



**Hymn 454 – Watch on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7ufzIB2rec>**

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| <p>1 Where shall my wondering soul begin?<br/>How shall I all to heaven aspire?<br/>A slave redeemed from death and sin,<br/>a brand plucked from eternal fire,<br/>how shall I equal triumphs raise,<br/>or sing my great deliverer's praise?</p> <p>2 O how shall I the goodness tell,<br/>Father, which thou to me hast showed?<br/>That I, a child of wrath and hell,<br/>I should be called a child of God,<br/>should know, should feel my sins forgiven,<br/>blest with this antepast of heaven!</p> <p>3 And shall I slight my Father's love?<br/>Or basely fear his gifts to own?<br/>Unmindful of his favours prove?</p> | <p>4 Outcasts, to you, yes, you, I call,<br/>Christ's love invites you to believe!<br/>He spreads his arms to embrace you all;<br/>sinners alone his grace receive:<br/>no need of him the righteous have;<br/>he came the lost to seek and save.</p> <p>5 Come, O my guilty kindred, come,<br/>groaning beneath your load of sin!<br/>His bleeding heart shall make you room,<br/>his open side shall take you in;<br/>he calls you now, invites you home:<br/>Come, O my guilty kindred, come!</p> |
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Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

**Psalm 40**

I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry.  
 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire;  
 he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.  
 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.  
 Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him.  
 Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,  
 who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.  
 Many, Lord my God, are the wonders you have done,  
 the things you planned for us. None can compare with you;  
 were I to speak and tell of your deeds, they would be too many to declare.  
 Sacrifice and offering you did not desire – but my ears you have opened; –  
 burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.  
 Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come – it is written about me in the scroll.  
 I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.'  
 I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, Lord, as you know.  
 I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help.  
 I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness from the great assembly.  
 Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord; may your love and faithfulness always protect me.  
 For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see.  
 They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.  
 Be pleased to save me, Lord; come quickly, Lord, to help me.  
 May all who want to take my life be put to shame and confusion;  
 may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace.  
 May those who say to me, 'Aha! Aha!' be appalled at their own shame.  
 But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;  
 may those who long for your saving help always say, 'The Lord is great!'  
 But as for me, I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me.  
 You are my help and my deliverer; you are my God, do not delay.

## Prayer

Lord God Almighty,  
We come seeking you,  
Confused by the world we are part of,  
Easily distracted by sounds and shadows that conflict.

In our muddles you reach out to us,  
You pull us back to our feet,  
Help us walk the right path  
lead us with outstretched arm and clear voice.

Christ, incarnate God with us,  
In this season of Epiphany  
May the light of star and sages' vision  
Burn the shadows away from our view of your Glory.

Spirit of revelation and of power,  
Open our minds to receive you  
As today and every day  
You come to us in word and sign, with truth.

Amen.

## Reading – John 1:29-42

### John testifies about Jesus

The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.' Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.'" I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One.'

### John's disciples follow Jesus

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!' When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?' They said, 'Rabbi' (which means 'Teacher'), 'where are you staying?' 'Come,' he replied, 'and you will see.' So, they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter).

## Sermon – Lighting What? (John 1:33)

*And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit."*

If you attended a carol service at Christmas time, or worshiped on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, there is a good chance you will have listened to, or read, the prologue to St John's Gospel. The mighty prologue sketches out the essence of Jesus Christ in fourteen verses.

Then we are into John the Baptist, his testimony, his denial that he was the Messiah leading into today's passage in which what his message is set out. That, in turn, provokes the response of the first of his own disciples switching their allegiance to follow Jesus.

John (the Baptist) gives us an important steer around a pitfall in witnessing for Christ today.

I remember when I was working at home during my year between school and college. I set myself up with a little workshop in an outhouse. In those days before good LED lighting it was difficult to avoid casting shadows and I rigged up complicated systems to do the best I could. I improvised with a plough light from the back of a tractor as a spotlight.

I also had one of those torches that had two bulbs the one on the front worked as a conventional torch with a projected beam while the bulb on top cast its light all round to light a bigger space. Both had their place.

Whether using a beam to highlight something in particular, or lighting a bigger space, I quickly understood that the best way to get most out of a limited light source was to work by the light but not get in the way of the light.

The point of the Baptist's ministry was to direct others towards a long prophesied Messiah so that the Messiah could invite them to join him. That is what started to occur as was recorded in the second part of the reading.

John fulfilled his task faithfully by not standing in his own light; by not casting shadows from himself across the path that he wanted people to take. Thus he was the genuine help to Jesus' ministry that he was called to be.

Let us look at three important points:

- Recognising
- Knowing
- Connecting

### **Recognising**

Twice John said, 'I did not know him'.

John almost certainly did know Jesus the person; their mothers were cousins and they were not far distant in age.

John did know his own purpose; he was called to Baptise people and bring them to repentance as a preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

What John did not know was that Jesus, his cousin, was the very Messiah he was called to prepare for – or, he only became aware when he Baptised Jesus and he heard the voice of God say so, and saw the Spirit descend on him, like a dove.

The world, in the context of the Gospel, is a collective noun used to describe humanity in hostility to God; people whose lives are criss-crossed by the shadows of normal worldly living, pressures and sin.

John said that this Jesus was the person he had always identified as greater than he was, but who had always been in the world (taking us back to the prologue's opening and the 'Word in the beginning').

John was helpful. John exposed people to God as he called them to repentance but then sprang out of the light so they saw no shadows, but only Jesus.

We who are Christians, the organisation of the Church and even the greatest of all preachers and teachers are not, and can never be, the atoning Christ. If we dare to project shadows of ourselves by getting in the way of the light, that light is likely to depict our sinful humanity; our witness diminishes and we help neither the cause of the Gospel, nor the needs of the very people we should serve.

It is not enough to be silently humble – we must be ready to point actively and say, there is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin or the world'.

## **Knowing**

Tragically, Church history is beset by cults and sects that have turned out not to be genuine. In the recent past that I can remember, each time such a group is exposed it is quickly obvious that those leading are not genuine but in it for themselves.

The same is true of abusers and manipulators of people of all types. Often their modus operandi is of mystery and of shadows.

Andrew heard what John was saying and he knew to look beyond the speaker to the subject of the speech. He understood that when John stood back and encouraged changed allegiance the step was to be welcomed and embraced. So sure was he that Andrew said 'we have found the Messiah'.

The Holy Spirit works like that when no one else is casting shadows. Words strike home, images are clear and affirmation both deliberate and definite. Andrew knew, he told his brother and in so doing affirmed the Baptist's Ministry in a way that John himself could not without the risk of casting shadows.

In your life, you may well have met someone who helped you enormously in your faith. If you have known or know one such, it is likely that they were more interested in you than themselves, more inclined to talk about God than themselves, and probably listened more than they spoke. You may have described them as humble

They are light shiners not shadow casters. They help you to come to know God and your own faith.

## **Connecting**

The Holy Spirit was always anticipated. The Holy Spirit was always active; in the Old Testament an outpouring was expected and in the New Testament we see it at work within and through Jesus himself. The Holy Spirit came on the Church at Pentecost.

Those who are filled with the Spirit get to know how it works and are never surprised when surprising things happen.

In a congregation at worship it is likely that there will be people who are full of the Spirit alongside those who have not experienced its power.

John Baptised with water. The repentance that went with the baptism was a way of helping the believer to see God, without shadows being cast across the view. The assurance that the Spirit gives is a great enhancement. When we repent we are taking an initiative and the extent to which we are honest is driven by our capacity for self-awareness on one hand, and our sense of helplessness on the other hand.

When the Holy Spirit comes, amongst many gifts, he enables a new sense of assurance that sins are forgiven, there are no more shadows and nothing and no-one can get in the way of the light of the glorious Gospel of hope.

It is as though we have moved from a set of rigged up lamps to the best of modern LED technology – no shadows, no corners, and perfect clarity of view.

That is as good as it can get while we live as mortals. We can easily sense test how well developed we are by following these steps. Have we recognised Christ beyond the shadows so often cast by his human servants? Have we got to know God through Christ?

Are we connected with the Spirit giving us certainty in our Redemption because of nothing other than the life, death and resurrection of Jesus himself?

If yes, how blessed we are.

If no, move to a different place and try to see round the shadows cast by whatever it is that is in the light.

**Amen.**

**Hymn 250 Watch on You tube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVJ3G7L\\_yjU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVJ3G7L_yjU)**

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| 1 | Jesus calls us: o'er the tumult<br>of our life's wild restless sea<br>day by day his voice is sounding,<br>saying, 'Christian, follow me;' |   | from each idol that would keep us,<br>saying, 'Christian, love me more.'   |
| 2 | As of old apostles heard it<br>by the Galilean lake,<br>turned from home and toil and kindred,<br>leaving all for his dear sake.           | 4 | In our joys and in our sorrows,<br>days of toil and hours of ease,<br>still he calls, in cares and pleasures,<br>'Christian, love me more than these.' |
| 3 | Jesus calls us from the worship<br>of the vain world's golden store,   | 5 | Jesus calls us: by thy mercies,<br>Saviour, may we hear thy call,<br>give our hearts to thine obedience,<br>serve and love thee best of all.           |

Cecil Frances Alexander (née Humphreys) (1818-1895)

**Prayer**

O God,  
you spoke your word  
and revealed your good news in Jesus, the Christ.  
Fill all creation with that word again,  
so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations  
and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples,  
we may become one living body,  
your incarnate presence on the earth. Amen.

Sisters and brothers,  
let us lift our hearts in faith  
to the one who hears all prayers  
and holds close all those in need.

*Prayers for those you know and love or who are in need, concluding with:*

Holy God, you gather the whole universe  
into your radiant presence  
and continually reveal your Son as our Saviour.  
Bring healing to all wounds,  
make whole all that is broken,  
speak truth to all illusion,  
and shed light in every darkness,  
that all creation will see your glory and know your Christ. Amen.

Steadfast God,  
you have enriched and enlightened us  
by the revelation of your eternal Christ.  
Comfort us in our mortality  
and strengthen us  
to walk the path of your desire,  
so that by word and deed we may manifest  
the gracious news of your faithfulness and love. Amen.

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**Hymn 347 Watch on You tube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh\\_ept-Js](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh_ept-Js)**

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| 1 | Crown him with many crowns,<br>the Lamb upon his throne.<br>Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns<br>all music but its own.<br>Awake, my soul, and sing<br>of him who died for thee,<br>and hail him as thy matchless King<br>through all eternity.          |   | His glories now we sing,<br>who died, and rose on high;<br>who died, eternal life to bring,<br>and lives, that death may die.  |
| 2 | Crown him the Son of God,<br>before the worlds began;<br>and ye who tread where he has trod<br>crown him the Son of Man,<br>who every grief has known<br>that wrings the human breast,<br>and takes and bears them for his own<br>that all in him may rest. | 4 | Crown him the Lord of peace,<br>whose power a sceptre sways<br>from pole to pole, that wars may cease,<br>absorbed in prayer and praise.<br>His reign shall know no end,<br>and round his pierced feet<br>fair flowers of paradise extend<br>their fragrance ever sweet. |
| 3 | Crown him the Lord of life,<br>who triumphed o'er the grave,<br>who rose victorious in the strife<br>for those he came to save.   | 5 | Crown him the Lord of love;<br>behold his hands and side-<br>rich wounds, yet visible above,<br>in beauty glorified.<br>All hail, Redeemer, hail!<br>for thou hast died for me;<br>thy praise and glory shall not fail<br>throughout eternity.                           |

Matthew Bridges (1800-94) and Godfrey Thring (1823-1903)

**Prayer**

Come, O Christ the Light, and lead us. Come, O Christ the Life and revive us. Come, O Christ the Physician and heal us. Come, O Christ, the Fire Divine, and kindle in our hearts the flame of your love. Amen.

*Dimitri of Rostov (1651-1709)*