

**The Rectory
Rectory Close
Radyr CF15 8EW
vicki.burrows@me.com
Tel 029 20842417 or 07515 965781**

Dear Friends,

In the beginning was the Word....

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John (from St John Chapter 1)

Once upon a time many years ago a parishioner complained that I had ruined his Christmas. He had attended Midnight Mass and felt cheated. Why?because I had failed to give him the straw stuffed manger, the shepherds and angels and a young woman in the agony of childbirth delivering her unplanned child. I had proclaimed my faith and preached the gospel according to St John who mentions none of this.

The prologue to the gospel of John begins in darkness in a place before time began. It echoes the earliest poetry of Genesis, the Wisdom myth of ancient Judaism, and anticipates much of the logos poetry of second century gnostic literature. Theologians cannot agree on the origin of the first eighteen verses of John's gospel but many believe an early Christian hymn launches the Gospel narrative of the "incarnate Word"

The text for this, the third Sunday of Advent, begins where The Prologue moves from the cosmic to the earthly life of God among us. The unknown author, in some of the most beautiful words in scripture, proclaims that the *logos* or Word or Light has the power to overcome darkness

The first human introduced into the story is a man named John. This is the same John, described by Mark as "the baptiser" and by Matthew as "the Baptist", who preaches repentance. Luke describes John by his family name and the place of his ministry; John the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. John has deep roots in Judaism's prophetic tradition.

How easy it would be to refer to the first human in John's gospel as "John the Baptist" but this would deny the writer's understanding of John's vocation as a holy man "sent by God" to bear witness to "the Word and to point to "the Light". John is not introduced by family name or place of origin. He is not the baptiser, a prophet, or even a messenger from God. He is a witness sent by God to testify to "the Word made flesh" the light that no darkness can extinguish.

Today, I conducted the marriage of Emily and Sam in St Mary's Church, St Fagans. At their rehearsal on Thursday I explained to them, just as I explained to George and Steph on Zoom the same day, that they must have two people present to be witnesses to their marriage. These individuals sign the marriage register to testify to the truth that a marriage has taken place before their eyes.

Yesterday, a woman called to ask if I would act as a witness in a potential court case. With her sister she is seeking to prove that her late father abused them when they were children. She knows I have plenty of written evidence, including a guilty confession even though I was not present when the events took place. I can only "attest to the truth of another's testimony". And this is what John's gospel does.

John recognises the true light when it is revealed and he calls attention to it so that others may see it, recognise it, trust it, commit to it and give their lives to it. Some people read John's Gospel as a long trial about the person and nature of Jesus, with John (the Baptist if you must) being summoned as the first and leading witness in the case.

From the opening words until its ending, John's gospel contrasts light and darkness. His story is about God's world and a world that does not know or recognise God. John is a human who shows the possibilities and limitations of a witness. He is "sent by God" just as the Word is sent by God but he is not the Word or *logos* and neither is he the Light. The Prologue to John's gospel makes this clear; John is simply a witness sent to bear witness to the Light. He does not compete with the Word but witnesses and testifies to the light of God in the world - a Light that has transcended the realms of Hebrew myth and gnostic philosophy in a human life. There are no miracles in John's gospel but there are "signs" and John, the first witness called, is a signpost. There are no signs (try not to call them miracles) in this Gospel that do not bear witness to the truth that this Light has the power to overcome darkness.

On the third Sunday of Advent we have no images of a young woman and the man to whom she was engaged journeying to Bethlehem. There are no shepherds singing and it is certainly too early to have wise magi on the move. Thank God. We are summoned to turn from our worldly ways, our nostalgic Christmas longings, and remind ourselves that the first witness arrived on the scene before Jesus did. He arrived not to decorate the story or to dress the tree, as some of us have done this week, but to “prepare the way of the Lord.” He came to bear witness to the Light of God saying that the darkest darkness that stalks us is not as powerful as it seems.

As a year like none other draws to a close we are reminded that this Light still has the power to beam rays of hope into the darkest corners of our lives. It is this Light shining in the darkness we will celebrate at our Christingle Service on Zoom tomorrow, 13th December, at 5pm. So whether you are 9 or 90 do join me as we worship the Light who shines in the darkness and who will not be overcome by it and why not witness to this truth by inviting your friends and family to join us on Zoom or in church?

With love

Vicki

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CHRISTINGLE SERVICE

Sunday 13th December 5pm ON ZOOM ID 214-843-1624 Password Radyr 2019

Please join with an orange, a red ribbon to tie around it, one small candle, 4 cocktail sticks and some sweets or dried fruit to push onto each stick during the service

THE CHRISTMAS STORY (Crib Service) ON ZOOM ID 214-843-1624 Password Radyr 2019)

Christmas Eve 4pm led by the Parish of Radyr Sunday Clubs

Christmas Eve 5pm led by the Parish of St Fagans Junior Church

Children do join dressed up as characters from the nativity angels, shepherds, wise men

Parish of Radyr COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Friday 18th December at 6pm ON ZOOM ID 214-843-1624 Password Radyr 2019

A service of readings and Christmas Carols

Parish of St Fagans CAROL SERVICE ON ZOOM

Sunday 20th at 5pm ID 214-843-1624 Password Radyr 2019

**A SERVICE OF READINGS AND CHRISTMAS MUSIC IN CHRIST CHURCH RADYR
on Saturday 19th at 6pm and Sunday 20th at 6pm**

CHRISTMAS EVE IN CHURCH

The First Eucharist of Christmas 9pm St John's (Danescourt)

Midnight Mass 11.30pm Christ Church and St Mary's (St Fagans)

CHRISTMAS DAY IN CHURCH

8am and 11am Christ Church

9.15am St John's

8am and 10.30am St Mary's

Please feel free to attend any of these services wherever you “normally” worship