

**Wednesday 24th June 2020 The birth of John the Baptist**

*‘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.’*

*Luke 3. 4-5*

Dear Friends

It’s been lovely to see both churches open this week! Sincere thanks to all who have made that possible. If you have been able to visit, I hope you have found it encouraging to be back in familiar surroundings that speak to us so strongly, yet so gently, of God’s enduring presence and support.

The latest easing of restrictions announced by the government yesterday provide us with the opportunity to consider when we would like to resume Sunday worship in church after 4th July.

No conversations have taken place yet amongst the clergy and churchwardens but I suspect we will have two concerns in mind in particular. First, simply because we can do something, doesn’t mean we should; and secondly, we must continue to be able to include everyone in worship, whether or not they are able to come to church. This means we need to zoom-enable our churches. We will not return to worship in church until we are sure we are both ready and safe. There is a lot to think about – please be patient as we work it all through.

Today we remember the birth of John the Baptist, who played a crucial role in preparing the ground for Jesus’ ministry. For most of us, most of the time, our ministry as disciples of Jesus is a little like John’s. We’re not the star out front, but we do make it possible for others to flourish.

Over the past few months, we have all been involved in a quiet ministry of making things possible for others. The benefit of all our efforts is incalculable; but then we don’t need to assign it a value. Those who have received know they have been blessed. Our satisfaction is derived from knowing we have responded well and that our efforts are pleasing in God’s sight.

As the nation slowly emerges from lockdown all sorts of new anxieties will emerge too. Some may be delighted that normality is returning; others may be concerned that everything is changing too quickly and all at once. The truth will lie somewhere in between I suspect. What I am sure of, is that we must continue to care for one another as well as we have these past few months. This is our ‘new normal’; a level of faithful care, of service to one another, that speaks powerfully of the love of God we have received and desire to share with others.

Thank you to everyone who has completed and returned their questionnaires. I am sure there are still some more ‘out there’; so please, if you haven’t returned yours yet, please do so as soon as you can. I did initially have a cut-off date of 30 June but I am happy to extend this a little as the first ‘results’ do not need to be discussed until Monday 6th July. So, a new deadline please of Sunday 5th July.

These questionnaires represent a real and deep desire to listen well to your thoughts and reflections. So please do encourage one another to complete a form if you haven’t already. I am compiling all the results together for the DCCs and PCC to consider. The first opportunity for reflection will be at a meeting of joint worship committees on 6th July when we will consider the outcome of the ‘worship’ questions. Change is likely, but it will not be rushed.

Whilst it is good to see many aspects of community life returning, this pandemic is far from over. So please continue to look after yourselves. Live confidently but cautiously, in the knowledge that you are loved and are precious in God’s sight.

With my continuing love and prayers,

David Ford, Rector

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