

**Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit  
Service at Home Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

Prepared by Rev John Archer

**Introduction**

A service for Advent featuring John the Baptist and 'preparing the way'.

**Read pray or sing StF 171**

[StF 171 Hark the Glad Sound](#)

- 1 Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,  
the Saviour promised long;  
let every heart prepare a throne,  
and every voice a song.
- 2 He comes the prisoners to release,  
in Satan's bondage held;  
the gates of brass before him burst,  
the iron fetters yield.
- 3 He comes the broken heart to bind,  
the bleeding soul to cure,  
and with the treasures of his grace  
to enrich the humble poor.
- 4 Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,  
your welcome shall proclaim,  
and heaven's eternal arches ring  
with your beloved name.

*Philip Doddridge (1702-1751)*

**Opening Prayer**

Gracious God we thank you that we can come to you in prayer, that for all your greatness and holiness we can speak to you as a friend. We thank you that we can open our hearts to you and share our deepest thoughts knowing that you are always there ready to listen and understand. So once more we lay our lives before you open to your gaze, the bad as well as the good, the doubt as well as the faith, the sorrow as well as the joy, the despair as well as the hope.

Gracious God help us to be truthful to ourselves and truthful to you, so that we can discover the renewing love which only you can offer.

Hear our prayer in the name of Jesus. **Amen**

**Old Testament Reading ; Isaiah 11 : 1 – 10**

**Read pray or sing StF 182**

[On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry. Lyric video \(StF 182\)](#)

- 1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry  
announces that the Lord is nigh;  
awake and hearken, for he brings  
glad tidings from the King of kings!
- 2 Then cleansed be every life from sin;  
make straight the way for God within,  
and let us all our hearts prepare  
for Christ to come and enter there.
- 3 For you are our salvation, Lord,  
our refuge, and our great reward;  
without your grace we waste away  
like flowers that wither and decay.
- 4 To heal the sick stretch out your hand,  
and bid the fallen sinner stand;  
shine forth, and let your light restore  
earth's own true loveliness once more.
- 5 To God the Son all glory be  
whose advent sets his people free,  
whom, with the Father, we adore,  
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

*John Chandler (1806-1876)*

**New Testament Reading Matthew 3 : 1 – 12**

**Prayers for Others**

Lord Jesus Christ we remember today  
how so many looked forward to your coming,  
but how it became harder to go on believing as the  
years went by, how hope started to splutter and  
dreams began to die, until finally you came.

The Word made flesh

bring hope to your world today.

We remember with gladness

how you brought hope through your ministry

to the poor the sick and outcasts and broken  
hearted  
light shining in their darkness  
Lord bring hope to your world today.  
We pray for those caught in the grip of despair  
those for whom the future seems bleak,  
optimism seems foolish and trust seems futile.  
May light shine in their darkness.  
Lord bring hope to your world today.  
Lord hear our prayer for those who mourn,  
who wrestle with illness,  
or watch loved ones suffer.  
Reach out in love and bring hope to your world today  
Lord hear our prayer for those whose lives are  
blighted by injustice  
crushed by oppression, poverty or hunger.  
Encourage all who work against the odds to build a  
better world.  
Lord of all, word made flesh  
bring hope to your world today.  
In your name we pray **Amen**

**Read pray or sing StF 342**

[All Hail the Power \(Diadem\) StF 342](#)

- 1 All hail the power of Jesu's name!  
Let angels prostrate fall;  
bring forth the royal diadem,  
and crown him Lord of all.
- 2 You seed of Israel's chosen race,  
you ransomed of the fall,  
hail him who saves you by his grace,  
and crown him Lord of all.
- 3 Hail him, the heir of David's line  
whom David Lord did call,  
the God incarnate, Man divine,  
and crown him Lord of all.
- 4 Let every kindred, every tribe  
on this terrestrial ball,  
to him all majesty ascribe,  
and crown him Lord of all.

- 5 O that with yonder sacred throng  
we at his feet may fall,  
join in the everlasting song,  
and crown him Lord of all!

*Edward Perronet (1726-1792)  
adapted by John Rippon (1751-1836)*

**Sermon**

Congratulations. You are taking time out to worship God instead of chasing around after presents, food or cards! You obviously take the message of Christmas seriously. Today in Advent we highlight the herald of Jesus coming, John the Baptizer – a wild man of the desert, slightly scary and demanding. He appears to be bad news but is in fact the very best of news. Mark headlines John's arrival “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God”. Mark names Isaiah as John's source. “Comfort ye my people”. It does not mean cheer up my people, but 'Go and comfort my people. Be kind to them. Tell them that the war is over- they have suffered enough'. It is good news addressed to 'my people'.

The voice of one crying out in the wilderness “Prepare the way of the Lord”

It was Isaiah's task. It was John's task, and it is our task.

**Isaiah's task**

It was not easy for Isaiah. In a world which judged by appearances, he had to tell them to prepare for the coming of God who would judge the poor, not by their poverty, but by righteousness, who would judge between the meek and their oppressors, not by their relative strength, but with justice. At a time when the world was ruled by powerful men., he had to declare that the day would come when a little child would lead them. In that wilderness he prepared a way for the Lord.

**John's Task**

It was not easy for John. His message brought him into direct conflict with the religious leaders of his day. He refused to baptise them, to embrace their lifestyle, to bless their hypocrisies. In the wilderness he was preparing a way for the Lord who's coming would be to such people like fire in a corn field, driving everything hidden into light.

John's message was quite simple – *share what is yours with others – don't be greedy – don't use your position to exploit others – remember the basic solidarity of the human race*. It was all set out in Luke's gospel. But this was a threat to the religious authorities in Jerusalem. It made them jittery. They set out to silence John. They did not want a new age to dawn.

### **Our Task**

It is not any easier for us in the wilderness we inhabit. There are still the equivalents of John and the Sadducees and Pharisees. Today's John the Baptists bring a disturbing word, stressing the need to care for our planet, stressing the need to care for the poor, to observe human rights. Today's Johns are not always in the church. Their message is that another world is possible. Today's Sadducees & Pharisees are perfectly comfortable as they are, resentful and suspicious of those who remind them of uncomfortable truths. I suspect there is a bit of John the Baptist and a bit of the Sadducees and Pharisees in all of us. That is why we are thinking about Advent – a time to take stock to prepare for Jesus coming.

We are responsible for the areas of our life which have become a wilderness and need the presence of the Lord. What about our relationships with husband, wife, partner, children, friends and colleagues. Have any of them broken down and does the resulting anger, resentment, or bitterness create a barrier against the presence of Christ? Does it mean that his peace and joy cannot feel at home? Is there a need to prepare a way for the Lord? Is there a telephone that needs to be picked up? A visit made? A letter to be written? Flowers to be sent? A gesture of reconciliation, an offer of forgiveness to be made? It is in such practical realities that the way is prepared for the coming of the Lord

So halfway through Advent Jesus is coming. Prepare a way for him in the whole world, in the intimate world of our personal relationships, in the private world of our own being. A little child will lead us. His name is Jesus

Prepare a way for him

**Amen**

### **Read sing or pray StF 167**

[STF 167 Colours of day dawn into the mind](#)

- 1 Colours of day dawn into the mind,  
the sun has come up, the night is behind.  
Go down in the city, into the street,  
and let's give the message to the people we meet.  
*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,  
open the door, let Jesus return.  
Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,  
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.*
- 2 Go through the park, on into the town;  
the sun still shines on; it never goes down.  
The light of the world is risen again;  
the people of darkness are needing a friend.
- 3 Open your eyes, look into the sky,  
the darkness has come, the sun came to die.  
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,  
but Jesus is living, his Spirit is near.

*Sue McClellan (b. 1951), John Paculabo (b. 1946) and  
Keith Ryecroft (b. 1949)*

### **Blessing**

Remember all God has done

Rejoice in all he is doing

Receive all he is yet to do.

Put your hand in his

the God of the past present and future,  
and walk with him wherever he may lead,  
knowing that he will walk with you  
this day and always.

**Amen**

*Acknowledgements*

*Some prayers from "Prayers for all Seasons" Nick Fawcett*

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