

## **Prayers of intercession**

Let us pray to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lord God, we thank you for the example of Mary. May we your people be ever open to hear your calling and ready to respond in obedience, even to the unexpected. We pray for all who continue to hear and obey your calling, often in costly ways.

Lord God, we pray for your wounded world. We pray for those places particularly on our hearts... We pray for all living precariously, facing the daily reality of war, violence, economic uncertainty and other threats to human flourishing. May the nations of the world grow in the ways of grace and peace.

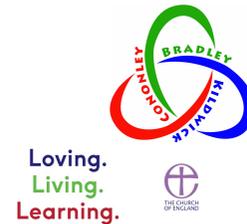
Lord God, we thank you that you come to us, wherever we are. We thank you for the favour that you bestow on us. In our homes, may we be attentive to your word and ready to do your will. We pray for families everywhere, of every shape and size, that they may be places of love and acceptance. We pray for all for whom family life is difficult, and where home is not a safe place.

Lord God, our strength and salvation, you alone are the source of healing and wholeness. We pray for all currently struggling in body, mind or spirit, especially...

Lord God, thank you for all those who have served you faithfully and are now at peace in your eternal presence. We remember particularly... We pray for all who continue to mourn the loss of loved ones, and we pray for your comfort for them.

## **The Collect**

Eternal God, as Mary waited for the birth of your Son, so we wait for his coming in glory; bring us through the birth pangs of this present age to see, with her, our great salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord.



## **The Parish of Kildwick, Cononley and Bradley**

### **A service of Evening Prayer for Sundays in Advent 2020**

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November – Advent Sunday**

**Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December – The second Sunday of Advent**

**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December – The third Sunday of Advent**

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December – The fourth Sunday of Advent**

***We are invited to join in spirit  
as we pray together at 4pm.***

*Do not worry if you cannot keep to that time, join in when it is possible for you! Or use this booklet for your own prayer time.*

*Take a moment to be still.*

*Perhaps light a candle or hold a cross.*

*Be aware that others will be saying these same words and prayers. We are united in prayer and worship.*

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*Prayers of intercession by Revd. Julie Bacon; some of the material in the prayers has been drawn or adopted from or inspired by prayers by David Adam.*

O God, make speed to save us.  
**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Reveal among us the light of your presence  
**that we may behold your power and glory.**

Blessed are you, Sovereign God,  
creator of light and darkness,  
to you be glory and praise for ever.  
As evening falls, you renew your promise  
to reveal among us the light of your presence.  
May your word be a lantern to our feet  
and a light upon our path  
that we may behold your coming among us.  
Strengthen us in our stumbling weakness  
and free our tongues to sing your praise.  
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,  
let us pray with one heart and mind.

*Silence is kept.*

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,  
so may your mercy come down upon us  
to cleanse our hearts  
and set us free to sing your praise  
now and for ever.  
**Amen.**

## **The Word of God**

*The appointed psalmody is said.  
The first reading from Scripture is read.  
The second reading from Scripture is read.  
The Magnificat (the Song of Mary) is said.*

and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

**Reflection** *(by the Revd. Barbara Mosse, retired Anglican priest and writer)*

*‘How can this be?’ (v.34)*

God’s ways are not our ways, nor are his thoughts are thoughts (Isaiah 55.8). We see the truth of this when we consider the people God calls to serve him in specific ways throughout scripture. From David, the youngest (and therefore, humanly, the least considered) son of Jesse (1 Sam. 16), to Saul, the persecutor of Christians (Acts 9), God’s choice of those he calls to serve so often challenges our human judgements.

Mary was a young girl betrothed to a carpenter, living in an insignificant backwater of the Roman Empire. There was nothing in her past that could have prepared her for what Gabriel told her was to happen. She has been specially chosen – favoured – by God, but she appears to share nothing of those features that many today associate with that favour: good health, wealth or high social status.

Mary’s ‘blessing’ was to bear a child out of wedlock (which could have seen her stoned to death) – a child who would later be executed as a criminal. The experience of Mary should remind us that God’s blessing has no connection with human standards of acceptability, wealth or comfort, and offers no easy reassurances.

In opening ourselves to receive God’s blessings, we, like Mary, are encouraged to step out in trust. Like her, we too are challenged to ‘Go out into the darkness and put [our] hand into the Hand of God’ (Minnie Louise Haskins, *The Gate of the Year*).

me a house to live in? <sup>6</sup> I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. <sup>7</sup> Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders<sup>[a]</sup> of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” <sup>8</sup> Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; <sup>9</sup> and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup> And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup> from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.

<sup>16</sup> Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

### **Second reading – Luke 1.26-38**

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.” <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you,

1 My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;  
he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

2 From this day all generations will call me blessed;  
the Almighty has done great things for me  
and holy is his name.

3 He has mercy on those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

4 He has shown strength with his arm  
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,

5 Casting down the mighty from their thrones  
and lifting up the lowly.

6 He has filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away empty.

7 He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,  
to remember his promise of mercy,

8 The promise made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and his children for ever.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

## Prayers

*This response may be used*

Lord, in your mercy  
**hear our prayer**

*The Collect of the day is said*

Awaiting his coming in glory,  
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

May the Lord, when he comes,  
find us watching and waiting.  
**Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord. Alleluia, alleluia.  
**Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.**

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## Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December – Fourth Sunday of Advent

### Psalm 113

- 1 Alleluia.  
Give praise, you servants of the Lord,  
O praise the name of the Lord.
- 2 Blessed be the name of the Lord,  
from this time forth and for evermore.
- 3 From the rising of the sun to its setting  
let the name of the Lord be praised.
- 4 The Lord is high above all nations  
and his glory above the heavens. R
- 5 Who is like the Lord our God,  
that has his throne so high,  
yet humbles himself to behold  
the things of heaven and earth?
- 6 He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ashes,
- 7 To set them with princes,  
with the princes of his people.
- 8 He gives the barren woman a place in the house  
and makes her a joyful mother of children.  
Alleluia.

### First reading – 2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16

<sup>1</sup>Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, <sup>2</sup>the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” <sup>3</sup>Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.”

<sup>4</sup>But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: <sup>5</sup>Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build

respect to another: there is nothing noteworthy, or indeed worthy, about John in relation to the one who is to come.

Let us reflect on which verse of Scripture we would choose if asked 'What do you say about yourself?'

### **Prayers of intercession**

Let us pray to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lord God, we thank you for the witness of John the Baptist. May we, your Church, testify to your light as your heralds in this generation, proclaiming your coming and pointing to you. Give us humility, to keep our eyes on you rather than seeking to serve ourselves.

Lord God, we pray for all who work tirelessly for the things of your kingdom; for those who strive for freedom from oppression, for justice, for economic equality. May all in authority seek to serve those in their care, and may we speak up for those who are powerless to speak for themselves.

Lord God, we give thanks for all the blessings we have received from your hand. We pray for our loved ones – friends, family and neighbours. Give us thankful, humble hearts.

Lord God, we pray for all who grieve the loss of loved ones. Give them a garland instead of ashes, and the oil of gladness instead of mourning. May our dear departed be numbered with your saints, and know the glorious liberty of the children of God.

### **The Collect**

God for whom we watch and wait,  
you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son:  
give us courage to speak the truth,  
to hunger for justice,  
and to suffer for the cause of right,  
with Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November – Advent Sunday**

### **Psalm 80.1-8**

1 Hear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you that led Joseph like a flock;  
2 Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim,  
before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.  
3 Stir up your mighty strength  
and come to our salvation.  
4 *Turn us again, O God;  
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.*  
5 O Lord God of hosts,  
how long will you be angry at your people's prayer?  
6 You feed them with the bread of tears;  
you give them abundance of tears to drink.  
7 You have made us the derision of our neighbours,  
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.  
8 *Turn us again, O God of hosts;  
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.*

### **First reading – I Corinthians 1.3-9**

<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— <sup>6</sup> just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— <sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Second reading – Mark 13.24-end**

<sup>24</sup> “But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

<sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup> Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

<sup>28</sup> “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>32</sup> “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup> It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

<sup>35</sup> Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup> or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.

<sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

**Reflection** (by the Revd. Lucy Winkett, Rector of St James’, Piccadilly)

*‘...stars will be falling from heaven’ (v.25)*

you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” <sup>23</sup> He said,

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,

‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”

as the prophet Isaiah said.

<sup>24</sup> Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup> They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” <sup>26</sup> John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup> the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” <sup>28</sup> This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

**Reflection** (by the Revd. Helen Orchard, Team Vicar, Wimbledon Team Ministry)

*‘What do you say about yourself?’ (v.22)*

We learn in verse 8 that John the Baptist is ‘not the light’; we now learn of three more things that he is ‘not’. Crucially, John is not the Messiah. When asked to clarify his identity, this is stated emphatically, so that no mistake may be made: he ‘confesses, does not deny, but confesses’ that this is not who he is.

If he is not the Messiah, could he perhaps be one of the other end-time figures the Jews were expecting: Elijah or ‘the Prophet’? He is neither, he confirms, leaving the priests and Levites with no further options to guess at. Instead, they ask for a positive identification in his own words: ‘What do you say about yourself?’ In response, John does not use his own words, turning instead to those of fellow prophet, Isaiah (v.23, cf Isaiah 40.3: ‘A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord”...’). While Jesus is ‘the Word’, John is ‘a voice’.

John’s choice of text is telling. He is the mouthpiece not the message, and his role is to ensure that ears will be open when the Word appears and speaks. Such is his humility that his identity is entirely defined with

the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

<sup>4</sup> They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.

<sup>8</sup> For I the LORD love justice,  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;  
I will faithfully give them their recompense,  
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

<sup>9</sup> Their descendants shall be known among the nations,  
and their offspring among the peoples;  
all who see them shall acknowledge  
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

<sup>10</sup> I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,  
my whole being shall exult in my God;  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

<sup>11</sup> For as the earth brings forth its shoots,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,  
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

### **Second reading – John 1.6-8, 19-28**

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

<sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

<sup>19</sup> This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” <sup>20</sup> He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” <sup>21</sup> And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” <sup>22</sup> Then they said to him, “Who are

With fabulous Middle Eastern hyperbole, using evocative descriptions of the darkened sun and falling stars, Jesus is trying to communicate the urgency of his message to live differently, to be attentive to the presence of God and the intolerable injustices of organized religion and politics.

It has often seemed to me that to be too literal about these pictures, and therefore to worry about whether they are ‘true’, is, ironically, to rob them of their beauty and power. At Advent, singing Charles Wesley’s words ‘Lo he comes with clouds descending’, quoting directly from this passage, has often given me a greater sense of awe and expectation as the musical picture unfolds than I have received from simply reading the words. The sense of God being ‘at the very gates’ as Jesus says, just beyond, just out of reach, the other side of the door – all these spiritual truths are recognizable to anyone who wants to take their own spiritual life seriously.

In the rhythm of night following day, as Spring follows Winter, we learn to expect change and movement at the heart of creation. Jesus is urging his listeners to learn from the fig tree’s seasons, to be attentive to its transformation and to know the potential for transformation for us too.

### **Prayers of intercession**

Come, Lord, come down, come in, come among us.

Enter into our darkness with your light.

Come fill our emptiness with your presence.

Dispel the clouds and reveal your glory.

Come refresh, renew, restore us.

Come, Lord, come down, come in, come among us.

Come, Lord, be known in your church, for without you we have no message, no power. Come, fill us with your presence, that we may proclaim your peace. Make us aware, alert to your coming, that we may reveal your glory in all the world. We pray for those that walk in darkness, that they may see your light. We remember those whose

lives are clouded with troubles and pray that they may behold your glory.

Come, Lord, and give peace to your world. Disperse the clouds of war and violence, of calamity and disaster. Let your power and glory be revealed to the nations. We pray for all who watch and wait while we sleep: for police, for all who work in the health services, for all key workers, for all who work in the dark hours of the night.

Come, Lord, be known in our homes, that our homes may reflect your loved. May we rejoice in each other's presence, and be fully aware of others, and sensitive to their needs.

Come, Lord, to all who are struggling to cope; to all who are weighed down with troubles. We pray for the ill, and those who care for them. We pray for those whose lives are clouded with despair. We pray for all who struggle with their mental health. Especially we pray for...

Come, Lord of our salvation, save us and we shall be saved. We remember before you our friends and loved ones departed this life... May they rejoice in the fullness of your presence and your glory.

### **The Collect**

Almighty God,  
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
and to put on the armour of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life,  
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;  
that on the last day,  
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through him who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## **Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December – Third Sunday of Advent**

### **Psalm 126**

- 1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
then were we like those who dream.
- 2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter  
and our tongue with songs of joy.
- 3 Then said they among the nations,  
'The Lord has done great things for them.'
- 4 The Lord has indeed done great things for us,  
and therefore we rejoiced.
- 5 Restore again our fortunes, O Lord,  
as the river beds of the desert.
- 6 Those who sow in tears  
shall reap with songs of joy.
- 7 Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed,  
will come back with shouts of joy,  
bearing their sheaves with them.

### **First reading – Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-end**

- <sup>1</sup>The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;
- <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;
- <sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,

We pray for our local communities, and for our parish of Kildwick, Cononley and Bradley. We thank you for all that is good and builds up our common life. May our homes be beacons of light and love, that we may speak mercy and peace to all who need it. We pray for homes and families where words become weapons, used to hurt and abuse.

We pray for those who feel broken in heart and spirit. We pray for those who are guilt-ridden, disturbed, unable to communicate effectively with others, that they may know your healing, your peace and your love. We pray for those who are unwell in body too, and especially we pray for...

As we wait for your coming in glory, we pray for all who have gone before us into the fullness of your kingdom. We give you thanks for the saints in glory, and particularly for those whom we have loved, and who have loved us. We look for the time when we will be once again reunited in your kingdom, rejoicing and praising you eternally.

### **The Collect**

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.

## **Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December – Second Sunday of Advent**

### **Psalm 85.8-end**

8 I will listen to what the Lord God will say,  
for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful,  
that they turn not again to folly.

9 Truly, his salvation is near to those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.

10 Mercy and truth are met together,  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other;

11 Truth shall spring up from the earth  
and righteousness look down from heaven.

12 The Lord will indeed give all that is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness shall go before him  
and direct his steps in the way.

### **First reading – 2 Peter 3.8-15a**

<sup>8</sup> But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

<sup>11</sup> Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? <sup>13</sup> But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

<sup>14</sup> Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; <sup>15</sup> and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

### **Second reading – Mark I.1-8**

I The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup> As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

<sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’”

<sup>4</sup> John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

### **Reflection (by Dean Martyn Percy, Dean of Christchurch, Oxford)**

*‘The beginning of the good news’ (v.1)*

Strange though it may seem, Mark feels compelled to tell us in the opening sentence that this is the beginning. Most translations of Mark render his opening words ‘The beginning of the good news...’ But Mark doesn’t even bother to use the word ‘the’; he starts with ‘Beginning...’. We are, in other words, straight into it. And, of course,

if you turn to the end of Mark’s Gospel, you’ll also see that it has no proper ending either – it is all a bit ragged.

An abrupt beginning and an abrupt ending point to several themes that occur throughout Mark’s Gospel. Readers don’t get a gentle introduction to Jesus. The good news is here, now. And it requires your attention, and a response. Here, now. The end is the same. There is no neat finish. You have to write that yourself, with your life as a disciple.

So there is no room for the armchair critic in Mark’s opening remarks. You are not offered an easy introduction to Jesus – his genealogy, for example (see Luke and Matthew) – but are invited straight away to deal with the challenging presence of John the Baptist. It is his call to repent, be baptized and follow Jesus that forms the heart of Mark’s Gospel. So, the tone of abruptness in the message of Mark is also his theme. There is no time to cogitate, and deliberate. Choose Jesus. Drop everything you are doing, and follow him. Now.

### **Prayers of intercession**

Let us pray to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Strengthen your Church, your people sent to the world in the name of Christ, to proclaim the gospel and to point to you. We pray for all who preach and teach the faith and administer the sacraments; for all who build up the Body of Christ in leading God’s people in worship; and for the entire people of God witnessing to you in their lives.

We pray for your world, and the cacophony of messages that are spoken and heard daily. May the voices speaking peace and grace be heard above the messages of hatred and division. We pray for all who have power and influence over others, that they may use it wisely and well, to serve and not to dominate.