

Study

Read Luke 3:1-9

How does the life of John the Baptist challenge you?

How are you preparing for the King?

In what ways do we restrict the message of salvation?

Read 1 Cor 1:26-31

What is God saying to you through this passage?

How will you respond?

Living it out (Application):

In what ways will you be a signpost to Jesus this week?

Coming Up at St Mark's

The **Alpha Course** beginning on 20th Jan from 10-11.30am (running fortnightly)

Trip to the Holy Land. March 2015. Details are in the narthex or on the website. Please let the office know if you are interested.

Rowan Williams. Saturday 1st Feb (morning). Harrogate School of Theology and Mission. John's gospel revisited.



prayer

Please pray for...

Give thanks for the brilliant **Over 60s lunches** at St Mark's – for those who put it on as a signpost to Jesus, and new members of the team.

Give thanks for our **choir** – after a great social this weekend!

Please pray for the new roles – **Kingdom Life Director, Information and Communications Officer, Resource Coordinator, Pastoral Director, Prayer Coordinator.** Pray for those applying.

Pray for the people of **South Sudan** and **Syria**, and for peace negotiations to bring an end to the conflict.

Pray for **Sam Lee**, that the work done to put a previous operation right would be successful.

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

Pray for the HG1000 campaign as we try to get the message out in the Harrogate area – visit the webpage at <https://my.compassionuk.org/app/Harrogate>

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.
Thank you for your prayers for this church community!



St Mark's

Inspiring each other to
love and follow Jesus Christ...
everywhere in everything

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 19th January 2014

Worship/reflection:

Who has been a formative person in your life and why?

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” John 10:10. Spend time praising God and giving thanks to him for the fullness of life.

Luke 3: 1-9. What kind of signpost?

Do you remember what you were doing on Friday November 22nd 1963? If you are of a certain age everyone remembers where you were the day President Kennedy was shot.

Or what were you doing on 13th July 1985 – It was Live Aid.

Do you remember where you were the Day Mandela was released from prison? (Feb 11th 1990).

These are moments in history where the world seems to stop, moments that define an era. They live long in the memory, they become so important that we remember where we were and what we were doing when history was being created. Each event points to a specific time in which something historic took place.

In just the same way, Luke wants us to know that the Word of God came to John at a specific moment in time: “It was in the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius ...” And this is important, because it makes it perfectly clear the gospel of Jesus Christ is no fairy tale, myth or legend. Luke, the historian, is setting his account at a particular moment in time, amid the historical figures of the day.

This is the third time Luke locates the drama he narrates amid the major actors of the world stage. The first time was the birth of John the Baptist “in the days of King Herod of Judah” (1:5). Next is birth of Jesus that takes place under the rule of Emperor Augustus and while Quirinius was governor of Syria (2:1-3). And now, as John is about to start his ministry, Luke again places his story amid historical figures.

Why does Luke do this? By comparison these events are about as small and insignificant as you can imagine. But Luke is saying they deserve to be placed alongside the world-shaking people and events of the day. “Really,” Luke dares his readers to ask, what does the birth of two small children or the ministry of a rather odd prophet have to do with kings, emperors, and governors?” And his reply: “Everything!”

This is the way it is with the Gospel – it seems so small it’s easy to miss. In these opening 3 chapters, Luke is continually emphasising the outrageous claim that God is at work in the weak, the small, the insignificant and the unimportant. God chooses and unmarried teenage peasant girl to give birth to the Son of God. God chooses and old barren woman (who would have been despised, rejected and considered of no value by her community because of her lack of children) to give birth to a prophet. Here in chapter 3 God chooses an unknown, unimportant rather wild and eccentric recluse to prepare the world for the coming of His Son.

God’s mercy, love and salvation comes disguised in human weakness and vulnerability. And, to be quite honest, God’s not done yet. God continues to work through unlikely characters today – unpopular teens and out-of-work adults and corporate executives and stay-at-home parents and underpaid secretaries and night-shift workers and police officers – to announce the news of God’s redemption. It’s a promise, as I said, that’s easy to miss, but when we hear it – and even more – when we see it taking place in our own lives – it changes us along with the world.

‘God choose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are’ 1 Cor 1:27-28

God comes at a particular moment in time, often when we least expect it, in the places we never imagine. The ‘word’ of God came to a nobody named John in that nowhere place – the wilderness/desert. Luke is drawing to attention and highlighting in big bold letters this was far more important than all the people and events of the day. There is almost hint of irony here. It is as if Luke is saying you remember these 7 great men.... these men of power and influence, you remember the rulers of our day (the celebrities the people of recognition, the people that matter), the emperors, kings and governors – well there was also this bloke named John. John who??? A no-body!

Luke is going further than merely locating John amid the VIPs of the day; he’s also setting him against them. Previously Luke mentioned one or two people of power when locating the births of John and Jesus at a particular point in history. In this passage he mentions seven men of authority, and as you read the list aloud it sounds like a roll call of the great and the good the powerhouses of the day. It is as if the political, economic, and religious powers and principalities of this world are marshalling their troops for war.

‘In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, 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...’

And against all these stands little, weak, insignificant John, son of Zechariah. Well, not quite: against all these stands little, weak, insignificant John, son of Zechariah...and the Word of the Lord. The word, as Isaiah said, that fills valleys and levels mountains, that straightens that which is crooked and smoothes over the rough places, all in order to build a direct path by which God can bring us God’s love and mercy. A highway fit for the arrival of the King.

Did you notice there were seven men that are representing the collective power of the world and against them all stands just one little, weak unknown man - John. Armed only with God’s word, preparing the people for the coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and pointing people to the saviour who was soon to come.

Interesting isn’t it that by the time Luke’s was being read, none of those seven rulers were still alive, yet we are still telling the story of John and of Jesus, the one John heralds. And today these proud and powerful men are just footnotes to the story of Christ, the one sent to reveal the salvation of God to “all flesh.”

I wonder how many of us feel overlooked, insignificant, and small, surrounded by insurmountable problems, people, and challenges. Maybe it’s not an Emperor that makes life miserable; maybe it’s just a difficult colleague or unhappy marriage. Maybe it’s not a Roman procurator that oppresses, but instead a struggle with addiction to alcohol, drugs, or porn. Maybe it’s not governors that threaten to destroy, but instead feeling lost at school or work with no real friends. Maybe it’s not rulers and priests that overwhelm, but instead a struggle with depression, grief or loneliness.

Whatever it maybe, Luke shares the gospel promise that these things, too, will pass; that in the end they will be but a difficult and distant memory; that over time they will become mere footnotes to a larger, grander, and more beautiful story of acceptance, grace, mercy, and life. The waiting can be hard, which is why Luke reminds his community and ours of this promise that is so easy to overlook but big enough to save and audacious enough to transform. Transform you, me, each other, even the world we live in.