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**Worship Sheet for Sunday 13th December 2020, the Third Sunday in Advent**

**Compiled by Rev Sue Baker-Maher**

**Call to worship:** As we worship perhaps separately, let’s remember we who are scattered are together in Spirit, part of God family. Let us pray that the presence of that Spirit draws near, flickering like a candle flame, as we await again for the hope that is Christ. Amen.

**Hymn: STF 213 – Oh Little Town of Bethlehem** (for those access to You Tube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAU5Xg-o-eM>)

**Circuit Liturgy for Advent** **3** ~ **Candle of Hope**

Reader 1: God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.

Reader 2: Soak me in your laundry and I’ll come out clean, scrub me and I’ll have a snow-white life.

Reader 3: Today we light this third candle and think about what we need to say sorry to God for.



**Candle is Lit**

Reader 2: Lord, we are part of a world that needs to change. Help us to live differently.

**ALL: Give us hope.**

Reader 1: To all those who really want to change, Jesus says: “Come with me, I love you, your sins are forgiven. Don’t be afraid.” **Amen.**

**Hymn:** StF 216 Silent Night - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PNzMy3lzAA

**Prayers:** Creator, King, our God and our Father, take our solitude, take our impatience, take our fears, take our uncertainties. Take our confessions and show us where we can share in bringing good news to the oppressed, in comforting the broken hearted and being a witness to your unfailing acceptance and love. **Let’s say the Lord’s Prayer**

**Readings**: **Isaiah 61:1- 4, 8-11 and John 1:6-8, 19-28**

**Reflections on the readings.** I wonder how often we are asked questions such as that asked of John the Baptist – Who are you? In the Gospel passage, it doesn’t sound a very friendly question. For those of us old enough to remember the ‘local bobby’ it’s more ‘allo allo allo – what do we have here then’? How often are we called to identify ourselves in this way - called to account for who we are, as justification for what we are doing? The priests and the Levites seem to know something important – that a messiah, an anointed one is predicted, expected. They have heard that this man John is doing something that a messiah would do. So is this the messiah? They set off to find out. Expecting a fraud, not a real witness.

One of the main themes of John’s gospel concerns the identity of Jesus. Sometimes the Gospel reads like a dramatic ‘who dun it’? with hints and clues planted throughout the text – small details that can often go unnoticed. We are told that this inquisition of John, took place in Bethany. The name, Bethany, means place of hospitality or welcome. We feel welcome when we feel we are accepted, particularly when we feel accepted for who we really are. And when this happens there is the potential of real encounter, real relationship.

Bethany of course is also the home of Lazarus, who Jesus raises from the dead – another sign or clue pointing to who Jesus really is. So, at a place which will become the scene of a very significant encounter, where we will see Jesus being who Jesus really is, we find John being cross questioned about who he is and what he is doing. And what is John doing other then testifying to the Light that was there in the beginning. Reminding people and helping them to prepare for the arrival of Jesus – the Light that is God breaking into the world. John evokes a previous messenger, Isaiah, to help explain. You may remember the hymn ‘God’s spirit is in my heart... He sent me to give the Good News to the poor, tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more, tell blind people that they can see…. Go tell everyone!’ John’s call makes people curious. It chimes with many, drawing them to be baptised. Others are threatened, particularly those in authority; they come to check him out and challenge him – who he is to be doing what he is doing?

There are many barriers to us sharing our faith – too numerous to list but the lack of knowledge of Christianity generally, people being suspicious of church and religion as well consumerism are a few examples. But I also wonder whether the answer to the question asked of John, strikes a more personal note? Who are we to be telling of the pending arrival of Jesus? Perhaps we don’t feel worthy, perhaps we don’t feel ‘good’ enough, perhaps we are unsure of our faith, perhaps we feel we can’t muster the clever arguments and evidence needed in the face of the Christmas story, which must sound pretty incredible on the face of it to people today. Let’s be aware of what stops us pointing to the Light and bring this to God. Let’s take confidence in who we are. Adopted children of God, who came in the form of a weak and helpless baby. We are called only to witness to our experience, our real experience however shaky, however ill equipped we might feel. We are called to share what is real to us. God will do the rest.

**Our prayers for the world:** StF 706 and on You Tube: Light of the world https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBKzCpkXJR4

Take a few moments of quiet reflection, perhaps with some background music and/or a candle. Are there things to thank God for? Take a moment to consider people that you have heard about or spoken with over the week. Who needs your prayer? Who might you be in touch with, in the week ahead, perhaps by phone or as you write your Christmas cards? What is your prayer for them? Might there by a word of encouragement you can give, or comfort? Is there a story or testimony you could share of about your faith, perhaps times when you struggled or perhaps that you are still struggling – a problem shared….? What world situations are you aware of, people in other less well-off countries. What is your prayer for them?

*Creator God. We pray that you would fill us with your love, so that we would long to share it so that others will come to know you. Bring transformation in people’s hearts so they would have eyes to see and ears to hear what we have to share. Amen.*

**Hymn: 169 STF – God rest ye Merry Gentlemen** **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQw83\_zpbJg&pbjreload=101**

**Blessing**

May the promise and the hope of the Advent season fill our hearts and minds with the true and everlasting Light of world, Christ. May we find ways to overcome barriers to being that Light for our friends, our neighbours, our families, people we meet, in the weeks ahead.

Amen.