

Home Worship for October 2019 – Revd Becky Jarratt

6th October

**“The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever.”**

Read Isaiah 40:1-8

What are your feelings about autumn? For some, it is a time of new beginnings. Children return to school, educators to work, and a new cycle emerges. Some people adore the colours in the trees and the anticipation of cool, crisp mornings and afternoons drinking hot chocolate by the fire.

For others it is more challenging. For those people who relish the heat and freedom of summer, autumn can be almost a time of mourning. The shortening of days and lack of sun reduces our Vitamin D intake. Some people feel a sense of loss.

Is there anything you feel sad about? Is something missing from life? For some of us it is easy to pinpoint. In a material sense, we can see that there are people who are struggling for food and shelter. There are others who have plenty of resources but little time in which to spend them, or to spend with their loved ones. They may be described as financially rich, but time-poor.

“The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass.” Let’s think about fruit, plants and trees. Any fruit we enjoy started as a flower. Once pollination and fertilisation has occurred, the flowers fall and fruit begins to grow. Without the flower falling, we would not have the fruit to eat.

Let us think about what the flower and fruit mean for us. The Writings tell us that the flower represents factual knowledge of truth. We need to become aware of something new, and to understand it, before we can apply it to our lives. Once we have taken on board this knowledge of truth, it can bear fruit and the good that comes out is how we make use of it for the benefit of others.

We need this cycle to continue throughout our lives. We may keenly feel the loss of summer when the leaves begin to fall, but without the ongoing cycle of flower, fruit, and then seed to grow again the next year, there would be no fruit for us to enjoy in the future.

And let us remember the last verse of this passage: “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” Our seasons are temporary. The challenges we face may feel like they will never end, but they inevitably do. There can be a small shift, but this can be enough for life to be bearable again. And we can take comfort in the knowledge that the Lord is with us always. Unlike our own seasons, He does not wither and die. His love for us is permanent, now and forever.

Prayer *Heavenly Father, we thank You that the difficult times in our lives are temporary. Help us remember to turn to You, so that we can feel the comfort You offer. Amen*

13th October

“Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

Read Matthew 10:26-30

One of the things I find exciting about autumn is the return of birds to our garden. They flit through during the summer, but as food is in such abundance for them, they do not stop on the feeders. It has been a great delight over the past few weeks to see them return in such numbers. It is a wonder that I get any work done at all when there is such activity going on outside the window.



When we have birds such as nuthatches, finches and woodpeckers, I sometimes forget about the lowly sparrow. As they are in such a plentiful supply, their presence in my garden does not seem as special. The more colourful birds grab my attention. This is a parallel to how some scenarios play out in our lives. The people who shout the loudest, making themselves known to all, can seem to get all of the glory. Are you one of the people who gets on quietly

in the background, performing thankless tasks? Does anyone notice when you have emptied the bins, or put the washing away? Or are you of the type that is always at the front of stage, making people welcome and ensuring that the show will go on?

Both groups of people are needed, but it can be a little frustrating for the quieter ones who may not feel appreciated for all that they do. This week, take a look around you, whether it be at home, at work or at church. Are things going on that you have not noticed? Is there someone who could do with a quiet word of thanks? At the supermarket – the shelf stackers. Yes, they are being paid, but it may not be glamorous work. At hospital – the cleaners. They are also deserving of our appreciation.

As the passage from Matthew reminds us, we are all valued in the Lord’s eyes. He does not let harm come to any of us, no matter how lowly the tasks we perform. He loves us all.

Prayer *Lord, help us to be aware of our own worth and that of those around us. Remind us that only You can know what is in our hearts, and bring joy when we have been of service to others. Help us to remember to thank others for the small tasks that they perform. Amen*

20th October

**Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will
return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.**

Read Psalm 126

In the Psalm we have read about those who were sowing with tears reaping with songs of joy. The Writings of the New Church teach us that this is to do with our inner state after a time of trial. When we go through truly challenging events, the Lord allows our eyes to be opened so that we can see ways in which we can develop spiritually. Having this new insight into our personalities can be

devastating. However, as we can read in the passage below from Apocalypse Explained, the Lord blesses us after this time of anguish:

From Apocalypse Explained 484 *And God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.* It is plain that these words are speaking about what happens when false ideas have been removed by a period of temptation, and we experience feelings of blessedness coming from an affection for what is true. The grief that comes when false ideas affecting us are removed, ceases once the temptation state is finished, and we feel deeply blessed. All the blessedness that angels experience comes when the truths they live by have their origin in goodness.

Reflect on a time of trial that you experienced in the past.

- How did you feel during this time?
- What was different about you after you had made this journey?
- What did you learn?
- Looking back, what do you wish you could have told yourself while you were being challenged?

When we see the new ways the Lord has shown us, we truly can reap with songs of joy. The Lord blesses us with enlightenment and a fervour to follow His truth.

Prayer *Lord Jesus Christ, help us to remember that You are always with us when we undergo our time of trial, even if we cannot feel your presence at the time.*
Amen

27th October **“Blessed is the one... whose delight is in the law of the Lord.”**

Read Psalm 1

In autumn, our focus can often be on the colourful leaves that fall around us. We discovered the reason that our house was not snapped up when it first went on the market in the October of that year. We have to spend a number of days each autumn collecting the incredible amount of leaves that fall and blow onto our drive and garden from the adjoining wood. We would not be able to access the house if we did not! There are many blessings of living next to the woods, but I would not say that this is one of them.

The real frustration has also been when we have collected every last leaf, only for the wind to change direction, and all of the leaves that were on the garden opposite ours fill the space we have just emptied.



I wonder at the beauty of the changing leaves. It seems almost miraculous that something that was such a lush green in summer can turn orange, red, or deep purple. The science behind this tells us that the green leaves, which help to make food for the trees, contain chlorophyll. Once the season changes and there is less warmth and light, the chlorophyll breaks down, the leaves lose their green pigment, and the

other colours become apparent.

There are, however, trees that stay green throughout the year. Many of us enjoy such trees in our homes at Christmas. Without the evergreen trees, the winter may seem quite dull. They add colour to what can be a bleak landscape.

How can we compare trees that drop their leaves with the evergreen tree? We heard in the Psalm that those who take delight in the law of the Lord are blessed: "That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers."

What does it mean to delight in the law of the Lord? In a narrow sense, it means to obey, and love, the Ten Commandments. We are also asked to do this when things are good, as well as when we are in trouble and come to the Lord for help. When we observe those around us taking the wide path, the one of least resistance, it can be hard for us to remember what the Lord is asking us to do. We need to be true to ourselves, and therefore true to him, at all times. It is not okay for us to observe the way others act to excuse our poor behaviour. To delight in the law of the Lord means realising that our actions do have consequences.

Let's take one commandment: "You shall not steal." *Exodus 20:15*. Most people reading this would not find it difficult to make sure they have paid for everything they take from a shop. And yet there is a broader sense to each commandment. We may consider stealing physically to be abhorrent, but what about stealing someone's reputation? We may not be the one casting aspersions about someone we know, but we may also not be the one standing up and suggesting the speaker consider taking their words back. We may allow someone's reputation to be stolen, even if we were not the ones actually taking it away.

Over the course of the next week, think about times when it was easier to stand back and let things happen, rather than challenging what you heard. And let this bring the delight of the Lord's law into your life, so that you can be a tree whose leaf does not wither.

Prayer *Lord Jesus Christ, the giver of all that is good, help us to find strength to take the narrow path. Help us to speak up when we hear of injustice, and to become more like You in every way. Amen.*

Blessing. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

Home Worship for November 2019 by Revd. Helen Brown

Sunday 3rd November Please read: Matthew 5: 13

Matthew Chapter 5 begins:

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

So, we can see that the Sermon on the Mount is directed to the disciples, not the crowds, the Pharisees, the sick or diseased. It is directed to those who have chosen to follow Jesus. For us this relates to the disciple within us. The part of us that truly desires to follow the Lord's truth and walk in his path.

Jesus describes the qualities of discipleship. The first of these is to be **the salt of the earth**.

For a moment think about what salt is used for in the physical world; taste, as a preservative, a binding agent and control of fermentation. It is extremely useful in all sorts of ways. If we didn't have salt what would it be like?

Then we have the phrase '**You are** the salt of the earth' what does this mean to you?

If you have ever been on a low salt diet you will realise how tasteless food **seems with little salt**. It is just not inviting. So, when we read of salt losing its savour (taste), how are we to understand this in terms of our spiritual life? [Note that the Greek word [moraino] used in this passage means to become insipid; figuratively, to make (passively, act) as a simpleton: —become a fool, make foolish, lose savour.]

What makes you seek out or yearn for the Lord's loving goodness and guiding truth?

Reflect on:

O **taste and see** that the Lord is good! Happy is the **one** who takes refuge in him! Psalm 34:8 Truth by itself is cold and dead. However, when it is married to loving goodness it is radiant with the Lord's life because He is present. When we are asked to **be** 'salt of the earth' this is showing us that what is needed is a yearning within us to live out what we know to be true invigorated by a desire for the **Lord's** goodness - not what **we** consider to be good. This is the fire of the Lord's love entering in and being used in our daily life.

As we read in Mark 9: 49, 50:

For every one will be **salted with fire**. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.

In contrast read Luke 14: 34, 35; here Jesus talks about 'salt' losing its taste. In allowing other priorities to take over from the life focused on the Lord's kingdom something vital is lost. We are no longer turned towards the Lord and therefore 'lost' spiritually.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we come to you with humble hearts and open minds, asking for your goodness and truth to be alive in our daily life. Help us to see what is needed, help us to hear the voice of your loving guidance in times of challenges and confusion. Be with us.

Amen

Sunday 10th November Please read: Matthew 5: 14 - 16

This is the second of Jesus' descriptions of what it is to be a disciple. To be the light of the world. We, in our modern world, are accustomed to so much physical light. In fact, so much so that in urban areas there is light pollution. Can we imagine a world where, when the sun goes down, in the house we are totally dependent on candle light?

The **dark** becomes part of our physical experience. Those of us who are afflicted with blindness know what this is like.

What does the dark mean for you?

Light needs to be in relationship with the darkness, we cannot see the darkness if there is no light. You might like to read Psalm 139: 11 & 12 and John 1: 1- 5 where there is mention of both light and dark.

Light of the World

We have a spiritual dimension within us and an earthly (natural/outer) level. Remember that the **earth** is symbolic of our outermost level of mindwhich is the seat of spiritual corruption. Our outer mind operates in the outer environment of the world with all its distractions, illusions and 'hooks'. This is where the **light** needs to shine.

Physical light shows us objects in our world – we can see their true form and colour.

Spiritual light (truth) shows us what quality of thought and feelings we are giving house room to.

Truth highlights and acts as a plumb line against which we can measure our inner processes. It leads to discernment and encourages an 'observing spirit' within us. It can show us the next steps, the right path [not the broad way that leads to destruction – but the narrow way].

This phrase 'You are the light of the world' is expanded or explained by the use of two examples: a city on a hill that cannot be hidden and the uselessness of putting a lit candle under a 'bushel'.

A city on a hill. This is symbolic of our perspective: we are raised up to a higher level of understanding/wisdom that flows from being in the loving presence of the Lord. And so, building the structure of our thoughts and understanding from a foundation that loves the 'neighbour as ourselves'. This is our mind as 'a city on a hill'. This affects how we live and our relationships with others.

A lit candle under a bushel. A bushel is a measure of dry goods so it is a symbol of a capacity to hold something or **receive**. A container turned downwards cannot receive anything ... when we are turned towards self-interest we cannot receive anything from the Lord. If looking outwards towards others and to the Lord, our minds and hearts are open to receive and radiate the light. Then we can - **Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

Prayer: Dear Lord, from you comes the light of truth that can inspire and illuminate what is dark within us. This is done from your great love for us, so that we might be open to receive what is of the light and radiate this in our living in your way. Amen

Sunday 17th November Please read: Matthew 5: 17-20

In the next part of the Sermon on the Mount we are shown the contrast of the 'spirit' and 'letter' of the Law. **What thoughts and reactions come to mind as you read these verses?**

Laws: Laws in our world keep the boundaries in which our society and culture can operate and govern how we are to act lawfully towards others in our society. We have rules and regulations, that hopefully enable us to live peacefully in our communities. They govern our behaviour.

What are the laws of heaven? Read the following:

All laws ordaining what is true and right flow from heavenly origins, or from the structure of the inner life in a person who belongs to heaven. AC 162

Spirits arriving in the spiritual world were told that the Lord's kingdom was founded on '*this solitary law: you are to love the Lord above all and your neighbour as yourself.*' AC 548

The Law and the Prophets This phrase 'the Law and the Prophets' appears a lot in the Bible. The prophets bring the message from God: they saw visions and received inspiration. So, what is prophetic in us is concerned with the light of truth that can help us to discern what is egocentric and what is given from the Lord. The Law concerns the eternal, heavenly laws that stem from the loving goodness of the Lord. We need both; the law or rule of Divine Love and the discernment that Divine Wisdom enables us to see the truth of any situation or crisis. These two are essential and in the words of the verse from Matthew are not to be 'abolished'. They are the essence of the heavenly life that we can be open to live out in our earthly living. Heaven comes to earth, as it is in heaven so be it on earth. Then our inner and outer life are in harmony and alignment. The Lord came into our world to show us, or make manifest, or fulfil the Love that transcends us and creates all that is living.

The question we need to constantly ask ourselves is what love rules our intentions, thoughts and actions? What or Who is the authority by which we assess our living? False gods? The first commandment tells us to love the Lord and not to go after false gods. We may be unconscious of what inner 'gods' rule our choices in how we live e.g. striving to look good in people's eyes ... or the need to be 'right' not wanting to change.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law In the Gospels we see the conflict between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees. We see contrasted the Love of the Divine with the hypocritical and defensiveness of the Jewish authorities. Their authority came from teaching and keeping to the letter of the law. The importance was to keep the rules outwardly and never mind about looking at what the intention was inwardly. External appearance rules. The outer law is an empty husk/container without the spirit that flows into and outward from it. It is DEAD. To receive the quality of righteousness greater than the Pharisees is paramount. [see Matthew 13: 43] and brings us back to the Law of heaven mentioned in the above quotations from Arcana Caelestia.

Prayer: Dear Loving Father, we ask for your law of love to rule in our hearts and minds, so that we might receive what is heavenly and eternal and know the power of your life within us. Help us, give us the strength and courage to face what needs to be let go of, to be changed and transformed, so that we might be your hands and feet in the world. Amen

Sunday 24th November Please read: Matthew 5: 43 - 48

Love your enemies

Here we have an echo of the last Beatitude – Mt 5: 10 -12. Once again Jesus in these words is showing the false and illusory thinking that had invaded the Jewish understanding of religious rules and regulations. To love your neighbour as yourself is one of the two great commandments – a divine instruction. But the injunction to hate your enemy appears nowhere in either the Old Testament or the New Testament. Having made this clear, Jesus goes on to explain what it is to love your enemies.

Who is the neighbour? Who is the enemy?

..... evil exists essentially in disunion, as is evident from what good is. Essentially good is a joining together because all good stems from love to the Lord and love towards the neighbour.

AC 4997

So anything that turns us away or disconnects us from the Lord and receiving love, goodness, wisdom, true guidance is **the enemy**. **Who is your enemy?**

We receive both heavenly and hellish influences ... thoughts and impulses. Our task as followers of Jesus is to discern with the Lord's guidance what will lead us towards the heavenly life and what will separate us from this life and send us off in the direction of the hellish life of pure self-love. The Lord is constantly working giving opportunities for us to discern our waywardness and return to his Way.

The Lord "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." **Is Divine Love only given to those who love in return?** No, otherwise hardly anyone would be loved ...this love is not a reward for good behaviour that human love can be tinged with. Instead we are asked to be perfect –as our heavenly Father is perfect.

To be a child of God we need to follow his pattern

- not too hate the enemy, differentiate between behaviour and person
- not to be contaminated by evil by getting sucked in
- to discern and turn away from what is evil but not in the spirit of revenge or hatred
- to look for the good and desire goodness for the other person
- the Lord prayed for his enemies on the cross –

*And Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**"* Luke 23.34

Prayer: Dear Loving Heavenly Father, we come to you in awe of the constancy and immensity of your love for us and care. May we remember this in times of stress and conflict. For this love can transform our lives and give us peace and hope and the strength to once again turn and get on in the Way of your Perfect Love. Amen

HOME WORSHIP for DECEMBER 2019 by Revd Christine Bank

Sunday 1st December Advent Sunday ‘Prepare the way for the Lord’

Please read Isaiah 40, as much as you want but definitely verse 3.

“A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD.”

The translations and punctuations vary and seem to offer us a choice of the voice speaking from within the wilderness or alternatively speaking from the outside about making separate preparation in the wilderness. Wherever we sense this call to prepare coming from it can resonate for us.

A wilderness is a place with some life but not a great deal. It is more hospitable than the desert but not exactly comfortable or richly pastured. It is a place to keep us wandering and moving rather than encouraging us to settle down for lengthy stays. The spiritual journey seems to require times of feeling we are on a journey with sparse resources around us as part of a process to turn us back to our reliance on the Lord and keep our life more clearly attuned to his leading.

This Advent Sunday marks a formal start to the Christmas season and the story is as usual in danger of being lost in all the external preparations that can so easily dominate our thinking and planning. There is of course nothing wrong in gathering together to celebrate this wonderful time of year and it is good to be prepared, but preparation also requires us to look inward, to make a preparation for the arrival of the Lord.

Prayer Lord Jesus, as we begin this month with you may our hearts and minds turn again to the special wonder of Christmas. The years have given us a store of memories to reflect on and treasure. The life we and others lead moves on and circumstances change so the Christmas of childhood turns into different celebrations with new groups of people over time. Keep our hearts thankful for the journey of our life and renew the preparations in our own life to welcome you at Christmas. Amen.

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Sunday 8th December The birth of John the Baptist foretold

Please read Luke 1: 1-25

The accuracy of this is important to Luke as he writes. He begins in a proper order, not with Jesus but with the preparation, the story of the child who will become John the Baptist. Zechariah has a powerful conversation with the angel; he is told wonderful things and given to know this child, his son, has a special task in the world.

Swedenborg recounts some of his own angelic experiences and the way his appreciation of the orderly process he describes led to consideration of John the Baptist.

AC 8028. *All that had happened went to show the orderly way in which things are done in heaven and therefore on earth - the way things are done when angels are about to arrive. A spirit is sent on ahead to prepare the way. He then produces a feeling of fear in people, and warns them to receive the angels in a kindly manner. He injects remarks, though at first he does not understand what it is the angels are declaring. But after he has been brought into a better state he does understand. In short, the spirit is present throughout, preparing the mind and trying to forestall anything disrespectful. All this made me think*

about John the Baptist, that in keeping with heavenly order he was sent on ahead to proclaim the Lord's Coming and to prepare the way for Him to be received respectfully.

Prayer Lord Jesus, day by day we can both receive the blessings you have for us in life but also make preparation and change so as to be ready and waiting when new things are asked of us. May we be ready to welcome your messengers and to recognise that your influence may send us another person or situation to speak to us, or we may simply sense your guidance within us. However we hear you, may we listen and then do what is asked to the best of our ability. Amen.

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Sunday 15th December Mary visits Elizabeth
Please read Luke 1: 26-56

Mary's willingness to obey a rather demanding message is one that inspires today. Her only question is 'how?' - as she is a virgin there is an obvious difficulty in becoming a mother. The response to this draws on the example of Elizabeth, who is already expecting her child, and is another way that the physically unlikely fact of an older woman becoming pregnant is used to demonstrate the power of God. His power has overcome her barren state and a child is now developing in miraculous and inspired circumstances.

This baby, John, even recognised the arrival of the pregnant Mary with the Lord taking physical form within her, by leaping in the womb at the sound of her voice. The rejoicing is not only a physical reference, of course, but a state of spiritual life.

Doctrine of the Lord 48 *Because a person's life varies in accordance with his state, therefore by spirit is meant the varying life's affection in a person*
49 *Spirit means the life of a regenerate person, the life called spiritual life:*
as in Luke 1:47 My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

The Magnificat, this wonderful outpouring from Mary, is well worth the time we spend considering it and reflecting on the way the power of the Lord is there. As so often happens there are resonances and ideas which repeat, such as the lowly being raised up by the Lord's power alone; those who lack food and riches are provided for. And we can see this as spiritual states being recognised and changed through the power of the Lord.

As I write this I am well fed, comfortably warm and not in any great state of worry about where my next meal will come from. It is undoubtedly a very pleasant situation to be in and one that allows me to spend time and energy 'doing things' with confidence and assurance. Without the security of being provided for my attention, energy and focus would be entirely devoted to ensuring physical needs were met. Considering the physical realities in a biblical passage and then reflecting on their spiritual application can lead to a sense of how our natural world really does link to spiritual states.

Being 'hungry' would be an ever present concern in the wilderness we thought of on 1st December. Preparing in the wilderness is about keeping the basics going, holding things together so they can be ready to receive greater abundance when the wilderness time ends. Glorifying the Lord, raising our hearts to him, enriches us in whatever state we find ourselves.

Prayer Lord Jesus Christ, as we magnify and glorify you in our hearts, fill us with a deeper appreciation of all the gifts you give us. Keep our hearts and minds thankful and humble so that we can continue to receive your blessings each new day. Amen

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Sunday 22nd December The Word lived for a while among us
Please read John 1: 1-14

The poetic words of John describing the Word dwelling among us require that we can hold the idea of the Word in the physical sense of a written book (the Bible) and also that same Word being given real life through the Lord. For a time this happened physically as he lived on earth and fulfilled what was written (as the risen Lord Jesus spoke on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:27 "...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."). The Word also holds within it the dimension we are hopefully familiar with as we read the words and find it makes a difference to our understanding and thinking. As the time we celebrate the birth of Jesus approaches, so the familiar story has the capacity to be full of renewed meaning and speak to us. The extract below reminds us that the attitude of the reader, in approaching the Word as holy, is of such importance.

AR 200 (part) *"The Word which was in the beginning with God, and which was God;" but not the Word regarded as to the words and letters of the languages in which it is written, but regarded in its essence and life, which from the inmost is in the senses of its words and letters. From this life the Word vivifies the affections of the will of the one who reads it as holy, and from the light of that life it enlightens the thoughts of their understanding.*

Prayer Lord Jesus, as we again enjoy the reassuring familiarity of much loved Christmas readings, may we never lose the sense of wonder and holiness that your Word is there for us. Renew our understanding and appreciation of the privilege of being able to read your Word and open our hearts to receive the gifts you know we need. Amen.

25th December Christmas Day The birth of Jesus

The things of ordinary life are very often put aside at Christmas, if only for the one day before normal concerns take over again. The Christmas Day Truce in the trenches during WW1 is remembered as an example of the peaceful message of the season stirring the hearts of the men on both sides and famously led to them sharing in a game of football instead of fighting.

Whatever is going on in our life, inside our own hearts or around us and among those we are close to, there is no battle or turmoil that can't be influenced and calmed by the realisation of the Lord's presence being with us. Luke 2: 6-7 gives the simplest and most profound news of the birth. As part of today's celebrations enjoy the time it takes to re-read and rejoice in the familiar story.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn [son](#), and wrapped him in [swaddling clothes](#), and laid him in a [manger](#); because there was no room for them in the inn.

Sunday 29th December
Please read John 1: 15-27

John the Baptist's testimony of Jesus

AC 5323.3 *As a "cry" also is an act that corresponds to a living confession or acknowledgment from faith, the rite of crying out was observed among the ancients when this confession was to be signified; and for this reason "crying" or "shouting" is frequently mentioned in the Word in connection with confession and acknowledgment from faith, as where it is said of John the Baptist:*

John bare witness of Jesus and cried, saying, This was He of whom I said, He that cometh after me was before me; for He was prior to me. I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord.

The Word is now made flesh and the first thing is to acknowledge and recognise this. From the life lived in the wilderness we now hear the voice of John the Baptist. The change in the spiritual dynamic, which brings him out to baptise, to speak of the need for repentance and to make a way so the Lord can approach, is always relevant to us.

The sphere of heaven is toxic to those who are of a hellish nature and the Divine could only come into the world after a preparation was made for him to do so.

Think of the way other people's presence can cheer us, inspire us and uplift our spirits. We feel drawn to them and would happily spend time with them. There are others whom we don't feel comfortable with and we choose to move away, feeling more settled for being out of range of their influence.

Consider the selfish and sinful unregenerate nature of humanity. At the time the Lord came to the world things were at a spiritually low place with the Jewish church corrupted and very few ready to recognise the longed for Messiah. The Lord always needs us to be willing to turn towards him and recognise with humility that we are in need of him. The work of John (and of other prophets) is to turn the hearts of men and women towards the Lord; it is through sincere humility and repentance that we can become open to the gift of his love and connection is formed. As we anticipate a New Year there will be many opportunities and challenges ahead; the Lord is with us each day.

Prayer Lord Jesus Christ, as we celebrate that you were once physically present in the world, help us to continue the work of repentance which opens our spirits to you. Help us to recognise and turn away from things which separate us from the heavenly life you created us to enjoy. May our life be one of humility that allows the way for you to draw closer and lead us towards the life of heaven. Amen.