



**ST NINIAN'S UNITING  
CHURCH  
WEDNESDAY WORDS  
11 December 2024  
Scripture Luke 3:1-6**



### **Prayer**

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

### **Thanks & praise prayer points**

- For the coming of Christmas and our preparations for the day.
- For our local church community, which share community and friendship.
- For pets and animals which have formed part of our life, for the joy and friendship they have brought us.
- For music which lifts our soul, bring us joy, and reminds us of your creation.

### **Forgiveness prayer points**

- For not being prepared spiritually for Christmas and the coming of the Christ Child.
- For being focused on people with power, not those with greatest need.
- For failing to help my neighbour or those in need, where a simple gesture can bring change.

### **Words of Grace**

Our God desires us to live lives of peace and, because we have been forgiven our sins, we can live such lives with the help of God. Alleluia! Amen.

### **Reading: Luke 3:1-6**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler 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 region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

## **Reflection**

Today's reading from Luke begins with a listing of seven high ranking leaders - political and religion - helping to locate the passage in a specific time and context. Emperor Tiberius, Governor Pontius Pilate, Herod and his brother Philip, Lysanias and the High Priests Annas and Caiaphas are all significant and important persons ('movers and shakers'). You can read about them in any history book on the first century.

But Luke takes us away from these leaders into 'the wilderness', where John son of Zachariah – who we know as John the Baptist - is waiting. The Word of God is not delivered to the powerful leaders, but to a prophet on the fringes, out in the desert. A place full of danger – with heat, robbers and wild beasts.

Luke's message is clear. God's message of salvation will not be delivered through the powerful. Rather, the message about where to find that hope will come from unexpected places. It will come from a prophet in desert. In the same way the birth of Jesus Christ – son of God, truly human and divine – to poor parents in a remote village Israel is unexpected.

In our world today, we can also look at the wrong places for hope. We can look to our political leaders here in Canberra, to financial markets, to Hollywood or Netflix. But we will not find hope or salvation from them.

Rather, we need to look to the unlikely places. To places in the wilderness. Places like a small rural church, where people faithfully gather to proclaim Jesus. To hospitals and hospices, where doctors, nurses and chaplains minister to bring healing and peace. To refuges and shelters, where housing and safety are provided.

It is easy to have the wrong focus, to look for the wrong things. Even the manger scene for the birth of Christ can be given an image of such importance that we forget Jesus' birth took place in a small village, with few people paying any attention.

And the message that John the Baptist shares is tumultuous. Even the very landscape in which the people were living, the valleys and the hills, needed to change to prepare the Way for God. Everything must change.

John's prophecy was about hope and about transformation. His message is that 'all people will see God's salvation', not just a selected few.

And from the obscurity of the desert, John's lone voice challenge the Empire, the authorities, and the temple system. Turn back to God, look for hope beyond the rugged terrain of your existence. There is something more, something better is on the way.

And as well as changes to the physical landscape, John the Baptist's message is also a vision of a monumental changes in the landscape of our minds. Making straight the pathway is also about correcting crooked thinking.

Each of us know how difficult it can be change any one of our behaviours, to turn in a new direction. John's message of baptism for the repentance of sin (delivered in the rest of Chapter 3) was about taking that first step in a different direction. A new direction in the hope and belief that God's peace and God's love will break into our existence, helping us to seek, know and experience the coming salvation of God through Jesus Christ.

We live in a world with as much turmoil as the time in which John wandered in the wilderness inviting people to repent. Just as much now as then, we can look with hope to God to bring a about a transformation in our personal lives and in our life as a common humanity. The coming of Jesus and the promise that he will come again helps us to see beyond our current experiences and be transformed by the hope and peace love of our God.

### **Intercessory Prayers**

Loving God, we thank you for preparing John the Baptist to be your faithful prophet. May we also cherish and nurture prophets in our community.

We pray for all leaders in politics, business, religion and education. May they recognise their need for you and bold enough to trust in the adequacy of Jesus Christ alone.

We pray for all forgotten and marginalised people, the unjustly treated and those falsely accused. May they receive the justice of Christ and the dignity due to all the children of God.

We pray for those who injure others without realising it, and those who take a perverse pleasure in making others miserable. May they become more aware, repent, and learn the gentle strength of Jesus.

We pray for the lonely, sick and dispirited. May they be comforted and experience the healing of your Spirit.

We pray for the church everywhere, and for our congregation. May we allow the Holy Spirit, though comfort or discomfort, help us to complete the work of Christ begun in us.

God of faithfulness, your promised can always be trusted. Help us to trust you now and always, that as we try to love both neighbours and enemies, and do good to both the just and unjust, we may be emboldened and guided by your Holy Spirit. Though Jesus Christ the Advent hope.

Amen

**Song : He's Among Us (The Porter's Gate)**



You'll find Me with the broken and the weak  
In the spaces in between  
You'll hear My voice cry out with those who weep  
Only if you're listening

Whatever you do for the least of these  
You do it unto Me

You'll find Me with the ones without a voice  
The forgotten and ignored  
My blessing is on those who love the poor  
Will you open up the door?

Whatever you do for the least of these  
You do it unto Me

Whatever you do for the least of these  
You do it unto Me

Hallelujah, hallelujah  
He is among us, He is among us  
By this the world will know the Father's love  
We will know the Father's love