

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Sandra Rose. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church - pray for them as they pray for you.



Opening Prayer

Even if we cannot gather in person

Emmanuel, God with us

Even if some Christmas traditions have had to go

Emmanuel, God with us

Even if we might not get to hug family and friends

Emmanuel, God with us

Even if we cannot sing carols beside each other

Emmanuel, God with us

Even if Christmas cheer is harder this year

Emmanuel, God with us

Hymn: On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry (Singing the Faith 182)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plr21lLgFpg>

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!

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.

For you are our salvation, Lord,
our refuge, and our great reward;
without your grace we waste away
like flowers 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.

John Chandler (1806-1876)

Prayer

Lord God,
Yours is the imagination which conceived the whole universe,
Yours the power which brings all things into being,
Yours the truth which guides all life to its fulfilment in you.
We praise and adore you,
Author and finisher of everything that is.

We praise you for your word,
Underlying all that exists,
Giving meaning to all things that you have made,
Shown to us in the story of your people,
Made clear in Jesus Christ our Lord.

We praise you for all that bears witness to him,
The word made flesh,
Saviour of all humanity,
Light of the world.
We praise you for the scriptures,
For the traditions of your Church,
For all faithful Christian living and learning.
We praise you that you have not left yourself without witness
in this age and place.

Word, Truth, Saviour, Light,
We adore you, in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayer of confession

Eternal God,
From whom alone we learn the true source,
The right way, the final goal of all life,
We confess to you our stubbornness and stupidity.
We run away from the sound of your voice.
We do not listen for your Word.
We do not obey our Lord.

In wilfulness we do not seek that Word
Within the life of the church,
Nor in the Scriptures,
Nor in your speaking to our inmost spirits.
And so we blunder, we miss the mark, we fall short,
Our lives go wrong, we hurt others.

Forgive us Lord.

Teach us to seek, as travellers who have lost their way.
Teach us to listen, as little children to their parents.
Teach us to treasure your words,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Assurance of forgiveness

Merciful Lord

We thank you that you give your faithful people pardon and
peace
that we may be cleansed from all our sins
and serve you with a quiet mind;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Reading: The Gospel of John 1:6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He

came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that
through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he
came only as a witness to the light.

Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in
Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He
did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the
Messiah.'

They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?'

He said, 'I am not.'

'Are you the Prophet?'

He answered, 'No.'

Finally they said, 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back
to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice
of one calling in the wilderness, "Make straight the way for the
Lord."'

Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, 'Why
then do you baptise if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor
the Prophet?'

'I baptise with water,' John replied, 'but among you stands one
you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps
of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan.

Reflection

This is the second week that the lectionary has used the man we call John the Baptist as its focus. This week he is presented as a witness, a forerunner. His mission is to point people to Jesus, the Light of the world.

It is no coincidence that many religions have festivals of light at this time of year. In the darkest days of the year, light gives comfort, hope, enjoyment. A celebration gives people something to look forward to, to relish – it lifts spirits.

Christmas was held at the same time as the Roman festival of Saturnalia so that people who converted to Christianity still had cause for celebration during December.

We think of Jesus as light because light is essential to life. In the account of God creating the world in Genesis what is the first thing he creates? Light. Even though sun, moon and stars were not created until day 4, God's foremost creative act was to create light. We know that as well as supplying our physical needs light also helps prevent and treat depression and sadness.

I don't know how familiar you are with total darkness? Many years ago when I was younger, fitter and a good deal thinner, I

used to go caving, pot - holing. Once inside the cave, the only light we had was from our helmet lights. On one occasion I remember staying in a large cavern by myself while the rest of the group went exploring. I turned my light off – I was frightened that the charge wouldn't last. Total blackness. At first it was pleasant, but after a while it was frightening – what would happen if they didn't come back, how would I get out, you can imagine the thoughts going through my head. What a relief when I saw the lights of the others returning.

In today's Bible passage John is pointing us to Jesus. The Jewish leaders show up quickly to check him out. When they ask him who he is, he says he is not the Messiah, not Elijah, not the prophet. "Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

John's answer is 'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Make straight the way for the Lord."

This idea is taken from the practice of Eastern monarchs, who, whenever they were about to embark on a journey or an expedition, especially through barren, unfrequented or inhospitable country, sent forerunners or heralds before them

to prepare the way. To do this it was necessary for them to provide supplies and make bridges, to level hills and construct causeways over valleys, to level hills and make ways through the forest which might lie in their intended line of march.

John was one man 'calling in the wilderness, yet he prepared the way for the Son of God. Each of us interacts with family, co-workers, neighbours and others (perhaps less so now than at more 'normal' times). Any of these people may know little or nothing of God and his word. Our words and our deeds could pave the way for any of them to answer God's call at another time. Each of us has opportunities to set an example that will affect their lives in a positive way. Each of us is a forerunner improving the trail for those who come after us. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

We offer you our prayers for those who struggle with this season.

We think of the bereaved,
Of those who cannot afford to celebrate as they might want,
Of those with no one to share a table,
And of those who feel helpless and hopeless.

Lord God,
You understand
And share
Tears and silences,
Disappointments and regrets.
Bring your comfort,
Fill with your strength,
And grant all your peace.

We pray too, for places in the world
Where conflict and violence are rife
For places where nature has been harsh –
And we have been thoughtless in caring for your creation:
Give us, we pray, greater concern for each other
And an even greater willingness to do whatever we can for
each other
And for the world itself
So may we work with you, Lord God
To make this world, the world you intended it to be -
A world where people care and love and laugh
A world where justice reigns and peace is evident
And where all know they belong.

We offer you these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord and Saviour. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

Hymn: Light of the world (Singing the Faith 175)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBKzCpkXJR4>

Light of the world,
you stepped down into darkness,
opened my eyes, let me see
beauty that made this heart adore you,
hope of a life spent with you.

*So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.*

King of all days
oh so highly exulted,
glorious in heaven above.
Humbly you came
to the earth you created,
all for love's sake became poor.

*So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.*

And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross
And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.

*So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.*

Tim Hughes

Blessing

May comfort, joy and peace be ours
And may we know how blessed we are
And pass that blessing to all around us.

May God Almighty hold us and all we love
In the palm of his hand
Today and always. **Amen.**