

The focus is Jesus.

John the Baptist is a truly remarkable character and he has a strong and convincing world view.

By world view I mean the understanding he has of God, life, the Universe and everything.

He believes there is one God and this God is the creator of everything.

He believes that God has chosen the Israelites to be the nation through whom his love and salvation will be shared with all nations. God's love is for all nations.

He knows that Israel has slipped badly in its relationship with God. The people live sinful lives. The religious leaders lead hypocritical lives.

John believes that God is faithful and he knows that the people are not.

John believes that God will send the Messiah and that his job is to prepare the way, to turn the hearts of the people back to God to be ready for the Messiah who is coming right NOW.

In order for the people to be ready, John has a ministry of calling people to repent and be baptised so that they can enter the coming kingdom of the Messiah who is coming right now.

However, there is one thing John doesn't know.

He doesn't know who the Messiah is.

God has given John a promise that he will know the Messiah by seeing the Spirit descend upon him. I don't know how John got

this promise. It may have been a dream, or a vision, or one of those jumps in thinking when reading the bible.

Imagine John reading the Old Testament about the occasion the Spirit of God fell upon King Saul, or Samson, or Gideon and before he knows it the words have formed in his mind...."the one you see the Spirit fall upon is my Messiah". That's one way God reveals things to us...through reading his word and our minds and the Spirit.

John already knows Jesus, they are related but John doesn't know that he is preparing the way for the Messiah who is his cousin!!!

³²Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'

John has a strong world view and powerful ministry and at Jesus baptism has the ground shaking moment of realizing - it's Jesus.

Now, instead of preparing the way generally for the Messiah he points the way to Jesus.

³⁵The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

You can see more of John's world view on display in the sentence.

The Lamb was the animal that was sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins. By describing Jesus as the Lamb of God, he is not giving him a royal, powerful title, but one that recalls the Passover and sacrifice.

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Two of John's own disciples follow Jesus and ask where he is staying and go with him. John is beginning to fade out of the picture. In chapter 3 of the gospel John says.

²⁹ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less."

It's really quite easy to forget the main thing. Like it or not, the church is an institution. It's a historic body with traditions of liturgy and music and how ministry is organised. We own historic buildings. Bishop Stephen sits in the house of Lords because we are the established church. A church might get a reputation for its choir and choral work or youth work or social action. It's not difficult to get absorbed in some aspect of "the church" or "the faith" and forget our focus should always be Jesus Christ. Like John our job is to point the way to him on the back of the revelation of who he is AND knowing him ourselves.

It would be very easy during 2020 to get distracted from this primary purpose. I'm busy writing the Transforming Trinity booklet about developing the church buildings and before long I will want to share that with each of you and talk about funding and our plans for the building.

I want all of that work and conversation and fund raising and activity to only ever be one step away from our main purpose.

In the booklet I'm writing I quote a verse from 1 Peter 2:9 *you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

John the Baptist would like that! Our purpose is praising Jesus who calls us into his wonderful light.

John's disciples followed Jesus and almost immediately told others about whom they had found. They trusted John's word about who Jesus was and shared it with others, which normally is an excuse to preach about evangelism.

Katherine and I attended this church (Picture – All Saints Anchorsholme) in Cleverley's and the Vicar there preached about evangelism very regularly. It was always awkward. One cannot fault his passion for Jesus but I was always left with a sinking feeling that I was supposed to be telling people about Jesus and I wasn't and I was failing. I think this scripture helps.

Andrew was a disciple of John and followed Jesus. Andrew told his brother about Jesus.

In the next passage, Philip is called to follow Jesus. Philip goes to his friend Nathaniel and tells him.

Unless you are called to be an evangelist then the chances are the most obvious and natural thing in the world is to share your faith in Jesus with people who you know so well you can talk to them about anything.

In the first weeks of this year our attention has been drawn to who we are in Christ and now directly towards Christ. This pattern will continue; discovering more of who you are in the light of who Jesus is. The more you understand of yourself in relationship to Jesus, the simpler it becomes to speak of Jesus from your own life experiences.

When we share communion, Jesus is the focus. Our Eucharistic prayers are Trinitarian, (listen out for that) but Jesus is the focus.

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The liturgy continues making clear that we are invited to share in the life of Christ as one people, joined in love and witnessing to the grace of God in Jesus.

At the end of the liturgy are these words...

Send us out in the power of the Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

We carry on where Jesus left off, declaring that the Kingdom of God is near because Jesus is near. In his name we offer ourselves to those we meet. Our words and actions speaking of Jesus Christ.

I would want every activity and action to be one step away from Jesus. Should you ever be asked about what you do and why you do it, you could answer. 'I guess I do things this way because of my faith in Jesus Christ' but before you panic thinking how awkward that would be Andrew told his brother and Philip told his friend.

You have to choose how you speak to someone depending upon how well you know them.

Today though I think the question for us is, has anything else taken His place?

(There followed a time of silence to reflect on this last question and then a prayer acknowledging that we do (often) let our focus be somewhere else and asking for the grace to keep Jesus front and centre)