

Dear all,

Today is the feast of the Birth of St John the Baptist. St John is one of the very rare number of saints (possibly St Paul is the only other) that has two feast days – one for his birth, and the other for his rather grisly death.

I served my title (i.e. my first curacy) at St John the Baptist, Wellington, and was then appointed vicar at St John the Baptist, Belmont. Sometimes it's a bit of a struggle not to go into auto-pilot, and welcome people to St John's rather than St James! Needless to say, I have preached about him many times.

He is a fascinating character. His title comes from the Greek word *baptidzo*, which literally means 'to dunk'. St John the Dunker has much less of a holy ring about it! He appears out of the wilderness, wearing a camel-skin, eating locusts and wild honey, and proclaiming the message that the Kingdom of God/Heaven was at hand... it was upon you... repent, turn around, get your act together... come into the waters, and wash away your sins... get ready!

He has hordes of followers, but when he sees the one they've been waiting for, he points them in Jesus' direction – "He's the one, follow Him, I'm not worthy even to tie his shoelaces..." Later, when he's thrown into prison, he has doubts. He sends his followers to Jesus – "are you the one?" And Jesus replies, "look at my works, at what I've done." John must have been OK with that, as he holds out to the end – faithful to his calling, his message. Jesus praises him as the greatest born of a woman... but the least of his followers would be greater still. That is certainly something to ponder!

The collect for today reminds us and encourages us:

Almighty God,
by whose providence your servant John the Baptist was wonderfully born,
and sent to prepare the way of your Son our Saviour by the preaching of repentance:
lead us to repent according to his preaching
and, after his example, constantly to speak the truth,
boldly to rebuke vice,
and patiently to suffer for the truth's sake.

I first heard the anthem 'This is the record of John' by Orlando Gibbons when I was at college (we had an outstanding counter-tenor there).

[This is the Record of John - Gibbons - YouTube](#)

This coming Sunday is Trinity 4. The Gospel reading is Mark 5: 21-43, and includes Jesus healing the woman with a haemorrhage, and the raising of Jairus' daughter. The other readings similarly reflect the power of God over sickness and death: Wisdom of Solomon 1: 13-15, 2: 23-24; 2 Corinthians 8: 7-15.

The hymns for Sunday are [We Cannot Measure How You Heal | Arr. John Bell - YouTube](#) (a different version to the one we will be singing) and Lay your healing hands upon us. (I cannot find a recording of this on YouTube).

The Psalm for the day is Psalm 30. [Psalm 30 "I Will Magnify Thee, O Lord" - YouTube](#)

Or a modern take on the Psalm. [Psalm 30 \(Lyric Video\) - YouTube](#)

Anthems suggested include:

[Morley: Out of the Deep - YouTube](#)

John Tavener [Prayer for the Healing of the Sick - YouTube](#)

[Wilby, Julian of Norwich: Vox Dei - YouTube](#)

And here is Don Francisco's telling of the story:

[♪ "Gotta Tell Somebody" ❖ Don Francisco ♪ - YouTube](#)

The Bible study group will be meeting on Thursday. We will be looking at Mark's Gospel, chapter 12. New members are welcome. It is not a particularly academic study, though occasional insights are shared. More important is the discussion of how the text impacts and applies to our everyday Christian life. The link is <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/8109399155?pwd=STVVTU44RzJxTFFHbTY1Mnl0bjJ2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 810 939 9155

Passcode: 1w2C9a

As we reach the week when we should have had restrictions lifted, the Arthur Rank Centre has produced a Prayer and response:

God of all times and places, we long for freedom from the constraints of this virus,
bring us to a place of patience, we pray;
we long to go about our lives without fear,
bring us to a place of confidence, we pray;
we long to sing your praises in churches full of welcome,
bring us to a place of safety, we pray;
we long for a world in which vaccines are available for all,
bring us to a place of justice, we pray.
And so may we find healing and health in the goodness of your grace. Amen.

(From the Diocese of Southwark's Discipleship News)

Response

Do you know someone who has been 'holding the light' for others over this last difficult year, and is coming to the end of their own strength? If so, you might like to use this prayer for them; perhaps use your creativity to turn it into a card to give to them:

A Prayer for you as you hold the light
May you find the strength and resolve
To continue in the face of all that is being asked of you.
When you've done your best and given everything you can,
May you be assured that this is all that could have been required.
When you are confronted by the unreasonableness of some
May you constantly be reminded that many others appreciate your endeavours more than words can say.
When messages of hope and comfort rare required of you
Mau you be granted the words and wisdom that you need.

When you feel broken and drained,
May you be held fast in the midst of your struggle.
And when you simply cannot respond to all the needs that confront you,
May your mind dwell on what you have accomplished and not what you had to leave undone.
So may you find the peace and stillness of heart
To rest and recover when your labours subside.
And may our prayers and concern
Be as unrelenting as the demands that you are facing.

(Prayer from the NW Baptist Association / Industrial Christian Fellowship)



Stay safe.

Blessings and love

Mark