

The Christian Community

Movement for Religious Renewal

Hollywood Congregation

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Newsletter for the week of St John's Day, 24 June

We start with a contribution about the Festival of John the Baptist by Luke Barr: Often we have the hottest days of the year when St. John's Tide comes round. The days are warm and glorious. The Spring is fully gone and Summer shows itself in its powerful splendour. It is almost overwhelming. The warmth draws us out; we want to soak it up and be in it. We feel more relaxed perhaps. Wearing shorts, sandals and loose shirt is a quite different experience to donning a suit and tie! We feel more outside ourselves. The heat at Midday is attractive -but ultimately, too much. And soon, we feel our shoulders or face becoming too hot. And we retire indoors or into the shade to re-establish our right body warmth. John the Baptist: was he like that Midday heat? Did we feel drawn to him, and yet burned by his intensity at the same time? Was this what humanity needed? The descriptions of John the Baptist in the Gospels are brief and intense. It must have been extraordinary to know this man! You didn't simply meet him. You didn't just make his acquaintance. He burned -and you were under his spell. Austere like the desert, generous like the sun. You wanted to run a mile if you saw him, but more than this, you wanted to sit at his feet, and worship him. God in camel's hair; a ragged Jehovah in the desert devastation. Like moths to the flame, we returned again and again to him. Even the philandering Herod was fascinated by this man, and feared his godliness. "He was a lamp, burning and shining. And for a while, even you were willing to rejoice in this light." (John 5:35). Such are the words attributed by Evangelist John to Jesus concerning Baptist John. John is something like a guru. A personality so charismatic, and yet so exacting. He attracted and repelled us at once. There is something about that charismatic warmth and light that John emanated, like the sun in its ascendancy, that drew people to him. And yet, at some point, the heat of the sun becomes too intense; the heat of John becomes too intense. At the height of his powers, he is taken from the people, it seems without offering resistance. He is arrested, and eventually executed. It is almost as if the sun stops shining -like a momentary eclipse. The birds stop singing, the world becomes dark. Everything feels strange and without orientation. It was at this moment, when the guru-like figure of John disappears, that Jesus emerges, and starts preaching and even baptising. Was he merely continuing the work? Was he filling the abyss left by John's absence in a world bereft of John's light, which felt dark, strange and daunting? Did the people feel like they had lost their head, when John lost his? The emergence of Jesus is actually the end of the external leader, the end of the charismatic spiritual authority. The sun of the old world with its mystery hierophants and sages has gone. John is the last of them. That sun is setting, and we can see the sinking of its glory. Invisibly however, a new day is dawning, a new sun will rise. The sun of the 'Christ in us'. We would no longer need to 'rejoice in the shining of an external lamp' because the light would now be in us. John was like what was called in meditative circles, 'the guardian of the threshold'. He stood at the threshold to another world, and by his moral weight held back those who were not worthy to take one step further toward it. Only after one has learnt from the Guardian of the threshold to encounter one's own authentic being, could one step further. And there one met something greater. It was called the 'greater guardian'. One could also call it the Christ in us. There is still much in our modern world which feels like the old world that John still inhabited. There are abundant Herods, many empires vying for patches of land. There are plenty of John like figures, promising the quick route to heaven on earth, with their own brand of baptism. But John himself announced that that time had come to an end, like the sun that has reached its zenith at this solstice time of year. Reliance on external authority had no spiritual path ahead. It lead to a spiritual desert. John's task -the festival's task -is to remind us that the zenith of the old world has long been reached and cannot continue so. The new world wishes to emerge, the world of 'Christ in us'

Luke Barr

Hollywood

Wednesday 23rd June The Act of Consecration of Man 10.00

St Johns

Wednesday 30th June The Act of Consecration of Man 10.00

Glencraig

Thursday 24th June The Act of Consecration of Man 9.30

Thursday 1st July The Act of Consecration of Man 9.30

Mourne Grange

Saturday 26th June The Act of Consecration of Man 10.15

Friday 2nd July Talk: "Bees of paradise" 16.00

Clanabogan

Sunday 27th June The Act of Consecration of Man 10.30

Saturday 3rd July The Act of Consecration of Man 10.30

The gospel for June 24 is Mark 1: 1-11

This is the beginning of the new word from the realm of the angels, sounding forth through Jesus Christ. Fulfilled is the word of the prophet Isaiah:

Behold, I send my angel before your face.

He is to prepare your way.

Hear the voice of one calling in the loneliness of the human soul

Prepare the way for the Lord within the soul,

Make his paths straight, so that he may find entrance into Man's innermost being!



Thus did John the Baptist appear in the loneliness of the desert. He proclaimed Baptism, the way of a change of heart and mind, for the acknowledgement of sin. And they went out to him from all of Judea and Jerusalem and received baptism from him in the river Jordan and recognized and confessed their failings.

John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist. Fruits and wild honey were his food. And he proclaimed: 'After me comes one who is mightier than I. I am not even worthy to bend down before Him and to undo the straps of His sandals. I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the fire of the Holy Spirit.'

In those days it happened: Jesus of Nazareth came to Galilee, and was baptized in the Jordan by John. And at the same time as he rose up again out of the water, he beheld how the spheres of the heavens were torn open, and the spirit of God descended upon him like a dove.

And a voice sounded from the world of the spirit:

'You are my son, the beloved —in you I am revealed.'

A homily on Mark 1, 1-11

At Christmastime, we awakened into mid-winter darkness. The starlit heavens opened up, and a choir of angels announced the approach of the great Sun-Spirit who was to be born in mankind. Through late winter and spring, we watched him grow as Jesus of Nazareth, teaching and healing. He died. He overcame death. And he appeared to his disciples as they learned to know him in a new way. He united heaven and earth in his Ascension. At Pentecost he sent his Spirit awareness to keep himself alive in human hearts.



Now we stand at the turning point of the year. It is mid-day in the earth's year. And oddly the gospel readings go back to the beginning. The story seems to start over; Jesus is baptized. It is as if the gospel readings would like us to take a closer look, to focus in on something. We see the moment in which Jesus, the man, offers himself. He steps into the streaming, living waters of the Jordan. The heavens are torn open. He sees, he hears. The Father's voice resounds, affirming His Son. The Sun-God himself enters him. He becomes the Christ-bearer.

At midpoint in the year, instead of a choir of angels, one lone human voice, John the Baptist, urges up to offer ourselves, as Jesus did, to the intimate working of Christ in us, through us. Now it is we who are to become Christ-bearers. Now it is we who are to become sons and daughters of the Father.

From now on the outer sunlight will gradually lessen as the days grow shorter. But the Christ-Sun wants to rise within us. He wants to irradiate our being as he once did the man Jesus. He wants us to see and hear, to change. Within us he wants to become the light that always rises.

A prayer for John the Baptist

by Adam Bittleston

Thou herald spirit, by the Father's grace
Abiding witness to the Light of Lights,
Look on our seeking.

All we have done on Earth has left its trace,
And all we say sounds on for spirit ears.
Help at our judging.

Baptizer of the waking soul, lead out
Our lives from barren conflict in the dark
Into Christ's presence.

Let sound the music of thy faithful heart,
Prophet of days to come, for brother man,
Unto Christ's glory.