**Advent 3**

The Birth of John the Baptist Luke 1:57-80

Having told us of the announcements of the births of these two boys and linked them together through the meeting up of the two mothers-to-be, Luke leads us into events around the first birth, that of John.

In this passage we learn about the birth and naming of John, we hear his father’s poetic prophecy of the coming days and we are told of his early life.

Luke 1: 57-66 John’s birth

* What was the local reaction to Elizabeth finally giving birth? vs 58
* What was the significance of circumcision on the eighth day, vs 59? Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12; Philippians 3:3-7
* What was the disagreement about the boy’s naming and how was it solved?
* What does John mean?
* What happened when Zechariah wrote that the boy’s name would be John? vs 64
* What do you think caused the neighbourhood to ‘buzz’? vss 65-66
* How did the friends and family interpret what had happened? vs 66

Luke 1: 67-79 Zechariah’s song

This song (canticle) is known as the Benedictus after the first sentence in Latin, *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israe*l and is used by various churches in worship (e.g. in Anglican Morning Worship).

* How did Zechariah know the things about which he sang ? vs 67

Luke 1: 68-75

* What would you say was the basic attitude of these verses?
* What is the main topic of these verses?
* To which people did this song initially apply?
* What is the significance of the ‘horn’ of salvation?
* What would indicate that he is referring to the coming of the Messiah?
* What two reasons are given for the Lord bringing salvation to his people – one past and one future?
* Looking back, how do Micah 7:20,   
  Psalm 105:8-9 and Genesis 22:16-18   
  throw light on the meaning?
* How do Ephesians 4:24 and Hebrews 9:14 help us see its relevance?
* What would have made this song popular with Jews at that time?
* Would the Jews have looked for a political or spiritual fulfilment of this prophecy?

Luke 1:76-79

Zechariah turns from his thoughts on the coming Messiah to the role his son would play. You can sense the paternal pride in what he said.

* What is the difference between what John would be called and what Jesus would be called? Vss 32 & 76
* How would people come to know of salvation, vs 77, and how do Matthew 1:21 and Mark 1:4 relate to this?
* Can you explain the metaphor or picture being used in vss 78-79 and how may Malachi 4:2, Psalm 107:14 and Acts 26:18 help to understand it?
* You might reflect on the times ‘mercy’ is used in this song and think through what it means there.

Luke 1:80

* What do we learn of John’s early life?
* Compare this with Luke 2:40