

## Are our churches now closed?

Although current government guidelines advise that communal worship can take place, many parishes have decided not to take risks and hold services where 30 or so people may be gathering. So, with a heavy heart, there won't be any communal worship in our four churches until we feel it is safe to open up again. We know that so many people miss not just our Sunday and other services, but the community activities which up until last March were taking place in abundance. Our bishops have given us their full permission to take this course of action though they hope we will offer ongoing online opportunities for worship.

So, our weekly Sunday You Tube services will continue. The link is on the benefice Facebook page on Saturday evening and on our website.

Mel will offer a mid-week You Tube service on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays of each month.

Here are our online addresses:

Benefice Facebook Page: @thePaxtonsBenefice

Website: [www.thepaxtonsbefice.org](http://www.thepaxtonsbefice.org)

Anita Bailey sends a link out for Mel's services by email on Tuesday evening, and on Saturday evening she sends a link for the Sunday You Tube service along with the latest edition of Keeping in Touch.

If you know someone who might like to receive these emails, please do let Anita know: [ajlbailey@aol.com](mailto:ajlbailey@aol.com). She has a long list of folks connected to our four churches but is always happy to add some more!

Printed copies of Keeping in Touch can also be hand delivered.

Annette pops up from time to time on the benefice Facebook page with some thoughts and prayers.

DAILY HOPE is a free telephone service which offers daily hymns, prayers and reflections. The number to call is: 0800 804 8044. Why not try it out?

Please do ring Annette if you would just like a chat – 01480 211048.

Leave a message if she is out – it is important to talk sometimes.

- Southoe and Diddington churches are open for personal prayer.
- Great Paxton will be open for personal prayer on Sundays from 10.00am to 4.00pm.
- Do observe social distancing and use hand gel upon entering.

TAKE CARE EVERYONE AND LET'S HOPE FOR  
BETTER TIMES SOON

## The Benefice of the Paxtons with Diddington and Southoe

January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

“Keeping in Touch” Edition 42

Annette writes:

Hello everyone. How have the first few days of 2021 been for you?

Many of us will have been staying mostly at home but we probably all know of people who are working very hard as key workers, often in very stressful situations. Often when I write, we are not too sure what restrictions may or may not be on the horizon, but we are now in our third national lockdown and things will be staying like this for some time. Infections rates have meant our hospitals are in many cases struggling to cope and staff are getting exhausted. I'm sure we are all praying for those in the caring professions who are wondering how much longer they can cope with the pressures of Covid.

Our brothers and sisters in the USA also found themselves the centre of world-wide attention on Wednesday when the Capitol building was stormed by thousands of pro Trump supporters. Many of us will have watched in dismay as the story unfolded on our screens, but thankfully now in a few days' time there will be a new administration and the chance for a new start for this divided nation.

It was only a few days ago that we were celebrating Christ's birth but now our gospel reading for the day propels us forward to Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan. I will reflect some more on that event on page three but there is one thing that gives me great heart from the narrative as we find it in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is the powerful way in which the voice of God was heard at Jesus' baptism as he came up out of the water:

*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

Those words must have resounded deep in Jesus' heart as he commenced his public ministry and encountered so many trials and challenges in the next three years. He was surrounded with complex politics, poverty, suffering and greed but didn't shy away from immersing himself in raw human life.

Our churches are now facing several more weeks of being closed for public worship, our bishops strongly suggesting that we take the greatest care and do not create opportunities where a lot of people gather together. But we can carry within our hearts and minds those great words of affirmation which sustained Jesus in our day to day living, whether we are facing exhausting challenges or staying quietly at home.

*You are my son/daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased*

Do keep well, safe and hopeful, with love from Annette

[canonannettereed@gmail.com](mailto:canonannettereed@gmail.com)

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## The Baptism of Christ.

### The Old Testament Reading: Genesis 1 v 1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

### The Gospel Reading: Matthew 3 v 13-17.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."



### The Collect for The Baptism of Christ

Eternal Father, who at the baptism of Jesus revealed him to be your Son, anointing him with the Holy Spirit: grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit, that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

## Annette offers a short bible study on our gospel passage.

### Just who was John the Baptist? How does he fit into the story?

John the Baptist preached in the wilderness, telling people to repent of their sins and to be baptised as a sign of their repentance. They needed to prepare for a greater person coming after him. There are many similarities between John and the Old Testament prophet Elijah. Both of them spent time in the wilderness and wore simple clothing. Both were outspoken and often offended people as they preached God's message as they believed they received it.

These similarities give an important clue about the identity of Jesus. In Jewish belief Elijah was expected to return to earth for a second time to announce the coming of the Messiah. So, if John was Elijah returned to earth - **ie a second Elijah** - what does this say about Jesus?

### What sort of baptism did John offer and was it a new idea?

The baptism carried out by John was full immersion in the River Jordan. Baptism was not a new idea. There is evidence that a monastic group called the Essenes used baptism at their monastery at Qumran as a type of ritual cleansing. Qumran was in the Jordan wilderness, near the area where John was probably preaching, and some Bible scholars think that John had connections with this community.

### Why does Matthew say John was hesitant to baptise Jesus?

Matthew records that when Jesus asked John to baptise him, John was reluctant to do so. This could be because Jesus is the greater person John has been telling people about, so John does not feel worthy to baptise him.

### What happened that was so special at Jesus' baptism?

At the moment that Jesus was baptised there were significant events:

Heaven was opened

God's spirit descended on Jesus

God's voice was heard, and a dove alighted on Jesus

A dove, often used as a symbol of peace, represents God's spirit descending on Jesus. This gives Jesus power to equip him for his ministry.

God's voice is heard saying "**This is my own dear son with whom I am pleased.**" This confirms Jesus' identity as the Son of God. The crowds of people standing on the banks of the River Jordan will be asking in earnest: "Is this the greater person John has been telling us about?"

**God of Love, help me to believe you love me intensely. And believing, help me to learn to sense your love. And sensing, help me to identify signs and symbols of your presence, for I know you surround me at all times. Amen**