

Bennochy church: 7th January 2018

They had waited a long time for this moment. It seemed as if it would never come. It is hard to wait with a heavy weight of expectation on your shoulders for an event that would change history. I am not talking about Raith Rovers winning the league cup in 1994, or even Andy Murray winning Wimbledon in 2013, Britain's first win in the men's singles since Fred Perry's win, in 1936.

Think about this, in our own life time's, history is littered with events that have changed the world, from world wars, moon landings, the fall of the iron curtain, the words of Martin Luther King, the actions of Nelson Mandela, the internet and the rise of social media. Over the years, history can point to many great events, but not that one.

In their recent years, history had been cruel to the people of Israel. They were a nation under the domination of the Roman Empire. The great promises of God seem to have got lost in the midst of captivity. Where was God? Had he abandoned his people? Who still believed in the hope of the great prophecies? Who was still watching for signs from God? Who was still listening for the voice that would shout, and would declare, that the Kingdom of God was close at hand? I wonder if these are the same kind of questions the church asks of itself, today?

The writer of Mark's gospel wants to make it absolutely clear, that what happens next, is the work of God, promised long ago. The history of God's people might seem disjointed and long drawn out, but there is sequence of events ordained by God. Mark says, what happens next, is no coincidence.

We don't like waiting. Time moves slowly. Patience is tested. A few hours, we can cope with. A few years. What about half a century? I suspect that many had already given up. God was long gone. His miracles, just stories from history. Yet, there seems to have been a faithful remnant, who held on. Maybe by the skin of their teeth! Their fingernails clinging on to the ancient promises of God. That was their hope. But they were there. Waiting and watching, for what God was going to do next.

When that moment comes, you hope it will be dramatic. Earth shattering. History changing. What does the story say, the strangest of individuals, a man named John, appears in the desert. Would we be disappointed? After all these years, would we say, is that it? God shatters history in the form of a man, and, in the act of baptism. Did many look at John, and just walk on by?

We should not be surprised at these events. In the background are the birth stories of John and Jesus. If any of the people of

1st century Palestine, were caught by surprise in the actions of John, we have no excuse. The parallel stories of the births of John and Jesus can be read in Luke's gospel. Elizabeth and Mary, women who should never have given birth. The appearance of angels who say, 'do not fear'. Did you know, that in the bible it says 366 times, do not be afraid, it is all the work of God. And in the mouths of Mary and Zechariah, great words of prophecy from the Old Testament, are uttered as words of faith, praise and blessing . In other words it is all part of God's one story, ancient and today. The interaction of these two men, and their births, ushering in the Kingdom of God.

Many will have forgotten this story. Lying dormant. Gathering dust in the history of the people of God. Then comes the ultimate wake up call. A great reminder of the long time promises of God.

"as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way. A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

If faith lies dormant, and we all go through those wilderness times, and we need God's wakeup call in our lives. Well, here it is! If we have been baptised, but wonder what it is actually all about. Then hear the Good News of the one who comes, and who baptises with the Holy Spirit of God.

This is when the gospel starts. This is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

I believe society wants to begin at the wrong place. It wants to begin at the beginning! In others words, the birth of Jesus, but then leave the story there! Jesus the child, forever in the stable.

The coming of John introduces a far more important story. A story we need to journey with. We need to leave the stable. We need to stand by the Jordan river, hear the words of John and witness the baptism of Jesus. We need to walk where Jesus walked and witness the miracle and the mystery of who he was. We need to leave the stable and travel to Jerusalem. For Immanuel, *God with us*, only becomes Messiah, the one promised long ago, when love is demonstrated, not just in birth, but also in death.

They had waited a long time for this moment. It seemed as if it would never come. It came in a voice. Are we listening? It came in a voice shouting from the wilderness, *"turn from our sins and be baptised"*. In response, what will we do? It came in a cry. God is here.

May we follow him, always, and seek first his Kingdom. Amen.