

## LOCKDOWN DAY 90 – 24 JUNE 2020

Molweni my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Scripture: Luke 1: 57-66, 80

Hymn: *On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry*

Give yourself a pat on the back that with God's help you have made it safely to day 90 of lockdown. We surrender ourselves to God in service and praise. We are reaching the peak of Covid-19 and new infections are spiking. Please be very careful about your health. Wash your hands, wear your masks and maintain social distancing. Please know that there is no shame or stigma should you or someone in your family contract the virus. Allow people to support and pray for you over the phone. Your clergy will not abandon you. This too will pass. God loves you and so do I.

In our church's calendar today, we celebrate the birth of St John the Baptist, six months before the birth of Jesus. He and Jesus were related through their mothers. The work for which John was born, was to be the forerunner of Jesus. Jesus himself said that John is the greatest among those born of women (Mt 11:11). They had a common bond in the **saving purpose** of God. By his preaching of repentance, John attracted many followers, among them several who were to be numbered among Christ's twelve apostles. The coming of Jesus to be baptized by him in the Jordan was the turning-point of his life. Henceforward, as John himself said, 'He must increase but I must decrease.' (John 3:30).

John was born when Zechariah his father and Elizabeth his mother, were both old. Through his birth and mission, the power of God was guiding human history. The angel of the Lord had told Zechariah about the child, "He will be great before the Lord...and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb." I would want us to emphasise this fact to all pregnant parents, that at the moment of conception, God said or says 'yes' to that child, whether the child was planned or not. Even before they were born Jesus and John met. John was so delighted in the presence of Jesus that he leaped for joy while still in his mother's womb.

When John's father spoke, after a long period of speechlessness, he said to the child "You shall be called a prophet of God most high. You shall go ahead of the Lord to prepare His ways before him." (Luke 1:76) Parents, are you exhorting your children to prepare the way of the Lord? It is expected of parents to be the Christian example, to give vision and wise mentorship. Do your children know that you delight in them? Zechariah and Elizabeth knew that John was a **special gift** of God and was destined to fill God's plan. Choose your child's name carefully. When I do Confirmation services, the names of the children interest me. Often their names match the young adult function that they have grown into.

Zechariah was silent and listening in the presence of God. So many of our people, including clergy, are in self isolation at home due to being tested positive for Covid-19. My brothers and sisters, for you it is an opportunity to be **silent and listening** in the presence of God. Put aside all objections and give up resistance. Be enriched by God. Be strong in the Lord. We are praying for your healing.

As God was with John the Baptist, he is with us too. Jesus must increase and we must decrease. We cannot forget that it was John who pointed to Jesus and called him the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29). John knew very well that Jesus was infinitely superior to him, yet, at the insistence of the Lord, John baptised him. John bore witness to Jesus, "I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him...this is he who baptises with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John 1:32-34)

Sadly during lockdown, we are not celebrating the sacrament of baptism, unless it is an emergency. Do we, however, absorb the significance of bringing children for baptism? Spend a moment today to read the Preface to the Baptism service on page 361 of An Anglican Prayer Book and renew your baptismal promises on page 402. The Holy Spirit does come down. You are people with a purpose. John was fully convinced of his mission and was totally committed to it. He knew what his place was and was deeply humble and truthful. I am deeply committed to being your bishop and humbly accept that I am a junior partner in God's mission, as a servant leader and team player.

May all of us be a shining example of humility, simplicity and truthfulness, of courage, conviction and commitment. These are the lessons we should learn from John the Baptist and try to practice in our lives. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight (Luke 3:4). Let us right now recommit ourselves to God's purpose for our lives.

Today, please **reach out** to your godparents and godchildren. Let them know that they are a special gift of God.

For **our prayers**, we use *The Song of Zechariah* on page 46 of An Anglican Prayer Book (or Luke 1:68-79) and the *Veni Creator* on page 392 of An Anglican Prayer Book. We pray for the Finance Minister and ourselves as we listen to the Supplementary Budget Speech today. We pray God's blessing on all medical personnel in our hospitals and clinics. We pray for calm of patients amidst their fears. We pray for comfort for patients dying alone. In this chaotic time, we pray for Funeral Undertakers and their families. We pray the Collect for The Birth of St John the Baptist on page 301 of An APB. Amen

I am, Because we Are, Because God is.....Opening Hearts to Heal God's world. *We never walk alone.*