



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, holding a Virtual Service on Sunday November 15th 2020 at 10:45.

As we are not able to meet 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.

We welcome those who are watching the recording either at our usual worship time of 10.45 or later. The service should be available to watch on Youtube. We also welcome those who are reading this at home.

Our worship today is led by **Alec** who gives us all a warm **welcome**.

"Good morning everybody. Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church and to our online presentation for Sunday, the 15th of November 2020. I was glad when they said to me "let us go to the house of the Lord, let us rejoice and be glad for this is the day that the Lord has made." We pray that you will get a real blessing from sharing with us in our online presentation this morning. May God bless you richly."

So we are welcomed and invited to join in **song**, as we watch , listen, or read the words to a song made available to us by Getty Music, **May the peoples praise you**.

(Had we been at Bethesda, we would not have been able to sing aloud, but you may wish to do that at home, here are the words for you to sing or read)

The song may be new to some, it has quite a strong rhythm and beat, and encourages us to lift our voices in song. Kristyn Getty leads us:

You have called us out of darkest night
into Your glorious light
that we may sing the wonders of
the risen Christ.

May our every breath retell the grace
that broke into our strife
with boundless love and deepest joy,
with endless life.

May the peoples praise You,
let the nations be glad.
All Your blessing comes
that we may praise,
may praise the Name of Jesus.

All the earth is Yours, and all within,
each harvest is Your own;
and from Your hand we give to You
to make Christ known.
May the seeds of mercy grow in us
for those who have not heard;
may songs of praise build lives of grace
to spread Your Word.

May the peoples praise You,
let the nations be glad.
All Your blessing comes
that we may praise,
may praise the Name of Jesus.

This our holy privilege to declare
Your praises and Your name
to every nation, tribe and tongue:
Your church proclaims.

May the peoples praise You,
let the nations be glad.
All Your blessing comes
that we may praise,
may praise the Name of Jesus.

(Quietly)

(Holy, holy is the Lord Almighty,
Worthy, worthy is the Lamb Who was slain.
Holy, holy is the Lord Almighty,
all creation praise Your glorious Name.)

May the peoples praise You,
let the nations be glad.
All Your blessing comes
that we may praise,
may praise the Name of Jesus.

Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, David Zimmer, Stuart Townend, Ed Cash. Copyright © 2016 Getty Music Publishing (BMI) , Allotrop Music (BMI) and Townend Songs (PRS) (admin by Song Solutions www.songsolutions.org)
Used by kind permission, CCL no 5664

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BrfkjHdKVI>T

This is the Internet link if you would like to watch it, and have the internet access to do so.

Becky now leads us in **Prayer**,

Heavenly Father, we come together this morning to praise your name and to thank you for our many blessings even in the midst of our concerns over this coronavirus. We witness so many of the blessings you bestow upon us every day, we see and hear of the miraculous things going on around of us, all of which we know can only have come from you Lord.

You love us all deeply Lord, with a love like no one else's, even our own loved ones. Your love is unconditional and nonjudgemental. You love us the same even when we let you down, or are disobedient, or selfish, or lazy. You love us the same when we put our own selfish needs before what we know would please you.

We are very quick to pray for your love and protection over all loved ones, but very slow sometimes to thank you for our answered prayers. This morning we say sorry for those things we leave undone, and really mean it. We do know Heavenly Father that you don't love us any less though. How very blessed are we then?

We have so many things to praise you for, the most important being sacrificing your beloved son Jesus Christ to die on the cross that we might have eternal life. Thank you heavenly father.

We share together in giving you our thanks and praise, for giving our NHS the wonderful attributes they have. You place the right people in the right places, with the correct skills and personalities, to look after the frightened and confused. I personally have been witness on more than one occasion this week to those miracles. We thank you for giving wisdom to the wonderful scientists and professors who are searching for cures for COVID-19, and all the other fatal diseases that we know of. We thank you for the nurses and doctors that work with children and, and for their encouragement and patience to these young ones. Thank you for giving these people the knowledge and desire to do what they do. There is so much heartbreak in the loss of the new baby or little child, but miracle after miracle occurs and many lives are saved. We praise your holy name for giving these people the gifting they have and for being in the right place at the right time.

Oh Father thank you for each miracle, each new day. That even in the midst and uncertainty of the world at present, there are so many good things.

Thank you for the charity organisations we are reminded of, especially at this time of year. Thank you for the food banks and organisations that are laying on food for the less fortunate among us. Thank you for the appeal of our shoeboxes, to little ones in poverty, may we all be generous with our time and money. Because of the age or ill-health not everyone can do something physical, would you prompt us Lord to give of the talents we can still manage. We could bake a cake or make up a small hamper or telephone or write to some lonely person.

Oh Father we all miss one another here at Bethesda. I know that a lot of our members live alone, and may feel lost at the moment. Thank you for our committed Deacons and Pastor. Thank you for the many things they think of to keep us together. They all work so hard behind the scenes. Again Lord you place the right people in the right place.

We just have to place our trust in you Father, that you have everything in hand, that you know the end from the beginning. That you know our every need, the way you knew Elizabeth and Zachariah's need. Elizabeth gave birth to a son, just as she was told she would and he would prepare the way for Mary's son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Please grant us that same trust and grace in you Lord, that you know what is best for each one of us, your children. Take away our hurting and confusion, and help us to keep reminding ourselves of your promise, that you are with us always, forever and ever. Amen

Shirley now reads our **Bible Passage** for today, **Luke Chapter 1 verses 57-80**

The Birth of John the Baptist

“When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.”

They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”

Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. All the neighbours were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord's hand was with him.

Zechariah's Song

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,

because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us

in the house of his servant David

(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

salvation from our enemies

and from the hand of all who hate us—

to show mercy to our ancestors

and to remember his holy covenant,

the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,

and to enable us to serve him without fear

in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;

for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

to give his people the knowledge of salvation

through the forgiveness of their sins,

because of the tender mercy of our God,

by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

to shine on those living in darkness

and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.”

May the Lord give us understanding of his word, in Jesus name I pray. Amen

We now share in a Meditative Hymn, again courtesy of Getty Music, entitled **The Lord is my Salvation**, sung by Kristyn Getty. It has been played at Bethesda since we have been able to re-open briefly, but not all of you will have been able to hear it.

The grace of God has reached for me and pulled me from the raging sea
and I am safe on this solid ground: The Lord is my salvation.

I will not fear when darkness falls, His strength will help me scale these walls;
I'll see the dawn of the rising sun: The Lord is my salvation.

Who is like the Lord our God? Strong to save, faithful in love,
my debt is paid and the vict'ry won: The Lord is my salvation.

My hope is hidden in the Lord, he flow'rs each promise of His Word;
when winter fades I know spring will come: The Lord is my salvation.

In times of waiting, times of need, when I know loss, when I am weak
I know His grace will renew these days: The Lord is my salvation.

Who is like the Lord our God? Strong to save, faithful in love,
my debt is paid and the vict'ry won: The Lord is my salvation.

And when I reach my final day he will not leave me in the grave
but I will rise, he will call me home: The Lord is my salvation.

Who is like the Lord our God? Strong to save, faithful in love,
my debt is paid and the vict'ry won: The Lord is my salvation.

Glory be to God the Father,
Glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit:
The Lord is our salvation.

Who is like the Lord our God? Strong to save, faithful in love,
my debt is paid and the vict'ry won: The Lord is my salvation.

— Words and music by Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, Nathan Nockels and Jonas Myrin©2016 getty music publishing (bmi) / sweater weather music (ascap) (admin by musicservices.org) / capitol cmg paragon (bmi) / son of the lion (bmi) (admin at captiolcmgpublishing.com)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjOGX5zT8KU>

Again, this is the YouTube link if you would care to watch the recording,

Alec brings his **message**, entitled **Mighty Saviour**.

In the pandemic, especially during lockdowns, reading and writing books has become for many a genuinely creative energy-bringing, life-enriching hobby.

When you write a story and read it back to yourself do you ask yourself the question, „What does it do for me? Does it move me? Does it encourage me? Does it challenge me? Does it help me?“

The first time I looked at this passage in preparing for today`s message I honestly thought „I can`t really relate to this, how can I engage with this? What has this got to do with me?

I don`t know Zechariah, John the Baptist is at best a rather distant connection, and Elizabeth?“

The passage is kind of familiar but yet unfamiliar isn`t it.

The paradox is that this passage is not mainly about the main actors Zechariah, John the Baptist and Elizabeth, not even that it concerns itself with Luke the story-writer but principally with God who is behind and in all things.

By placing our God at the centre of the picture, we see the main actors and participants in the story as relevant, as having roles to play, as God their and our Creator, the Maker and Sustainer of the universe had wanted, as He had planned.

So when we have God at the centre of our lives, leading us and guiding us, when we look at ANY passage of Scripture we should perhaps ask ourselves questions like:

-what does this passage say to me?

-what can I learn from this?

-how does what I read in and learn from this passage affect my everyday life, my thinking, my habits, my preferences, my decisions, my prayers?

In our reading which Shirley kindly read for us today there are two stories. The account of the birth of John the Baptist and Zechariah`s song.

Read vv. 57-58.

I am not surprised that Elizabeth`s neighbours and relatives heard what had happened. Most newborns make their presence audibly very clear. They would have heard the baby all right. But what is really meant here is what the baby`s mother said. Not about the child, but about the Lord. They heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy and that the Lord was the source of her joy, which they then shared.

What about us? We experience the Lord`s mercy in so many ways. Do our neighbours and relatives hear about that? Or do we simply keep quiet about it? Do the neighbours share in our joy in the Lord?

Zechariah would have been very quiet because he had lost his voice. Why had he lost his voice? Because of unbelief. Do you see what I am saying?

There is another thread here.

At the beginning of verse 57 we read the simple, straightforward phrase, „When it was time.“

The same phrase comes in Luke 2:6 concerning the birth of our Lord. In Galatians 4:4 we read „But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son“.

It might indeed interest you as a word study to look at the many occurrences of „When it was time“ in Luke`s gospel. If you get really hooked, maybe refer to Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 as well. Or look at the occurrences of this phrase in the Psalms.

God`s timing is perfect. His ways are perfect. His thoughts are perfect.

These are not theatrical, theoretical, purely theological phrases with no basis in or application to the realities of our everyday lives.

They are straightforward, simple, satisfying truths. Even in a pandemic. Especially in a pandemic. Even in lockdowns.

Read v. 68.

This verse divides into two parts. We praise God now in the present for what He has already done. He has come and redeemed us, that is to say bought us back or paid the price for our disobedience, for our wrongs. After a long period of time in which it seems as though God was not involved, in which it appeared as if he was not interested in being active and helping, God has acted, He has come down and intervened. In your life; in my life, in our church.

This is what this passage of Scripture is all about. A Mighty Saviour. We are His instruments. We do not stand centre stage. We are not the focus of attention. We are not indispensable. He is the Lord. Lord of all. Lord of Lords, King of Kings, Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.

Now my message divides into two points. They are a bit like Yin and Yang, opposite forces seen as interconnected and counter-balancing.

1)The first point is supernatural beliefs.

Our religion is not a thought system filled with stone-cold hedonistic, materialistic, humanistic ideas.

It is not an empty, weak and powerless apology for a distant, disinterested God.

It is about power and might. A dynamic, life-transforming gospel.

We believe in angels, prophetic predictions and miracles.

And that is what we find in Luke chapter 1. Twice an angel of the Lord appears. Each time he appears in order to bring a prediction of the future. Both times the predictions are fulfilled through miracles.

In 1979 the Swedish music group Abba recorded a song by Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus called „I have a dream“. It was a massive success.

„I have a dream, a song to sing

To help me cope with anything

If you see the wonder of a fairy tale

You can take the future even if you fail

I believe in angels

Something good in everything I see

I have a dream, a fantasy

To help me through reality

I believe in angels“

It was and still is a wonderful piece of song-writing and creative art and presentation. But we do not need to dream of angels or create a fantasy of angels to help us cope with everything and to help us through reality.

Angels are God`s ministering spirits. They are real. Not only are they able to help us. In God`s time and in God`s way and in obedience to God they do help us.

In the same way we do not need to hang on to empty prophecies made up to transfer our financial resources to gurus and groups that are more able to run a profitable business than to care for the needs of fellow human beings.

The prophecies in the Word of God are real. They are trustworthy, They come true. We can and should build our lives on the God of the Bible.

I hear you saying, „Alec, didn`t you say some weeks ago at the beginning of this series of messages from Luke`s Gospel that Luke claims in his introduction to be a painstaking, seriously-minded historian?“

But here he is conjuring up supernatural visions without an apology right at the beginning of his story, at the very start of his narrative, as main headlines on the front page of his newspaper, on the first side of his homepage. What IS he doing?“

Let me ask you a question? In which world are we living?

A world of five senses?

Can you see it? Then it is visible.

Can you touch it? Then it is tangible.

Can you smell it? Then it exists.

Can you hear it? Then it is audible.

Can you taste it? Then it may be safe!

A world of ESP? Extra-sensory perception?

Our God who created the universe naturally uses supernatural means to communicate and to intervene in human history, in your life and in my life.

In the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist,(1:5), it is written that Zechariah`s son was to be filled with the Holy Spirit, Mary`s son is to be born by the power of the Holy Spirit,(1:35), Elizabeth greets Mary with a cry inspired by the Holy Spirit,(1:41f), and Zechariah celebrates John`s birth with a prophecy in the Holy Spirit,(1:67).

Do we believe in the Holy Spirit? Do we believe in the supernatural?

How does the Apostles` Creed end? „I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

Can you say I believe in God the Father, I believe in God the Son, I believe in the Holy Spirit?

For our God is three in one.

Do we believe in the Holy Spirit?

This is another world when the Holy Spirit of God breaks in.

Our faith is a faith with belief in the supernatural.

There was once a television debate on the theme, „Does God do miracles today?“ A panel of three including a humanist, a free-thinking church minister and a bible-believing church pastor were invited to debate this topic with a moderator in charge of the discussion. Just before it began the bible-believing pastor saw that the humanist had pages and pages of unhelpful material which he prayed that the humanist would not be able to make use of during the debate. He himself made a clear statement at the beginning that God was alive, all-powerful and able and willing to perform miracles today. The moderator asked the free-thinker for his opinion on this but in such a way that the latter was surprised, moved his arm suddenly, made

contact with the glass in front of him which descended with its contents ungraciously onto the humanist's notes turning them into a messy wet mass, apparently making them illegible and of no use. The moderator then asked the free-thinker once more whether he thought God does miracles today.

We believe in a supernatural God.

2)The second point is an alien culture

I mentioned once before that the language of 1:1-4 is something of a very civilised Greek language. But the rest of the chapter has so to speak a very Jewish flavour about it. It sounds sort of quaintly `foreign`. Luke states straightaway that his story belongs to the `far away` of the Judaeian kingdom of Herod, and the `long ago` of the religious history of Israel,(1:5).His characters are clad in the religion and priesthood of Judaism,(1:6,8), and his scene is set in its temple, before an altar, at a service, (1:9-11).The opening speech in 1:13-17 takes us straight into the world of the Old Testament.

Luke creates a kind of `world-of-the-Bible` atmosphere. And he does this quite deliberately. We have seen in chapter 1 that Luke is showing us the faithful few in Israel, who were looking forward to the coming of a mighty Saviour.

Maybe you are wondering just how am I going to relate the first point of the supernatural to the second point of an alien culture? Do you know already? Can you see the connection? Even without lateral thinking?!

The connection, the link, is this: both these points constitute stumbling-blocks or barriers to the acceptance of the gospel of salvation. A gospel of salvation which involves supernatural beliefs and which seems to be anchored to a remote and alien culture.

For many a gospel with supernatural beliefs appears to many to be on the one hand incredible, unbelievable and wholly unacceptable. On the other hand a gospel anchored to a remote and alien culture appears to be insignificant, unimportant and at the same time wholly irrelevant.

Luke does not do what I am not prepared to do either. He does not water down or play down the unacceptable parts of the story. He does not reduce the gospel to an attractive, palatable version of the truth. He does not create a gospel of salvation which ignores some elements of the truth so that it nicely fits our preferences and our personal tastes. Boxed-up religion.

Christianity is meaningless without supernaturalism; without angels, prophecies and miracles. And likewise the Jewishness of the story is an integral part of it, it is intrinsic to it. Because at no other place or time has God ever broken into our world with the full message of salvation, except in these events recorded here by Luke which occurred in the first century in Palestine.

If there is to be a salvation for mankind at all it can only be brought about by the almighty, supernatural, miracle-working God. This God offers it to us, to you and to me and to all men only through the medium of a first-century Jew-Jesus of Nazareth. This man alone, the central figure of the Gospel of Luke, is to be the Saviour of the world. He is our Mighty Saviour.

Amen.

We now come to our final song, which is sung by Kristyn Getty.

"Holy Spirit living breath of God"

It begins with the haunting melody of "Gabriel's Oboe", written by Ennio Morricone, if you wish to imagine that being played before reading, singing or humming the words. This song should be familiar to at least some of us. Kristyn finishes by reading words from Ephesians, said over the violin playing, once again, Gabriel's oboe.

Holy Spirit, living breath of God,
breathe new life into my willing soul.
Let the presence of the risen Lord,
come renew my heart and make me whole.
Cause Your Word to come alive in me;
give me faith for what I cannot see,
give me passion for Your purity;
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.

Holy Spirit, come abide within,
may Your joy be seen in all I do.
Love enough to cover every sin,
in each thought and deed and attitude.
Kindness to the greatest and the least,
gentleness that sows the path of peace.
Turn my strivings into works of grace;
Breath of God show Christ in all I do.

Holy Spirit, from creation's birth,
giving life to all that God has made,
Show Your power once again on earth,
cause Your church to hunger for your ways.
Let the fragrance of our prayers arise;
lead us on the road of sacrifice,
that in unity the face of Christ
may be clear for all the world to see.

(Spoken: Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever, Amen. Ephesians 3, 20-21)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDYjn-YdnD4>

Keith Getty & Stuart Townend Copyright © 2005 Thankyou Music (Adm. by CapitolCMGPublishing.com excl. UK & Europe, adm. by Integrity Music, part of the David C Cook family, songs@integritymusic.com)
Used by kind permission, CCL no 5664

(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 their songs today.)

Alec closes our service today:

"Let's close our service of worship together this morning with the blessing.
The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. Amen"

May you know God's peace in your hearts and lives in this time of renewed lockdown.

In case you are aware of any birthdays this week: here are our special words

Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday dear.....,
Happy Birthday to you.

Happy Birthday to you,
only one will not do!
Give your heart to the Saviour
and then you'll have 2!

Happy Birthday to you,
from old friends and new
The Lord bless you and keep you,
Happy Birthday to you.

We are reminded of:

Virtual Coffee time on Zoom @ 11.45am on Sundays, for those of you who have internet access - Look for the Link

Thursday Prayer Meeting on Zoom @ 7.30 - Again, look for the link. Please join us for this precious time, it's only half-an-hour, and no one expects you to pray if you don't wish to. You can always add your own Amen to the prayers that are said, so that you make them your own.

Operation Christmas Child - as our boxes are still awaiting collection you can still contribute, ring Morag for more information. Tel 01254 602910

Operation Christmas Child - whilst we were anticipating the boxes being collected by now, this has not been able to take place in light of the current restrictions, so we have some extra time if you would still like to take part, whether by making a box yourself or donating to Morag who has been buying some of the items. needed. It's not too late to participate!.)

We are sure you are all aware that the new Government restrictions (Lockdown) will mean that we are unable to meet at Bethesda on Sundays for at least the next four weeks. We will let you know when we are able to meet in person to worship again.