

**Written Service Sunday December 15th**  
**A service of worship for use at home**  
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**Compare John the Baptist and Jesus.**

**Introductory Prayer:**

Dear Lord God, I offer myself to you -  
My mind – to think for you,  
My eyes – to see the needs of others;  
My ears – to hear the world’s cries;  
My voice – to speak for you;  
My hands – to work for your Kingdom;  
My feet – to walk in your path;  
My life – to be used in your service;  
My heart – to love you above all others;  
May the joy of the Lord be my strength! Amen

**Hymn:** StF 254 Seek ye first the Kingdom of God  
Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness  
And all these things will be added unto you  
*Allelu, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia,*  
*Allelu, Alleluia.*

Ask and it shall be given unto you; seek and ye shall find.  
Knock and the door will be opened unto you.  
*Allelu, Alleluia ...*

We shall not live by bread alone, but by every word  
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord  
*Allelu, Alleluia ...*

**Prayers of thanksgiving:**

Let the earth shout, the mountains cry out and let the sea roar, for God gathers in the old and the young, the lost and the lame, the poor and the weary, the faithful and the doubter.  
We thank you Lord, for times of renewal: for the dawning of the morning after the night; for the coming of spring after winter; for light in our lives after spells of darkness; for new burst of energy when we were weary.

We thank you Lord for restoration to health after illness; for renewed relationships after brokenness; and we thank you for restoring our hope when all seemed hopeless.  
And we thank you for sending your own dear son, Jesus, to be our Saviour and our friend. All our voices are not enough to sing our song of praise to God our Father, so let earth join the sun, the moon and the stars to rejoice together as all creation praises her maker. Amen

**Readings: Luke 3:7-17 (From The Good News translation)**

Crowds of people came out to John to be baptised by him. “You snakes!” he said to them, “Who told you could escape that you could escape from the punishment God is about to send? Do the things that will show that you have turned from your sins. And don’t start saying among yourselves that Abraham is our ancestor. I tell you that God can take these stones and make them descendants of Abraham! The axe is ready to cut down the trees at the roots; every tree that does not bear will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

The people then asked him, "What do we do then?"

He answered, "Whoever has two shirts must give one to the man who has none, and whoever has food must share it."

Some tax collectors came to be baptised and they asked him, "Teacher what are we to do?"

"Don't collect more than is legal," he told them.

Some soldiers also asked him, "What about us? What are we to do?"

He said to them, "Don't take money from anyone by force or accuse anyone falsely. Be content with your pay.

People's hopes began to rise, and they began to wonder and whether John perhaps might be the Messiah. So, John said to all of them, "I baptise you with water, but someone is coming who is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He has his winnowing shovel with him to thresh out all the grain and gather the wheat into his barn; but he will burn the chaff in the fire that never goes out.

**Isaiah 35:1-10** *(From The Good News translation)*

The desert will rejoice, and flowers will bloom in the wilderness.

The desert will sing and shout for joy; it will be as beautiful as the Lebanon Mountain and as fertile as the fields of Carmel and Sharon.

Everyone will see the Lord's splendour and see His greatness and power.

Give strength to hands that are tired and to knees that tremble with weakness.

Tell everyone who is discouraged, "Be strong and don't be afraid!

God is coming to your rescue, coming to punish your enemies."

The blind will be able to see, and the deaf will hear. The lame will leap and dance and those who cannot speak will shout for joy.

Streams of water will flow through the desert; the burning sand will become a lake, and dry land will be filled with springs.

Where jackals used to live and marsh grass and reeds will grow.

There will be a highway there called "The Road of Holiness". No sinner will ever travel that road; no fools will mislead those who follow it. No lions will be there; not fierce animals will pass that way.

Those whom the Lord has rescued will travel home by that road. They will reach Jerusalem with gladness, singing and shouting for joy. They will be happy for ever, forever free from sorrow and grief.

**Hymn: StF 182** On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh.

Awake and hearken for he brings glad tidings of the King of Kings.

Then cleansed be every life from sin; Make straight the way for God within.

And let all our hearts prepare for Christ to come and enter there.

For you are our salvation Lord, our refuge and our great reward.

Without your grace we waste away, like flowers that that wither and decay.

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.

To God the son all glory be whose advent sets His people free,

Whom with the Father we adore, and Holy Spirit evermore.

## **Compare: Jesus and John the Baptist**

### **There were three outstanding things about John's message**

#### **1. Sharing what they had**

John the Baptist suggested that if they had more than enough, they were to share with those who were in want.

In his *The Miracle of the River Kwai*, Ernest Gordon tells the story of prisoners of war building a bridge. They were overworked, often starving, exhausted and ill. The need to survive made them put themselves first fail to see each other's needs. Then two men, Dusty and Dinty began helping others. They put themselves out to care for other's needs.

A new spirit began to spread through the camp until the place was transformed, as were the inhabitants. When asked about their actions Dusty read that passage from Luke's Gospel. We were only doing what John the Baptist suggested we should do. Dusty was a Methodist and Dinty a Roman Catholic – but they showed just what could be done if they followed John's sayings.

#### **2. Not to leave their jobs but to do them to the best of their ability**

John also suggested that every person should not try to change his employment but to do it to the best of his ability. So the tax collector came to John and asked what they should do. His answer was not to try to change his job but to never ask for more money than was allowed by the law. The tax collectors were renowned for their collecting more money than they could get away with! This is how they became very rich.

Similarly, the soldiers would put pressure on people to pay more than was strictly necessary. They were told not to take any money by force but to be content with their pay.

They were asked to be a good tax collector or a good soldier. People had a duty to serve God where God had put them.

#### **3. John was quite sure that he was not the long expected one.**

John was sure that he himself was only the forerunner. The King was still to come and with Him would come judgement. The winnowing fan was a great flat wooden shovel; with it the grain was tossed into the air, the heavy grain would fall to the ground and the chaff was blown away. And just as the chaff was separated from the grain, so the King would separate to good from the bad.

So John painted a picture of Judgement, but it was met with confidence only by those who had discharged their duty to their neighbour and who faithfully done their day's work.

### **Compare with Jesus: In some ways John the Baptist was the same as Jesus.**

In some ways Jesus and John were much the same – but there was a startling difference. When Jesus was talking about John the Baptist (Matthew 11:7-15) He mentioned that John was the greatest man who ever lived but then He said that even so, **he is least in the Kingdom of God**. Why did Jesus say that? Could it be something to do with the fact that John was simply the forerunner of Jesus? He could never know what it is like to be Jesus.

#### **1. Symbolism**

Every one of the four Gospels was represented by an animal and as far as Luke was concerned, he was represented by a calf – which was an animal for sacrifice; and Luke saw Jesus as a sacrificial animal for the whole world. Above all the barriers are broken down and Jesus is for Jew and Gentile, saint and sinner alike. He is the Saviour of the whole world – no matter what.

## 2. The Kingdom of God

Jesus saw His mission as proclaiming the Kingdom of God. He mentions it more times than any single item – sometimes He calls it the Kingdom of Heaven but most often it is the Kingdom of God. Just read through the beatitudes (Matthew chapter 5) and you will see what I mean.

He saw it His divine mission to preach the Kingdom of God. John the Baptist spoke about the King who is coming to reign – bringing judgement.

As far as the Jews were concerned the Kingdom of God was represented by Israel. They saw themselves as especially blessed and unique. So as far as they were concerned all this talk of the Kingdom of God meant Israel. What they failed to recognise was that Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom was wider and broader than that. When Jesus was questioned by Pilate He was asked if He was King of the Jews – Jesus answered that He was a King but not of this world.

When talking about the final judgement, Jesus said “When the Son of Man comes as King and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His royal throne, and the people will be gathered before Him”. So Jesus saw His divine mission was to rule as King – but not of this world.

Every so often we hear of someone finding a great treasure. These days metal detectors are often used over fields and ancient sites turn up all sorts of wonderful things. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God was like that – we find a wonderful treasure called the Kingdom of God.

## 3. Universal Gospel

### a. Didn't shut out Samaritans or the Gentiles

Particularly in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is seen as the Gospel that reached out to everyone, even the Samaritans and the Gentiles! Many times, Jesus is seen as favouring the Samaritans – take for example the Good Samaritan.

He mentions on many occasions the faith of Gentiles – for example the centurion's servant, or the Syrian woman's daughter; so Jesus was seen as reaching out to all people.

### b. Supremely Gospel for the poor

Jesus was seen as having a special place in his heart for the poor. He mentioned that noticed that a poor widow was seen putting two copper coins into the Temple box. It was all she had to live on. He said that this was worth more than others gave because they gave only what they could afford, but she gave of her poverty.

### c. Above all Jesus shows Himself a friend of outcasts.

So often Jesus is seen as favouring the outcast; He helped the blind, the leper, all who they couldn't walk or talk. These were not considered suitable companions. They were not even allowed into the temple to pray. But Jesus was not going to dismiss them. To Him they were just as valuable as the able bodied.

When we compare Jesus and His cousin John we see that although they were alike in many ways, they differed in the type of messages that they mentioned: Jesus was seen as the sacrifice for the whole world; He was a friend of the poor and the outcast; but most of all He came to preach the Kingdom of God and to sit in judgement when He came into His kingdom.

## Prayers: Confession

Lord asked us to walk in each other's shoes and we did not;

*Father forgive us and grant us your peace.*

Lord you asked us to listen to each other's stories and we did not;

*Father forgive us and grant us your peace.*

Lord you asked us to witness an injustice and we did not;

*Father forgive us and grant us your peace.*

Lord you asked us to bear each other's burdens and we did not;

*Father forgive us and grant us your peace.*

Lord you asked us to share all we have and we did not:

*Father forgive us and grant us your peace. Amen*

**Prayers: Intercession** *(using the words of Beauty for Brokenness)*

**Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,**

**Lord in your suffering world this is our prayer.**

**Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,**

**sunrise to sunset your kingdom increase!**

*(We spend time asking God to provide bread, justice, joy, peace – and a fair sharing of the earth's resources)*

**Refuge from cruel wars,**

**havens for from fear;**

**cities for sanctuary freedoms to share.**

**Peace to the killing fields,**

**scorched earth to green.**

**Christ for the bitterness**

**His cross for the pain.**

*(We spend some time asking God to bring peace where there is war and violence – especially in Ukraine, Russia, Lebanon, Israel, Iran, Gaza, Sudan, Yemen etc)*

**Rest for the ravaged earth,**

**oceans and streams plundered and poisoned –**

**our future our dreams.**

**Lord end this madness, carelessness, greed;**

**make us content with**

**the things that we need.**

*(We pray for God to act on our behalf to show that it doesn't need to be like this – you have provided us with a wonderful creation and provided all that we need. Show us Lord how to share)*

**Lighten our darkness,**

**breath on this flame**

**until your justice**

**burns brightly again.**

**Until the nations**

**learn of your ways**

**seek your salvation and bring you their praise.**

*(We pray for our own churches, those we know who are ill. And we pray for the Circuit staff)*

**Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power, and the glory

for ever and ever.

Amen.

**Hymn:** StF 178 Long ago prophets knew

Long ago prophets knew  
Christ would come born a Jew.  
Come to make all things, new  
bear His people's burden,  
freely love and pardon.

*Ring bells, ring, Ring! Ring!  
Sing choirs sing. Sing! Sing!  
When He comes,  
when He comes,  
who will make Him welcome?*

God in time, God in man  
this is God's timeless plan.  
He will come as a man,  
born Himself of woman,  
God divinely human.  
*Ring bells, ring ...*

**Final Prayer**

God of the poor, friend of the weak  
give us compassion we pray.  
Melt our cold hearts let tears fall like rain;  
come change our love from a spark to a flame.  
Amen

Mary, hail! Though afraid,  
she believed, she obeyed.  
In her womb, God is laid;  
till the time expected,  
nurtured and protected.  
*Ring bells, ring ...*

Journey ends! Where afar,  
Bethlem shines, like a star  
Stable door stands ajar.  
Unborn Son of Mary,  
Saviour do not tarry!  
*Ring bells ring, ring, ring!  
Sing choirs sing, sing, sing!  
Jesus comes! Jesus comes!  
We will make Him welcome!*