



**Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on Sunday January 24th 2021 at 10:45, at the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.**

The current lockdown restrictions have resulted in the decision to not meet in person at Bethesda Chapel at present. We plan to use our YouTube channel to broadcast the services, but will still continue to provide this written service sheet. 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.

Alec is leading our worship today, with recordings from Germany. Again we thank his daughter (BRD from Mondlicht films) for her help and copyright permission. Tim has recorded the contributions from here in Blackburn, and we express our thanks to him for his technical expertise!

**Welcome from Alec**

**(Filmed in Germany)**

"Hello everybody, really good to see you again, how are you today? A very warm welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church for our online presentation for the 24th of January 2021. where ever you are, whoever you are, whenever you are sharing with us in this online presentation we pray that you may know God's presences and him speaking to you as you share in the message, the reading the prayers and the hymns and songs with us today. May God bless you, and us, richly. Let's begin now."

**Our opening hymn** is a traditional one, but with a modern twist. The words and tune are familiar, though with an additional refrain, which if you cannot hear (or watch the video) you will be able to speak aloud or silently.

**Immortal, invisible, God only wise"**

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;  
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

Almighty, victorious, Your great name is glorious!

Almighty, victorious, Your great name we praise, Oh Lord!

To all, life Thou givest, the great and the small;  
T all life Thou livest, the True Life of all;  
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
and wither and perish, but naught changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory; pure Father of light;  
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;  
all praise we would render: O help us to see  
'tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.

Almighty, victorious, Your great name is glorious!

Almighty, victorious, Your great name is glorious!

Almighty, victorious, Your great name we praise, Oh Lord!

Immortal! Invisible! Almighty! Victorious!

Your great name, Your great name we praise!

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqk-bEwCuIs>

**Ellie shares our Bible Reading for today, Luke 3:1-14**

### **John the Baptist Prepares the Way**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for him.

Every valley shall be filled in,

every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight,

the rough ways smooth.

And all people will see God’s salvation.”

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

“What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”

He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

**We can lift our hearts and voices in song** again with a less well known song: "Who you say I am" from Hillsong - or you may wish to read it.

Who am I that the highest King would welcome me?

I was lost, but He brought me in.

Oh His love for me, oh His love for me.

Who the Son sets free

Oh, is free indeed.

I'm a child of God, yes, I am.

Free at last, He has ransomed me, His grace runs deep.

While I was a slave to sin, Jesus died for me,

yes, He died for me.

Who the Son sets free

Oh is free indeed,

I'm a child of God, yes, I am.

In my Father's house there's a place for me,

I'm a child of God, yes, I am.

I am chosen, not forsaken, I am who You say I am.

You are for me, not against me, I am who You say I am.

I am chosen, not forsaken, I am who You say I am.

You are for me, not against me, I am who You say I am,

I am who You say I am.

Who the Son sets free oh is free indeed,

I'm a child of God, yes, I am.

In my Father's house there's a place for me,

I'm a child of God, yes, I am.

In my Father's house there's a place for me,

I'm a child of God, yes, I am

I am chosen, not forsaken, I am who You say I am.

You are for me, not against me, I am who You say I am.

I am chosen, not forsaken, I am who You say I am.

You are for me, not against me, I am who You say I am.

I am chosen, not forsaken, I am who You say I am.

You are for me, not against me, I am who You say I am.

Oh I am who You say I am, yes, I am who you say I am,

Who the Son sets free oh is free indeed,

I'm a child of God, yes, there's a place for me,

I'm a child of God, yes, I am.

Songwriters: Reuben Timothy Morgan / Benjamin David Fielding

Who You Say I Am lyrics © Hillsong Publishing CCL no 5664

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

You will remember two weeks ago our theme was „Looking for Jesus“ from Luke 2:42-52. We mentioned that that episode was only recorded in Luke`s Gospel and asked ourselves why? What was so important about this event? What did God want to teach us?

We found out that it was a very helpful, encouraging passage concerned with looking for Jesus, belonging to Jesus and becoming like Jesus. That is what life is all about isn`t it?

Maybe we look now at Luke chapter 3 and think why spend two sermons on that? Why do we do more than treat it as a cursory read-through? Can`t we put that in a sub-file or something and play it`s importance down? Seems at first sight like a dry chapter only moistened up by teaching on baptism.

But we can`t play it down. Albeit in a rather different form, the storyline of Luke 3: 1-14 appears also in all three other New Testament gospels, in Matthew, Mark and John. The content refers to major and minor Old Testament prophets, even the Acts of the Apostles gets a look-in if we want really to understand what these verses in Luke are concerned with.

It`s really exciting, it`s full of surprises. I hope I have wetted your appetite enough to listen to what God is saying here.

In chapter 3 Luke continues to carry out his strategy of „writing an orderly account“ so that Jesus` followers „may know the certainty of the things that (they) have been taught.“ Sounds a bit like 2. Peter 1:12 doesn`t it? You remember? Where Peter says: „So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.“

But then I am sure we don`t forget what God told us in the past!

So Luke begins again so to speak in what we call verses 1 and 2 with the historical context of the events he is writing about. And then with the event itself. Which specific event am I referring to here today? It is a real surprise. It is the appearance of a new prophet.

It is like Sheffield United winning a soccer game. Really unexpected. Long awaited. It is like being hit on the head with a hammer. Dramatic. Perhaps even devastating. Difficult to come to terms with. What I am talking about is in this sentence in v. 2b, „the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.“

At last! After such a long time? There hadn`t been a prophet in Israel for ages! The way in which God spoke to the prophets is the same as the way He now speaks to John, naming the father of the one He is calling to be a prophet. If you are interested in this look maybe at Jeremiah 1:2, Ezekiel 1:1 or Joel 1:1ff.

What God said to John is not recorded. But I think you will agree we can presume it was a wonderful, powerful, authoritative word. Maybe in its substance, in its essence like what we later read was said to the disciples as recorded in Matthew 28:18ff.

What John received were not just words that he had to pass on. No. What God said was intended to achieve something, to perform something, something that could be seen, be realised, become part of history, showing God alive and at work in human history, in world history, in the future of His world.

And here I stop as usual and say, what happens when God speaks to us? Do we shove what He says in a convenient drawer and forget about it until the next clearout? Do we wizz it straightaway? Do we take it to the dump on Monday after the Sunday service?

Let`s be clear that when God speaks to us as a church He is not primarily interested in filling up our heads. He is wanting us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth of the Gospel of His Son Jesus Christ. He is wanting us to obey His call and to follow Him as His disciples.

What we have heard from God, what we have experienced with God we are to share. To share in our lives in the reality of everyday living, seven days a week.

John shared what God gave Him in His Word in what he said, in how he lived, in his greetings and gestures, with his heart and his hands, in his language and in his attitude.

What John said commanded respect. What he said was serious. It included God`s unreserved judgement on His people. It rolled out the sin and shame of men, the ruin and wickedness of men all along the line in all classes and professions, of all ages and in all places.

What John said was of deep and wide-reaching significance. A message of grace and forgiveness in all its holiness and glory. This word of forgiveness of sins, of forgiveness of the mess we have made, was the greatest hope of the Old Testament prophets, (Isaiah 33:24, 55:7, Jeremiah 31:34, Ezekiel 18:31-32, Zechariah 13:1, Micah 7:18).

The word came to John in the wilderness, in the desert. After he had lived hidden away so to speak for 30 years his public life began. For the Israelites the wilderness was of special significance. On the one hand the desert was the scene of their disobedience,(Job 3:8ff., Acts 7:41ff.), on the other hand the place of God`s faithfulness and grace to them,(Acts 7:36, 38 and 44). God prepared many of his prophets including Moses, Elijah, John and the apostle Paul in the desert.

Would you go into a desert if you were hungry?

Would you go into a desert if you were thirsty?

Would you go into a desert to meet God?

Would you go into a desert to have fellowship with others?

Would you go into a desert to work for God?

Shortly before Jesus came into the world the desert and staying in the desert hinted at the coming of the Messiah. People believed that the Messiah was going to appear in the wilderness. So much so that many sects decided to move to and set up their bases in the desert.

John, whose very name means, „God has had mercy“, didn`t think twice about being in the desert. Because that is where God had called him to be.

Although he was the son of a priest he did not go into the Temple at Jerusalem, neither did he do what Jesus and Paul after him did and go to the Israelite synagogues. The holy Temple and

Jerusalem, the holy city, were not his calling. He went to the desert because that is where God had called him to go and to be.

At All Nations Christian College in Hertfordshire where Sibylle and I first met there were those who taught Greek and Hebrew, Theology, Missiology, Apologetics, Cross-Cultural Communication and lots of other important long-worded things. That was all well and good. But one guy on the staff impressed me particularly. He was the gardener. Tom belonged to the Lord and even though he came from Yorkshire, he knew what he was talking about.

He taught us a very important truth. „Blossom where you are planted“ he said. He had been called by the Lord from Yorkshire to Hertfordshire and that is where he was staying until the Lord called him on somewhere else.

Like the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire that led the people of Israel in the desert as we see in Exodus 13:21-22 we are guided by the Lord. He leads, we follow. Not the other way around!

John stayed in the desert until that episode of his earthly life and pilgrimage was completed. Then he moved on.

Not only where he lived and preached; not only his message as we will see shortly; but also his very way of life in the desert set him apart from what one would normally expect and anticipate from a priest. To have reached the desert would have meant a hard 24 mile journey through rocky landscape, unbearable heat and dust whilst facing the threat of thieves and robbers. He would probably not have counted as having been very „churchy“ or religious. But he knew His God, he was called of God and by God and was obedient to God. These qualities are important.

John didn't say, wait a minute, my expectations, my plans, my wishes are somewhat different. This is a dry, hot, stony desert area. Not sure of this. In the job description there was nothing written about my potential responsibilities in the event of a pandemic. Where can I preach now?

Let's look at Luke 3 verse 3. First the NIV: „He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.“

Second the Expanded Bible Translation, (EBT), which I have slightly modified. „He went throughout the region around the Jordan River preaching a baptism of changed hearts and lives for the forgiveness of sins.“

I have modified the EBT a little. But semantically, that is to say as far as the meaning is concerned, I haven't changed it.

What is blatantly clear is what it does not say.

Does it say that John went to all the easily accessible areas? No!

Does it say that John went where he knew he would get a good hearing? No!

Does it say that John went to the areas which he had always wanted to visit? No!

Does it say that John went to the area where he grew up as a child? No!

Does it say John went to the area where he would be given the best salary and enjoy the best working conditions? No!

It says: „He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.“

This country around the Jordan is your workplace, your neighbourhood, your golf club, your former school friends, the people you meet at the hospital, those you meet when you go shopping, when you go for a walk in the park. Your family. John was preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Is that what we are saying and demonstrating? Is that what we are living out in our country? What does our life as believers look like? Are we following Jesus?

If we were put on trial for being believers in Jesus Christ would there be enough evidence to convict us?

John attacks the spirit of the age with a power, a clarity and a sharpness that reached into the heart of the deception and hypocrisy, the insincerity and the dishonesty of the religious leaders of the time. Let`s not pretend that of itself being religious is of any spiritual value.

John is yet another of these genuine men of God who completely fails to preach a popular gospel. Masses of people come out to him in the desert to be baptised by him. And how does he greet them?

Does he say, well that`s really great that you want to be baptised. I am personally really encouraged.

No. He says as recorded in verse 7, „You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?“ Well that was probably that for his yearly performance bonus!

Judgement is coming he says. Indeed not only will it come at the end of time it has now come in Jesus Christ himself. This is like a weblink back to Malachi 4:1-5, indeed to all the Old Testament prophets, specifically to Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos and Zechariah).

Here are some references that may help you if you wish to look at this further:

Isaiah 2:12; 13:6,9-13; 34:8-10

Ezekiel 7: 7-10

Joel 1:15; 2:1-3

Amos 5:18-24

Zechariah 1:14-16

John can see into the hearts and minds of those who have come to him to be baptised. He sees their presumptive arrogance. They think they are the bees knees. He warns them clearly not for one moment, not for one second, even to think that because Abraham is their father they are safe from judgement.

Let us not make a similar mistake. Let us come joyfully and humbly into the presence of God.

All mankind will see God`s rescue act. This is not just for the Jews. This is for all nations and all people. This is for all the peoples of Blackburn with Darwen. This is for you and for me.

God`s mercy and grace know no limits. He chooses us, we respond.

Like Mary and Joseph, instead of walking away from Jesus we need to turn completely around, make a 180 degree about turn, and move towards the Lord. To produce fruit in keeping with turning away from the mess that we have made of our lives by leaving God out of the equation., by taking Him and His Word to the dump.

What does this about turn actually do to our behaviour? What difference does it make to our everyday lives? That is what the crowd asked in verse 10 where it says, „What should we do then?“

John doesn't say go and study theology at a theological college and then you will understand. He is much more down to earth than that.

Read verses 11-14.

It is very simple isn't it. It's really straightforward, uncomplicated.

The prophet Micah put it like this in Micah 6:8:

„The Lord has shown you what is good. He has told you what he requires of you.

You must act with justice. You must love to show mercy.

And you must be humble as you live in the sight of your God.“ (NIRV)

We are to produce fruit worthy of a life changed by the Spirit of God.

Is that what you choose? God has chosen you. Give your life to Him.. Let Him be the Lord of your life. Live each day with Him.

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. Choose for yourselves today the one you will worship. You may decide to put other things first. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)

**We can join in singing again, (or reading) another familiar hymn for many of us:**

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!  
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation!  
All ye who hear, now to His temple draw near;  
praise Him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth,  
shelters thee under His wings, yea, so gently sustaineth!  
Hast thou not seen how thy desires e'er have been  
granted in what He ordaineth?

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;  
surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee;  
ponder anew what the Almighty can do,  
if with His love He befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, oh, let all that is in me adore Him!  
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him;  
let the amen sound from His people again,  
gladly for aye we adore Him.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEh7Vt9sxmc>

**Our prayers today** are led by Becky:

"Dear Father in heaven,

You say, where there are two or three of us together you will always hear our prayers, we know that to be true. This morning we open up our hearts to you in prayer. We want to praise your beautiful name, Heavenly Father, and give you thanks and wonder for the wonderful blessings you have poured upon this past week.

We want to thank you for your protection over ourselves and our loved ones. We want to thank you for each other, for our families and friends. We want to thank you for your unceasing love for us. A love that takes us just as we are, warts and all. A non-judge mental love, a love that knows our shortcomings but loves us just the same. We want to thank you Father also for the privilege of being able to bring our worries and fears to you, however large or small. What a relief we feel when we talk to you about our worries and thank you again that you are always willing to listen, happy to listen, never tire of listening. Somehow we are always able to cope after talking with you, able to find a solution, feel much less stressed.

The world is very stressful at this present time Lord. With your love and guidance we are making progress though. Vaccines are being administered quite rapidly and people are feeling much more optimistic about the future.

Please guide us though Father to still take care, this vaccine is still only in its infancy. We continue to pray for the NHS and the scientists who are working night and day to find cures for these unknown pandemics. Teach us common sense to proceed slowly and with care, where we go and what we do. Help us to help those who are caring for us, risking their lives, working with the very sick and dying, and then having to go home to their families. Help us all to be responsible towards each other.

Once again Lord we know that we can seek our comfort from you and that you will take our fear from us, and guide us.

We pray also for countries that are living every day with poverty and hunger and lack of supplies. Even in the midst of this latest pandemic and employment losses, we still have luxuries no end. We thank you Father God for the charity workers who fund

raise for these countries. We thank you for the aid workers who drive supplies to these places. We pray for the poorly children dying of malnutrition and ask that you prick our consciences to donate to these causes. We pray for the Leprosy mission too, and are thankful for the work of Brian and Jackie Chilvers. We pray for countries where it is forbidden to practice Christianity, to read your bible or to go to church.

We ask your blessing also on those families Lord, who do not know of your everlasting love. We pray that somehow, even maybe through this disaster we are having at present, families may get to know you. It may be from the kindness shown to them, or that they have intentionally or unintentionally seen something on their websites. It might even be loneliness has taken precedence and they have been talking to someone who knows and loves you.

A lot of these families are hurting dear Father without even knowing why. We just pray with all our hearts Father that more families will come to know about you. Give us courage Lord and an opportunity to tell someone about your love for them.

We pray for all the young people who are living in a whole different world than what they are used to at this present time. We ask that their families be supportive towards them and spare some time and give them encouragement. Each family member will be under pressure in one way or another. Please help them all to be sympathetic to be sympathetic to each other.

Drawing to a close heavenly Father we pray for our congregation and those members who are struggling health-wise at the moment. We pray for Brian and Beryl Fish. Please put your healing arms round Beryl and let her recovered quickly from this Covid. Please give her peace of mind that you will find the right place for Brian, that it is safe in your hands, whilst Beryl is recovering herself. We remember Sam Spence and pray he will feel better soon.

As always Lord we ask for your blessing on our deacons and our Pastor Alec. Please keep them in your protection safe and strong as they look after us. We know how hard they all work and appreciate their dedication so much. We hope it won't be long till Alec is back with us again.

Thank you Lord for listening to our prayers in Jesus name. Amen"

As our time together draws to a close, **we are able to sing or read** our final song for today: Yet Not I but Through Christ in Me.

What gift of grace is Jesus my redeemer;  
there is no more for heaven now to give;  
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom,  
my steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace.

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus,  
for my life is wholly bound to His;  
Oh how strange and divine, I can sing: all is mine,  
yet not I, but through Christ in me.

The night is dark but I am not forsaken,  
for by my side, the Saviour He will stay;  
I labour on in weakness and rejoicing,  
for in my need, His power is displayed.

To this I hold, my Shepherd will defend me,  
through the deepest valley He will lead;  
oh the night has been won, and I shall overcome,  
yet not I, but through Christ in me.

No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven,  
the future sure, the price it has been paid,  
for Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon,  
and He was raised to overthrow the grave.

To this I hold, my sin has been defeated,  
Jesus now and ever is my plea;  
oh the chains are released, I can sing: I am free,  
yet not I, but through Christ in me.

With every breath I long to follow Jesus  
for He has said that He will bring me home,  
and day by day I know He will renew me  
until I stand with joy before the throne.

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus,  
all the glory evermore to Him;  
when the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat  
yet not I, but through Christ in me.

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus,  
all the glory evermore to Him,  
when the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat  
yet not I, but through Christ in me.  
When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat  
yet not I, but through Christ in me;  
yet not I, but through Christ in me;  
yet not I, but through Christ in me.

Words Jonny Robinson, Rich Thompson, Michael Warren  
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwc2d1Xt8gM>

### **Alec gives a final greeting and benediction**

"Hello again. We've almost got to the close of our online presentation for today. I hope you enjoyed it, have appreciated it, and hopefully have benefited from it. Of course you can listen to it and hear it again if you want to on our YouTube channel. If you have any questions, or if there is any information you would like us to pass on to you, please contact us through our homepage, [blackburnbaptistchurch.co.uk](http://blackburnbaptistchurch.co.uk) and we will get back to you and answer you as thoroughly as we can, to the best of our ability, as soon as it is possible for us. So we're going to close officially and formally now by sharing together in the words of the grace, let's pray.

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

*Goodbye for now, hope to see you again next week, goodbye."*

As the week of prayer for Christian Unity draws to a close, we continue to pray for our nation and our world in these unusual times. We also pray for the NHS, as they face all the challenges brought by Covid 19.

A reminder that you can make donations to the work of the Leprosy Mission by sending a cheque made payable to the Leprosy Mission to Jane. Please let her know if you are a UK taxpayer and are willing to Gift Aid the amount you are able to give.

We would love to hear you in our virtual 'Community Room' after the Sunday service on Zoom at 11.45 am for a time of fellowship and chat. **You can join in by ringing 02034 815237 then entering 962 5576 8258,(the meeting ID), then 491306 (the passcode)**

We also have our regular prayer meeting on Zoom on Thursday evening at 7.30pm **Again, you can join if you like by telephone by ringing 02034 815237. Meeting ID: 923 9680 7071, Passcode: 411034.**

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