



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, meeting here at Bethesda Chapel on Sunday October 11th 2020 at 10:45.

We are delighted to welcome Gus Eyre this morning, together with his guitar, (and his wife Wendy) as he takes part in our time of worship.

If you are not able to meet with us in person at present, we hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we all seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

Our worship today is led by **Tim**, who **welcomes** us all, and introduces Gus.

We now join in song, with a **Hymn** that may be new to some of us. Written by Keith and Kristyn Getty and others, it is sung by Kristyn, and has an Irish feel to it, complete with some Irish jig violin accompaniment – imagine an excited Kate playing along! This is a hymn that uses some alliteration - M's, magnificent, marvellous, matchless – love of God.

Getty Music and others are allowing churches to use their music in worship during the present time, waiving the usual copyright licensing arrangements, which is why we are able to watch and listen and read it today.

(Whilst those meeting in person are not able to lift their voices in song, if you are at home you can sing as loudly as you wish, to any tune you like, or read the words either aloud or silently:)

Magnificent, marvellous, matchless love,
too vast and astounding to tell;
forever existing in worlds above,
now offered and given to all.
Oh, fountain of beauty eternal,
the Father, the Spirit, the Son;
sufficient and endlessly generous,
magnificent, marvellous, matchless love.

Creation is brimming with thankfulness;
the mountains, exultant they stand.
The seasons rejoice in Your faithfulness
all life is sustained by Your hand.
You crown every meadow with colour
You paint every shade in the sky,
each day the dawn wakes as an encore of
magnificent, marvellous, matchless love.
*How great, how sure,
His love endures forevermore;
Magnificent, marvellous, matchless love.*

What grace, that You entered our brokenness,
You came in the fullness of time;

how far we had fallen from righteousness
but not from the mercies of Christ.
Your cross is our door to redemption,
Your death is our fullness of life,
that day, how forgiveness flowed as a flood:
magnificent, marvellous, matchless love.
*How great, how sure,
His love endures forevermore;
magnificent, marvellous, matchless love.*

United in Your resurrection
You lift us to infinite heights;
could anything sever or take us from
magnificent, marvellous, matchless love.
*How great, how sure,
His love endures forevermore;
magnificent, marvellous, matchless love.*

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Words and music by Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, Matt Papa, Luke Brown, Aaron Keyes

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<https://youtu.be/ggEn6ftrT-4>

Here is the link if you would like, and are able, to access the internet and would like to see what is being shown at Bethesda:

Tim then leads in a **brief prayer**, thanking God for his wonderful love which lasts for evermore, before sharing an **interview with Gus**.

Tim reminded us that it is a year since Gus was with us, and a lot has changed in that time. No-one could have imagined the changes that have taken place, and Tim asked Gus how he and his fellowship have responded. Gus shared that he spent a couple of weeks in hospital for some surgery, his scattered family have coped extremely well. His church fellowship have not yet started to meet again for services, but they've had good contact with all sorts of people in all sorts of ways, using computers. Gus has spent a lot of time in the past working in prison, and all that work has been wiped out, probably till the middle of next year, but he has produced postcards which he's shared with the prison chaplains to distribute, as many men are confined for 23 hours per day.

Tim asked about Gus' music ministry, which has obviously been curtailed, but he is at present working with partners to edit some music for YouTube, planning to do a series of things over next few months, aiming to make it user friendly, for people who would not normally go to church. It includes some new songs which Gus said may or may not be any good - no-one has been able to judge them yet! (Wendy gave a thumbs down here, which Gus said is usual!)

Tim asked what Gus has learnt in this time, and the reply was that there is nothing wrong in slowing down. He has had more time to read and pray than for years, which has been refreshing for his own soul, and he has been able to pray for others, "Be still and know that

I am God,” are familiar words. sometimes we don’t have time to do that, but Gus has been able to use the extra time we’ve been given, which has been a real blessing.

Tim asked Gus if there was anything specific to pray for? Gus said his YouTube music, that it will reach out with the good news of Jesus; and his neighbours, as they have some been needy neighbours, who would value prayer, as they realise that this is serious and life is fragile.

Tim prayed for Gus, that he has been able to draw closer to God, by spending more time with him, that Gus’ YouTube ministry will be used to share the gospel and that many in prison will realise their need of God. He prayed that Gus will continue to gently share the gospel and good news of Jesus.

This is followed by **Tim sharing our notices** for the week.

Operation Christmas Child boxes are now available, to be completed by the beginning of November, together with notes of what to pack. There is also a box also in the foyer if anyone wants to donate individual items rather than complete a full shoe box.

Tim gave thanks for our Harvest donations for the work of BMS in Chad – where our link missionaries, Brain and Jackie Chilvers, will be serving next year. We raised over £500 which will be increased to the amount mentioned in Chad video.

Gus now leads us in song, as we listen to him.

Our Bible reading, Luke 1, 5-25 is read today by Debbie.

The birth of John the Baptist foretold

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshippers were praying outside.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’

Zechariah asked the angel, 'How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well on in years.'

The angel said to him, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.'

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realised he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 'The Lord has done this for me,' she said. 'In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people.'

Thanks be to God.

Gus now shares his message with us, based on this passage,

Have you noticed it's Christmas? At least it has been on the television for the last two weeks and will be right through until December 25 and yet to us, probably it seems like it's very much pre-Christmas. It's a long way away but suddenly the media and everybody selling things are doing their best to persuade us that Christmas is here, and I suppose if you think about it the story of John the Baptist is pre-Christmas or pre-Christ obviously, so we are thinking pre-Christmas, pre-Christ and the story of the coming birth of John is pretty wonderful. When you start to look at the characters, I don't if you know but the name of Zachariah means God has remembered, and if we think way back in history the children of Israel, after 400 years in Egypt, become slaves and finally they were set free when Moses led them to the Promised Land. The Bible says at one point that God heard the groanings of the children of Israel after their years of slavery and he remembered. Now it's interesting that Zachariah had been praying since he was probably a young man for a child and now it says that God remembers. His actual name means that God remembers, and Elizabeth's name literally means God has promised, so like God had promised to bring the children of Israel out of slavery into the promised land, so God promised something wonderful and that was going to happen through Zachariah and Elizabeth. Something about them as a couple of characters thrills me; it says they were righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. They were faithful before God. They kept all the commandments as they were required to do. Sometimes we're in danger - we don't keep all the dietary laws and so on that God gave to Israel, but to a believer, the ten commandments should still be rooted in their faith. We are saved through grace, but then as believers we should live righteously, walk blamelessly and keep his statutes and commands. Sometimes that gets lost today, we live in the day of grace and so sometimes we think we don't need to do those things, but we do. A lot of Christian believers seem to have forgotten that. The Christian gospel is all about righteousness and salvation of course.

The story of Zachariah is interesting. 12 times a year the priests, and there were a lot of them, came to Jerusalem to do their service, a bit like an altar boy in the High Anglican church! There were about 2-300 of them in each group, and they would be chosen to do different things. On this particular day, Zachariah was chosen by lot, you may think this

was the providence of God, certainly in the Old Testament that was something that was recognized as God's will. Note that the last time choosing by lot is mentioned in the Bible was when Matthias was chosen by the disciples as a replacement for Judas. Zachariah was brought to the temple by lot. The whole scene was quite interesting, 3 priests would go into the Holy Place, 2 would carry the bunker of hot coals from outer part of temple and bring them in and set them on the altar, then the chosen one, in this case Zachariah, would take incense – probably a bucket of it - and pour it onto the coals, to make a sweet smelling scent for God. It was about this time, as we understand it, the others had left, so he was alone when Gabriel appeared. I wonder of the angels got a bit fed up of saying the same thing when they appeared, the first thing he said was "Fear not, Zachariah, your prayers have been heard, you are going have a son and call his name John." John means God is gracious. Note how all the names fit with holy story. He goes on to say he will bring you great joy, can you imagine it, having longed for a child all those years, and the older couple must have been thrilled. Gabriel says he will be great before the Lord, he is not take strong drink, but will be consecrated and separated to God- effectively a Nazarite, and filled with the Holy Spirit. We can see that, even before he was born, we can see that when Mary visited, the baby leapt in Elizabeth's womb, because he was already full of the Spirit of God. John's job will be to prepare people for God. I sometimes wonder in this land how many churchgoers need to come to Christ. They go to church, they were taught to go to church, but they need to seek to come to the Lord not just go to church. Sometimes I find that after a service people will talk about everything but they won't talk about Christ. They won't talk about God, they certainly won't talk about what he wants them to do and is doing. They talk about football and shopping and everything else, there's nothing wrong with that but suddenly it seems the things of God are being left behind, just like it was in Zachariah's day. Many people who were children of Israel and believed that they were special before God, didn't know God, and Gabriel says many were going to be returned to the Lord. God was going to prepare, through this babe that's going to be born, going to prepare the people to listen ultimately to the Messiah who is going to come. He said he – John - will go before him - The Messiah - in the spirit of Elijah. You find that Jesus said Elijah has come, this was after the transfiguration when the disciples were walking down the mountain with him and they said first of all Elijah must come before these things happen and Jesus says Elijah has already come and he was talking about John the Baptist.

Interesting that Isaiah prophesied also about John. I've been reading Isaiah just recently, in fact I'm still working through it, it's not the easiest book in the Bible to read to try and get any real sense and understanding. We have this fabulous phrase in Isaiah chapter 40 where it says a voice cries in the wilderness "prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert the highway for our God. Every valley should be lifted up and every mountain and hill will be made low and the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places made plain, and the glory of Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." I can start to picture what's he saying. John is coming to prepare the way for the Messiah that they waited for for so long to come and what happens in this particular story is that Zachariah didn't believe - how will I know this is going to happen? The funny thing is how often do we pray and don't believe; maybe we don't receive the answers to prayers as consequences for our lack of belief. It's interesting, very much in Zachariah's case; Gabriel said because you don't believe you're not going to speak for nine months, you'll be struck dumb if you like, and I think it's very true that when people don't believe God they've got nothing to say about him. I can often tell when somebody who is a believer who has gone off the boil and they've started to get involved in other things. They don't speak about Jesus, in a sense they are done about talking about him, so when we don't have belief the things of God become distant and we've got nothing to say. You compare Zachariah with Mary and you see how different their

responses are, because she's told by the same angel, by Gabriel, "You're going to have a son." "How can I? I'm not even married" she said "how can this be?" and Gabriel explains it - the Spirit of God is going to come upon you, the Most High is going to hover over you and you will bear a son - and you see the difference between her and Zachariah as she simply says "let it be according to your word" so she believed God at a point when Zachariah didn't. I think that's a very interesting thought when God speaks. We need to believe what he says and hold fast to it and it might come to pass. The rest of the story is they simply finished working in the temple, a week or a fortnight, working out in the temple, the temple and guesthouses, they went home and it says very wonderfully Elizabeth conceived, and she stayed in for five months to be absolutely sure that she was, really was pregnant I guess. Perhaps Elizabeth couldn't believe what "the Lord has done for me, looked on me to take away my reproach" because in the peoples' culture at that time for a woman who was married not to have a child, it was almost there something wrong and suddenly in her old age she's pregnant and everybody around is thinking "wow what's going on here? Something is happening" and of course something was happening, God through John was preparing the way for Jesus the Messiah, the Saviour.

You don't think about it, we're not going to be John the Baptist but in another way we can be. Notice what Luke's Gospel closes with - the Christ must suffer and rise on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sin be preached in his name to all nations - so we can in a sense be a forerunner to bring people who know nothing about him to start to show an interest in and finally trust in Christ; so in a strange way we can be forerunners for Jesus. Of course there are so many people in this country and our days, who have no understanding, no clue, no real thought, about Jesus and yet we can be his forerunners and we can pray that the Lord will make the way for us and open the way for us to speak, to build bridges, to show kindness, to have the opportunity to speak to them about the Lord Jesus. Wendy and I try to do this with our neighbours. We want to be not anybody special but we want to be somebody who seeks to introduce them to him and that was going to be John's big job; he was preparing the people.

Now of course you'll hear about that I presume next week when you'll be looking at the next section, I don't want to spoil any of that but the fact is that John is coming to do a great and a wonderful job, he's coming to make the way, prepare the way for God's people repenting and believing and then waiting for the Messiah, and the thing is in a small way we can start to do the same thing.

I don't know if you've ever heard of a guy called Mordecai Ham? I bet most of you haven't, and yet he preached the day that a young Billy Graham became a follower of Christ. What a difference that man made. He was a nobody, I've never heard of him, but God used him. God sometimes doesn't do things with a big fanfare, in fact in the birth of John there was no big fanfare. God works in quiet ways, quiet ways that change the world. The other thing is God uses godly people and he still does, if we seek to be godly, if we seek to be like Christ, as I said earlier if we follow in the way of his commands then God would use us to bring people to know him. C H Spurgeon became a Christian through an unknown preacher at a primitive Methodist church, and the only reason he went to that church on that night was because it was snowing and it was a bit too far to walk to the local Anglican Church. He heard this not very eloquent man speaking, and he said these words from Isaiah that really struck Spurgeon "look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the Earth, for I am God and there is no one else" and so a nobody, in a sense, led Spurgeon to Christ, and how many people have been blessed through him? How many people have been blessed through Billy Graham and yet nobody remembers Mordecai. There is a man called Mr Kimble, he was a Sunday school teacher and he had a young man in his Sunday school class and he was concerned for him. One day he went to see the young man when he was at work and the man worked in a boot shop mending and repairing and

presumably selling boots. He told him of Christ's love for him and the love Christ wanted from him and that young man was called D L Moody, again, somebody that nobody has ever heard of, pointed a man who was then used by God to turn thousands to Christ. God takes ordinary little every day people, Zachariah doesn't appear again, Elizabeth doesn't appear again, and yet God used them because they were godly people, to bring their son into the world. Through that son he was going to prepare the way for the Messiah to come. Of course thousands of people came to listen to John and he always pointed them towards Jesus. That's really the story, that said that God can use nobodys and just be encouraged that God can use you. You might never be thought about, sung about or be anybody famous, we are just ordinary people, but if seek to be Godly people God would use us to point other people, just like John the Baptist, to Jesus and that probably is the highest privilege and the highest honour that anyone of us can ever have.
(Gus then played and sang before closing his message with a short prayer)

Shirley now leads us in **prayer**, recorded at home and shown on the screen at Bethesda.

Almighty, most Glorious God, Maker of the Universe, our Heavenly Father, Saviour and our Friend,

We humbly come before you this morning with hearts full of thankfulness for your gracious provision for us in all our lives, yet tinged with sadness and lack of understanding of all that is happening in the world at this time. You said Lord, that in this world we would have trouble but to take heart because you have overcome the world. Help us to be overcomers too as we live our lives a day at a time, knowing that your grace is sufficient for us as your power is made perfect in weakness.

We bring before you all those who are suffering with Covid 19, in hospital and at home, May they lean on you as never before, knowing that you, who suffered and died for them at Calvary, love them and care for them in sickness and in health. May they receive your healing, know your comfort and your peace. Have mercy on us, Dear Father, help us to think of others more than ourselves as we try to follow the government guidelines. We pray for Boris Johnson and the government, that they may seek your guidance this pandemic. We also lift before you Lord those who are anxious regarding the possibility of unemployment with so many fears. Having Gus with us this morning, sharing his beautiful gift of music and songs, we are reminded particularly of the arts and music world which provides us with much joy and relaxation, which is such a blessing to us all, especially those who suffer with mental health issues. Give wisdom, dear Father, to the government as they struggle to balance health and economy issues. We are aware, dear Lord, that for all our troubles, we are still a wealthy country compared with many who are consumed with poverty, war and the coronavirus. May they and all who seek to help them in their suffering know your presence, peace and provision at this time. We think of America as their election fast approaches, may your kingdom come and your will be done in this land. Israel, the land of our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is suffering greatly too. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem and remember that if we bless them, all families of the earth will be blessed.

Finally dear Lord, we bring ourselves before you, our families, our dear church family, those who are sick amongst us, those waiting for hospital appointments, those struggling with lockdown, those needing a special touch from you. May they know they are not forgotten by you or us, and may they know the peace that passes understanding that only

you can give, Above all dear Lord, we remember and take hold of your promise, “if thy people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and heal their land. **Amen.**

Our closing **hymn** is a familiar one, ‘When I survey the wondrous cross’. As last week, this is from “Hymns at Home”, so the screen at Bethesda shows a young man playing his keyboard and singing at home. Although the version shown on the screen is sung to the Celtic tune. if you are at home you can choose whichever tune you prefer!!

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count as loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ my God:
the very things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down:
when did such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all!

Words: Isaac Watts
CCL no 5664

<https://youtu.be/a3la4uCpFi4>

This is the internet link if you wish to use it, although I know some areas of Blackburn are having difficulty accessing the internet at the moment!

Tim closes our service today as we share the **Grace** together:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.

If you have any news you'd like to share let Judith or Tim know please!

Church news: Joan P has now moved to Eastbourne to be with her daughter. She is enjoying her daily walks by the sea and will try to keep in touch with us online! We wish her God's blessing in her new life there, especially as things have happened more speedily than she anticipated! Contact Judith if you'd like her new address.

It's not too late if anyone would like to donate to the BMS World Mission Operation Chad Harvest appeal - just let one of the deacons know, telephone Paul Carter on 665717, send a cheque made payable to BMS World Mission c/o 153 Revidge Rd, Blackburn, BB2 6EE or see the "envelope" below.

OPERATION CHAD Hope and healing in a Sahel hospital. 

GIVE NOW
Place your donation in this envelope, and remember to complete the Gift Aid form on the back.
Please make cheques payable to **BMS World Mission**.

GIVE ONLINE
Visit our website www.bmsworldmission.org/operationchad to donate online by credit or debit card.

GIVE OVER THE PHONE
Phone **01235 517641** during office hours to make a donation over the phone and speak to one of our friendly team.

You really can make a difference. Please give.
Donations made to *Operation: Chad* will be used to support life-saving medical work in Chad. If our appeal target is exceeded, additional funds will be used to support other life-transforming BMS work around the world.
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