

## Birth of John the Baptist 24.06.2020

Isaiah 40: 1–11; Psalm 85: 7–end; Galatians 3: 23–end; Luke: 1: 57–66 & 80

If it were not for the Coronavirus, Vicki & I would be half way through a ten day holiday in North Wales. Indeed, today it would be the midpoint of a five day conducted tour of the Railways of Wales. This morning's highlights would be the Llangollen Railway and in the afternoon a horse-drawn boat trip along the Llangollen canal. We would already have experienced the Ffestiniog Railway & Portmeirion and have Caenarfon Castle, Beddgelert & the Welsh Highland Railway still in store.

Back in 2014 we used the same company to travel by rail to Vienna, Prague and Berlin. We had been eagerly eyeing the Railways of North Wales for some years before opting for the three capital cities. So, for us, it was a great disappointment when this Summer's rail holiday was cancelled. However much our personal disappointment was, in the great scale of things it would have mattered little compared with the bitter disappointment of Zechariah and Elizabeth being childless.

When Zechariah was told by the angel, Elizabeth was to have a son to be called John, he responded how is this so, "*I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years*"(v18). Because of his not believing Zechariah was turned mute until the baby was born and named John. We are fortunate in that we have Jesus's words following the conversation with the rich young man (Matt 18: 16 – 26) "*with God all things are possible.*"(v26)

There is a parallel in the Old Testament, when Abraham and Sarah are told by the three angels that they will have a son in their old age. They too respond with incongruity and are told, "*Is anything too wonderful for the Lord.*" (Genesis 18: 14).

When we think of John the Baptist we think of the one who has come "*to prepare the way of the Lord*" (Isaiah 40: 3 & Mark 1: 3) to prepare the ground for the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Preparing the way, preparing the ground is a most apt theme for us as we as a nation very carefully move out of "lockdown". As we, the worshipping community of the West Hereford Team, prepare for the next steps we are to take with our worship, our ministry and the careful reopening of our churches – possibly in stages.

There may well be difficulties along the way; ‘bumps in the road!’ There may well be localised flare ups and the potential for the “R” number to rise. This is why careful, well considered and well researched preparations are essential. Not everyone will be able to progress at the same pace. Those shielding will still need to be in isolation and will continue to require worship materials by email or the post. So preparing the way really is the work of this moment.

One aspect of preparation will be our preparing of ourselves for the work ahead. What we, individually, can do to facilitate our worship and ministry. The starting point will be in our preparing of our own spirituality – our prayer life and meditation on scripture. Each of the readings for today has a passage that can be reflected upon, internalised and allow the Spirit of God to open up for us. Perhaps take one a day during the remainder of this week.

*“But the word of our God will stand for ever”* Isaiah 40: 8

*“steadfast love and faithfulness will meet”* Psalm 85: 10

*“for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith”* Galatians 3: 26

Let us conclude by returning to John the Baptist whose birth we celebrate today and of whom it was said, *“the hand of the Lord is on him”* Luke 1: 66. Today may the same be said of you and of me, *“the hand of the Lord is on him/her”*.

Amen