert and Elaine Snook, Pastoral Team***

## **Beacon Lunch**

A festive lunch will be held on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> December in Church House at 12.00pm for 12.30pm. All are welcome. If you think you are likely to join us it would be helpful if you would sign the list at the back of the Church TODAY to help us to cater effectively.

## **MISSION FOR THE MONTH**

### **HOME MISSION**

The Church Army - Activating positive change through faith, words and action. A mission focused community within the Anglican Church, positively affecting lives prayerfully. They are expectant—risk taking and generous

The Children's Society - is a national society that seeks to help thousands of children who desperately need support and practical help. They also campaign to change laws.

***Jill Chapman***

### **ABROAD MISSION**

Founded in December 2006 by Ruthie Marcus, in memory of her only child Alex, AMECA is committed to healthcare delivery, training healthcare professionals and to healthcare education in sub-Saharan African countries, through sustainable initiatives. AMECA is a small but growing charitable trust.

In Malawi the last project to be completed is the building of a maternity unit and training personnel to administer healthcare.

***Meg Topley***

## **12 Days - Movement for good**

'Could you spare 5 minutes for 12 days to help St Martins?

Ecclesiastical Insurance are donating £1,000 to 10 charities for 12 days from 6th to 21<sup>st</sup> December.

Just click on [12 Days - Movement for good – Nominate a charity to receive £1000 from Ecclesiastical](#) and complete the simple form starting with our Charity No: 1134149.

Everyone who enters, each day from 5<sup>th</sup>, will increase St Martin's opportunity to receive £1,000. Thank you!

## CHRISTMAS CARDS – STOCK SELLING FAST!

If you have not yet purchased your Christmas cards, please consider supporting the Church by buying from the Church card stall. Please note that my entire stock is now out on the tables at the back of church. Once an item has gone, it's gone and I have no further stock! Payment may be made in a variety of ways:



- Cheque: made payable to “The PCC of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Epsom” (please either hand in to the office or place in the wall safe in church)
- Donation Station: contactless payments – please use the “Cards” button
- Cash: via the wall safe in church.

Every packet sold helps the church. Thank you to everyone who has already bought from my stall.  
**Mary Holloway-Neville**



### Epsom Rotary

### Christmas Collections

This year the good news is that Santa is back and will be visiting Epsom this Christmas! Epsom Rotary Club and Tilly the Train will be helping Santa collect money for local charities. If you have been good, Santa may have something for you in his sack! All children in the areas below will need to keep an ear open for Christmas carols and Tilly lit up like a Christmas tree. Just look out of the window, give Santa a wave and see whether he has a gift for you.



#### We will be visiting:

Monday 6th Dec.	Langley Vale
Tuesday 7th Dec.	Woodcote Side
Wednesday 8th Dec.	College Ward
Friday 10th Dec.	Hookfield
Monday 13th Dec.	Mospay Crescent
Wednesday 15th Dec.	The Wells
Friday 17th Dec.	Livingstone and Horton Park

Santa will start his visits at 4.30-5.00 pm  
Watch him on his round at [sleightracker.co.uk](http://sleightracker.co.uk)

This year Epsom Rotary is collecting for local good causes in Epsom and Ewell and we'd be grateful for your support. You can see who we help on our web site [epsomrotary.uk](http://epsomrotary.uk). Gifts can be made on-line or text at any time, and by card or cash on the collection night.



If you are a wiz with your mobile then use the QR code to make a donation

Just go to [justgiving.com/campaign/tilly21](http://justgiving.com/campaign/tilly21) and give us a few pounds and we will help local charities to survive in these difficult times  
or Text TILLY to 70450 to donate £5

Texts will cost the donation amount plus one standard network rate message.



EPSOM CHORAL SOCIETY

# Christmas Concert

**Festive music**  
**Carols old and new**  
**Sing along to traditional favourites**

Julian Collings | Conductor  
London Metropolitan Brass  
James Bower | Percussion  
Marion Lea | Piano  
Benedict Lewis-Smith | Organ

**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> December**  
**at 7.30pm**

St Martin's Parish Church,  
Church Street Epsom KT17 4PX

Tickets: £16, £8 (students or under 18s)  
[www.epsomchoral.org.uk/tickets](http://www.epsomchoral.org.uk/tickets)  
Box Office: 07522 111219



Registered charity number 273757

## Latest message from Food Bank

We are so grateful to all of our wonderful supporters, every donation makes a difference! Booking a supermarket delivery? Let us know when to expect it.

This week we need:

- Custard
- Longlife fruit juice and sponge puddings
- UHT milk (full fat and semi skimmed only please)
- Instant mash
- Tinned spaghetti in sauce
- Nappies 4+ & 6+
- Christmas Bags for Life

You can donate at the usual supermarket points, or bring donations to our car park (please wear a mask);

Epsom & Ewell Foodbank  
Generation Resource Centre  
(Behind West Ewell Primary School)  
Ruxley Lane  
Ewell, KT19 0JG

Normal donation drop off times: Monday to Friday 9am – 2pm. We are closed on Bank Holidays.

\* Please make sure all donations are sealed, in date and do not contain alcohol\*

We are fundraising for:

🎄 Christmas meat vouchers. Once again we are working with local butchers, we want to give our clients vouchers to enable them to choose their meat for Christmas.

🎄 Funds for seasonal fresh fruit and vegetables to add to our Christmas meat voucher and goodie bags.

🎄 Energy top up funds for our clients' gas/electricity to cook their Christmas dinner.

🎁 Gift cards of £10 each for parents to choose a present for their children from Argos, Wilkos, Superdrug, Boots, or TK Maxx.

You can donate funds here via our website, make a small donation by text (details below), or contact us if you want to make a BACs transfer.

Donations can also be made if you prefer by texting any amount between £1 and £20 Christmas Gift followed by your chosen amount to 70450. If you wish to donate a larger amount please e-mail us.

Kind regards

Chris Shortt





**Only 40p**

# Send your cards by Scout Community Christmas Post

Delivery in Epsom, Ewell and Ashtead in postal areas KT17, KT18, KT19 and KT21

Final collection: Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> December 7pm

Full details of collection points and delivery times:  
[www.7thepsom.org.uk/activities/christmas-post](http://www.7thepsom.org.uk/activities/christmas-post)

Payment (in cash) should be included with the cards and posted into one of the Scout post boxes

All proceeds to:  
**7TH EPSOM (METHODIST) SCOUT GROUP**

Official sponsors:




## Scout Community Christmas Post 2021 Post Box Locations



Epsom		
Clarks (outside)	The Ashley Centre	KT18 5AB
Hotel Chocolat (outside)		
Superdrug (outside)		
W H Smith (outside)		
Ebbisham Centre (by library)	High Street	KT19 8AG
Michael Everett	High Street	KT19 8DP
Tesco Express	Chantilly Way	KT19 8SP
Costcutter	Manor Green Road	KT19 8RA
Ajits Local	Sefton Road	KT19 9HG
Epsom Methodist Church	Ashley Road	KT18 5AQ
Save 'n Smile	Wells Estate	KT18 7LG
Dorking Road Stores	Dorking Road	KT18 7JZ
Corner Shop 4U	Burgh Heath Road	KT17 4LU
Sainsbury's	Kiln Lane	KT17 1EQ

Ewell / Stoneleigh / Cuddington		
Sainsbury's Local	Cheam Road	KT17 1SN
KMM Convenience	166 Ruxley Lane, West Ewell	KT19 9HA
Smiths Mail Shop	12 Ruxley Lane	KT19 0JA
Ballards	Chessington Road, West	KT19 9UR
Sainsbury	65 The Broadway, Stoneleigh	KT17 2HP
Vale Road Post Office	173 Vale Road, Cuddington	KT19 0PJ
Bourne Hall	Spring Street, Ewell	KT17 1UF

Epsom Downs		
The Shop on the Corner	Langley Vale	KT18 6AW
McColls	Tattenham Corner	KT18 5QG

Ashtead		
Marks and Spencer	The Street	KT21 1AA
McColls	The Street	KT21 1AW
Tesco Express	Craddocks Parade	KT21 1QJ
Gary's Greengrocers	Barnett Wood Lane	KT21 2DB

## CONTACT US

### Parish Office:

**Church House, Church Street, Epsom,  
KT17 4PX Phone: 01372 722567**

**E-mail: [smartinsepsom@btconnect.com](mailto:smartinsepsom@btconnect.com)**

**Website: [www.stmartinsepsom.org](http://www.stmartinsepsom.org)**

**Opening hours are Mondays, Wednesday, Thursdays & Fridays  
9.30am to 12.30pm**

**The Revd Nick Parish – Vicar – 01372 743336**

**Email: [vicar@smartinsepsom.org](mailto:vicar@smartinsepsom.org)**

**The Revd Canon Adrian Esdaile - Priest in Retirement - 01372 723770**

**Email: [esdaileadrian@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:esdaileadrian@yahoo.co.uk)**

**(available for Contemplative Prayer, Counsel,  
Spiritual Direction and the Healing Ministry)**

## COLLECT

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us, and with great might succour us; and whereas, through our sins and wickedness we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and for ever.

## FIRST READING

Either **Baruch 5:1-9**

*A reading from the book of the prophet Baruch.*

Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on for ever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting; for God will show your splendour everywhere under heaven. For God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory." Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

Or **Malachi 3:1-4**

*A reading from the book of the prophet Malachi.*

Thus says the LORD God: See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

## CANTICLE Luke 1:68-79 (Benedictus)

**R** *Blessed be the Lord, who sets his people free.*

Blessèd be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, born of the house of his servant, David. **R**

Through his holy prophets he promised of old, that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all that hate us. He promised to show mercy to our forebears and to remember his holy covenant. **R**

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight, all the days of our life. **R**

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, To give his people knowledge of salvation, by the forgiveness of their sins. **R**

In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace. **R**

## SECOND READING Philippians 1:3-11

*A reading from the letter of Paul to the Philippians.*

My brothers and sisters, I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your

sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

## GOSPEL Luke 3:1-6

*Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.*

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 Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 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. 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; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

## POST COMMUNION

Father in heaven, who sent your Son to redeem the world and will send him again to be our judge: give us grace so to imitate him in the humility and purity of his first coming that, when he comes again, we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

# Sunday Homily

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

5 DECEMBER 2021

YEAR C

“The word of God came to John  
son of Zechariah in the wilderness.”

Luke 3:2

### Illustration

Airport terminals are strange places. They have a mixed-up atmosphere that seems to come from the excitement of holidays, the weariness of the business trip, the anticipation of returning home, and the boredom of prolonged waiting at unearthly hours of the day or night. They have the clinical feel of a waiting room – except you have to buy your own magazines. Even the shops selling enticing things such as watches, souvenirs and huge bottles of whisky can’t distract you for long from the fact that there is nothing to do except shop. And then there are those endless loudspeaker announcements trying to find people who have got lost somewhere between check-in and take-off. In an airport, you are in a kind of geographical limbo – it’s as if you belong neither to the country you are leaving, nor the country you are going to. For however long you have to wait, you are neither here nor there, and there is little to do except listen eagerly for your gate to be called.

### Gospel Teaching

The Bible has its own geographical limbo: the wilderness. Much more than a place of dust and rocks, the wilderness has a special spiritual significance in the relationship between God and his people. It is in the wilderness that God calls Moses from the burning bush to lead his people out of Egypt, and it is in the wilderness that the Israelites wander for forty years while they learn what it means to be the people of God. After his baptism, Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and filled with the power of the Spirit.

So when we read that the word of the Lord came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness, we know that something of real importance is about to happen. John has spent the best part of his life in this geographical and spiritual limbo; just over a chapter earlier we read that he was in the wilderness from his childhood until the day he appeared publicly to Israel. Even allowing for the fact that we don’t know how old John was, we can make a good guess that that’s a long time to be hanging about in a desert. It was a measure of the importance of John’s future work that he required the kind of spiritual preparation that only the wilderness can give. And when the word does come to John, it sets off something that will change the world.

John's call is the drum roll that announces that salvation is near, that something really new and really good is about to happen. It is a turning point in time, which is perhaps why Luke takes such care to locate this event in history, by giving us the names of the rulers of the day. John hears his call and sets off into public life to call people to repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and to baptise them as a mark of their decision to lead a new life. And so he becomes John the Baptist, preparing the way for the Lord.

## Application

We all know what it's like to be in limbo: to feel that we are neither here nor there. Generally speaking, we are creatures who love to have a purpose, and we get restless and unhappy when we lack one. It may be that this "wilderness" is a stagnant time in our lives: a dead-end job or relationship. Some people talk of retirement as a time when they feel lost and useless after many years of work. Some parents talk of feeling strangely empty when their children leave home, and for some children the school years have a kind of aching boredom that can only be described as a wilderness.

Our experiences are all different, but the thing to note is this: that just like the airport, the wilderness is a place where things are about to happen, a place of preparation. It may be a long wait; it may seem painfully boring, it may seem pointless, but the wilderness is where the seeds of change are sown and nurtured. It may not be an easy time (although for some it may be too easy, and that is the problem with it) but it is a time to embrace. It is a time for waiting and listening carefully for the voice of God. And when it comes, who knows where God might lead us?

**MONDAY**  
**6 DECEMBER**

Isaiah 35  
Psalm 85:7-end  
Luke 5:17-26

**TUESDAY**  
**7 DECEMBER**

Isaiah 40:1-11  
Psalm 96:1. 10-end  
Matthew 18:12-14

**WEDNESDAY**  
**8 DECEMBER**

Isaiah 40:25-end  
Psalm 103:8-13  
Matthew 11:28-end

**THURSDAY**  
**9 DECEMBER**

Isaiah 41:13-20  
Psalm 145:1. 8-13  
Matthew 11:11-15

**FRIDAY**  
**10 DECEMBER**

Isaiah 48:17-19  
Psalm 1  
Matthew 11:16-19

**SATURDAY**  
**11 DECEMBER**

Ecclesiasticus 48:1-4. 9-11 *or*  
2 Kings 2:9-12  
Psalm 80:1-4. 18-19  
Matthew 17:10-13

**REFLECTION**

“Comfort my people,” Isaiah is told. But this is not the comfort of a soft armchair in front of a

warm fire. This is a voice that sends shivers up the spine, that drives people on to the streets. The voice declaims to people in exile, who have lost everything, and sends them back across the desert to their true home, led by the God who redeems the people.

Isaiah is clear why this is possible. Despite all evidence to the contrary, despite other faiths in other gods, there is only one ruler in the universe. It has always been the God of Israel, from creation to exodus, from land to exile, and on into the future. “The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 40:28). In the service of such a God anything is possible, as Elisha begins to discover in Saturday’s reading from 2 Kings.

In our Advent journey we are accompanied by the God who makes flowers bloom in the desert and promises us eagles’ wings, and who leads us to the most exciting destination of all, a stable in Bethlehem.

**PRAYER**

Almighty God,  
purify our hearts and minds,  
that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again  
as judge and saviour,  
we may be ready to receive him,  
who is our Lord and our God.



The prophet Isaiah, Cathedral of Dinant, Belgium. jorisvo / Shutterstock.com

# ADVENT

## PART II – EMBER DAYS

**T**his week contains three Ember Days – on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The word “ember” comes from the Anglo-Saxon *ymbren*, denoting a circuit or revolution.

There are four Ember Weeks each year – each containing a set of three Ember Days. The weeks are roughly equidistant, depending on when Easter falls, and occur in the weeks leading up to the Third Sunday of Advent, the Second Sunday of Lent and the Sundays nearest to 29 June (the Feast of Peter and Paul), and 29 September (Michael and All Angels). In the medieval Church Ember Days were days of fasting and prayer. In more recent times they have become the traditional days on which members of the clergy are ordained.

Theologians debate the origin of Ember Days, but generally agree that the observance predates the Christian era. Some think they have Celtic origins, linked to the custom of observing various festivals at three-month intervals: Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain, although in fact they are only loosely related to these dates. Others think Ember Days have their roots in the Roman pagan custom of making seasonal offerings to the agricultural deities three times a year: in June, in the hope of a bountiful harvest; in September, to petition the gods for a rich vintage; and in December, to encourage productive sowing. It is suggested that the fourth week may have been added into the Christian calendar for the sake of symmetry.

At one time Christians sought to underplay links between the Christian calendar and other faiths, but perhaps we can rethink that, and celebrate it as something enriching. They may be remnants of bygone practices, their origins lost to us, but the very existence of Ember Days highlights a faith heritage with roots that go deep into the history of humankind.

LIVE  
theWORD

SUSTAINING YOU  
THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by  
Caroline Hodgson  
and  
Heather Smith



Second week of Advent

Monday 6 December to  
Saturday 11 December  
2021

WEEK

# Then and now

Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 3:1-6

**L**uke carefully sets his story in its historical context, referring to local, national and international politics. He makes it clear that Jesus lived in the real world, among real people. He also carefully sets his story in the context of God's dealings with the people of Israel, who now live under the oppression of Rome and an emperor who is worshipped in some places as a god.

The people of Israel long to be set free from fear and oppression, they long for knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins and for the light of a new dawn to shine upon them, guiding them from darkness into the way of peace.

Luke describes how John uses the words of Israel's prophet, Isaiah, to herald the coming

of the one who will answer this longing and to call people to prepare for his appearance among them.

Our world is not so very different. Powerful nations still oppress. Many people of faith live under threat of persecution. Corruption and injustice create inequality among people who are equal in the eyes of God.

We need to hear John's message every bit as much as the people who heard it two thousand years ago. We are not spectators by the banks of the river. We also have a need for repentance, forgiveness and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to prepare us for the return of our Lord so that we shall see the salvation of God. ☺



Zvonimir Atletic / Shutterstock.com

**Heavenly Father, your prophet John calls us to prepare for your coming among us in Jesus. Give us the grace and humility to acknowledge our need for forgiveness and the strength of your Holy Spirit to guide us in the ways of peace and justice. Amen.**

## Keeping Christ in Christmas

### Part 5 – Christmas cards

by Heather Cooke

As part of the usual preparation for Christmas we write cards, often for people we don't see from one year to the next. Sometimes a card is a heartfelt way of reaching out to someone we couldn't otherwise see, and Christmas cards have been all the more important for many in recent years.

Sometimes, though, a card is just the easy way out. God didn't take the easy way out. God didn't rely on written communication but

came in person. God not only gave us the wonderful written words of the Bible, but paid us a very special Christmas visit; the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and still visits us each day.

We can keep the Christ in Christmas this week by looking through our Christmas card list. Rather than just a scribbled signature, could we send news and warm wishes? Could we make a long telephone call? We can certainly visit all those people in prayer.

*"Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing". ☺*

## John the Baptist

by Caroline Hodgson

John the Baptist is the subject of our Gospel readings today and next Sunday. So let's take a look at the man known as the "forerunner".

Some maintain that John belonged to the Essenes, a semi-ascetic Jewish sect who practised ritual baptism. His ministry drew the attention of many people, some of whom became his disciples. Indeed, in John's Gospel (1:35-40) we read that the first two people Jesus

called as disciples, including Andrew, had initially been followers of John. Jesus himself identified John as "Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:14) – a direct reference to the prophecy of Malachi (4:5-6) – "Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes."

John's ministry lasted for about three years until he was imprisoned by Herod Antipas for speaking out against his unlawful marriage. Because of a promise Herod had made to his wife's daughter, Salome, he had John beheaded.

As well as being as a major figure in Christianity, he is also a prophet in Islam, the Bahá'í Faith, and Mandaism. ☺

**“God has come not to judge the world, but to save it! Do not run away; do not be afraid. God comes unarmed... This tells you that God has come to save you, not lose you; to rescue you, not to imprison you.”**

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), abbot and leader in the revitalisation of Benedictine monasticism



Sunday 5 December 2021  
 Luke 3:1-6  
 2nd Sunday of Advent

In the  
**GOSPEL TODAY**

John the Baptist tells us to get ready to welcome Jesus by making his path straight.

## Listen to John the Baptist

John the Baptist says it is our job to make Jesus' path straight and smooth. We need to get ready for Jesus. What is John saying to you? Put the words in one or more of the speech bubbles. Colour the bubbles you are going to do this week.

### Share my things

say a prayer

care for others

speak kindly

help at home

try hard

smile



## Make his path straight

Jesus wants to get to the people. Can you help him choose the quickest, easiest way?

## Put it right

These children are doing something wrong. Unscramble the letters to find out what they need to say.



I am \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

Choose one of the children and draw how he/she will change to show that they really mean they are sorry?



## A PRAYER TO SAY

Please help me, Jesus, to make the way to my heart easy for you. Help me to say "sorry" when I need to and to change the way I behave if I am selfish. Amen.

## Word shapes

Which word fits the shape?

path

road

way

track

