

Repent and be ready

Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 3:7-18

Large numbers of people respond to John's call, but they might be taken aback by his reaction. He doesn't thank them for coming, or offer an encouraging and reassuring welcome. In fact, he does the opposite and we can perhaps imagine their feelings on being called a "brood of vipers!" and told that just being born into Abraham's family doesn't give them an automatic right to salvation.

How would we feel if we heard John tell us that, just because we might attend church and call ourselves Christians, we're not automatically

guaranteed a place in God's kingdom? Surely it would sound very threatening, especially when John goes on to talk about trees that don't bear fruit being cut down and burned. We might ask, with the people on the banks of the Jordan, "What should we do?" and John will give us the answers that he gave them. Be mindful of those in need and share what you have with those who have nothing. Feed the world. Be honest and trustworthy with your belongings and your money. Be content with what you have and don't be constantly complaining and wanting more. Repent and be baptised and then be ready to meet the One who is to come – the One who will demand more of you and offer you a baptism of fire for the salvation of your soul. ☺



St John the Baptist by Rodolfo Morgari

Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

It's dark in the northern hemisphere in December. Here in West Wales it's barely light before eight and dark before five, and often barely light when it's cloudy or raining. In the morning, searching for the sheep to check them, I find depressions in the grass with no dew or frost where they've been sleeping, because the frost or dew is on their backs rather

than on the ground. But sheep are hardy creatures and don't mind the cold so long as there's plenty to eat. After checking and feeding them, and letting out and feeding the ducks and hens, my desire to hibernate is strong. So I go back to the fire and with a cup of coffee and a book.

In these short days and long nights of winter, I remind myself that the One who is in the manger is also the One for whom "darkness is as light," as the psalmist says (139:12). ☺

“If Christ is to come more fully into our lives this Christmas, if God is to become really incarnate for us, then fire will have to be present in our prayer... Ours is a great responsibility not to waste this Advent time.”

Edward Hays (1931-2016), author and priest

Lord Jesus, help us to live honestly, showing generosity and love towards others. Let us never be complacent in our faith, but always alert, open to receiving your spirit and ready to do your will in our lives. Amen.

Advent Part 3 – Cranham, a village in Gloucestershire

by Julian Smith

When Ralph Vaughan Williams was commissioning music for *The English Hymnal*, he turned to his close friend Gustav Holst. At the time Holst was living in Cranham and he gave the village's name to the tune he composed for Christina Rossetti's poem "In the Bleak Midwinter". Although it's firmly lodged in the lists of the nation's favourites, it's not a comfortable or comforting carol. Holst's

music captures the mood of the poem so perfectly that it is almost impossible to separate the words and music.

The carol begins in a winter of Dickensian proportions. What follows is a meditation on the Christmas story and is full of contrasts; the divine – heaven, the worship of the cherubim and the presence of angels – with the earthly – a stable, a mother's milk and human love. The poem is bleak and the tune plaintive, but it seems to suit the British temperament perfectly. ☺