

**The Community of St Cuthbert:
*Spiritual Growth Group Study Guide***

Nov – Dec 2022



Advent Sessions

These studies were prepared for us by Daleen Bakker, a Cranmer ordinand who is on placement with us in 2022-23.

They allow you – if you wish – to follow our lectionary Advent readings through the latter part of the year (and the beginning of the new church year, which starts every Advent), though you can do them at any speed. If you decide to follow the Sunday sermons at St Nics, then the dates work out like this:

Week of:

21 – 25 Nov	Luke 23:33-43 = study
28 Nov – 2 Dec	Matt 24:36-44 = prayer and praise
5 – 9 Dec	Matt 3:1-12 = study
12 – 16 Dec	Matt 11:2-11 = acts of service
19 – 23 Dec	Matt 1:18-end = study

Over Christmas and New Year: group social time for those who would like it

Richard Briggs, Prior, CSC

Week One – Luke 23:33-43

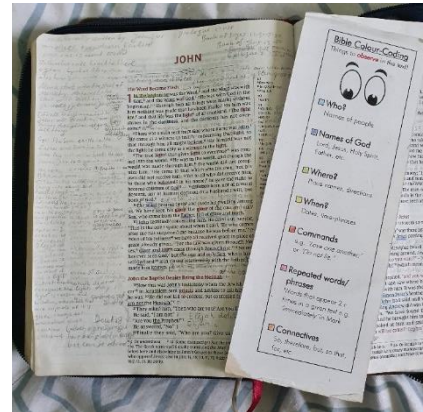
Bible Study

This week we read about the crucifixion according to Luke. You may be very familiar with the passage. Take a moment to pray that God might reveal himself through it and that we may grow deeper in awe and love for Christ.

Observation

Read Luke 23:33-43

I am a huge fan of ‘colour-coding’ (highlighting key words or themes in colour in the text). Besides just being fun, it helps to pay more attention to certain patterns and recurring words in the text.



Spend a few moments looking at the text individually and then discuss with each other: Are there recurring themes? Who are the main players in this passage?

Count how often there is a reference to Jesus' kingship (including the term 'Messiah' which means 'anointed' and implies kingship as well). In what different contexts are different people using the term?

Count how many times the word 'save' occurs. Who is using the term and what do they imply with it?

Interpretation

Read the text again, paying attention to all the things you have noticed.

- Having noted that kingship is a recurring theme in this passage, what do we think that might mean?
- What do we make of the mocking references to salvation? What would be the connection between the kingship theme and these references?
- If time allows, have another look over the passage. Are there any other things that strike you?

Application

- What are the things in this text or said in your discussing that struck you most? What might we learn from it?
- Does this change / highlight something of your understanding of what is happening at the cross?

Do take time to pray in response to these things. If it is helpful, there is a beautiful Taizé chant with the words of the criminal:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3M9bX4lgzCO>

Week Two – Matthew 24:36-44

Prayer and Praise

Whenever we go online, or watch TV, or open a newspaper, we are met by an endless flow of hardships from all over the world. This week let us spend some time talking and praying about them.

- If you think about the news headlines of the past weeks, what are the things that have touched you most? What are the things you are worried about most?
- How are people around you dealing with the instability and hardships in the news or in their lives? What about yourself?

Read Matt 24:36-44

One of my teachers at Cranmer said: ‘sometimes when reading or discussing things that are really hard and that are stirring up all kinds of emotions, I will take a step back and say out loud “Jesus is Lord”.’

- What does it mean to believe that Jesus is Lord in relation to the things we have been talking about?
- Last week we made the connection between Jesus’ kingship and his crucifixion. What does it mean to hold together Christ’s suffering and his kingship in relation to today’s hardships?
- What could it mean for us to have an attitude of watchfulness amidst our present troubles?

Take time to pray together, for specific situations people have mentioned as well as for local and global issues. Pray for the church to be watchful and faithful.

Some suggestions for worship:

Paul Baloshe ‘Open the eyes of my heart’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXxSEQBOWEk>

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNeP7bGaggg>

Week Three – Matthew 3:1-12

Bible Study

This week the lectionary gives us a passage that is a key in connecting the Old Testament with the New Testament.

A prayer from St. John the Baptist day:

ALMIGHTY God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance: Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Observation

Read Matthew 3:1-12

Also: Read Isaiah 40:1-14, and Malachi 3:1-5

- What are the key themes in these passages?
- What are the things Isaiah and Malachi are saying about God's coming? And what is John saying about Jesus' coming?
- Who are the key players in this passage? What do we know about them?

Interpretation

A few things commentators say that might be helpful to think about the meaning of John's baptism:

First of all, although we find many types of ritual washings in the Old Testament, nowhere do we read about baptism in the same way as we find it here. What seems to get closest to John's baptism is 'proselyte baptism'. This is not recorded in Scripture, but the rabbis describe that if a non-Jewish person wants to become a proselyte (i.e. a practiser of the Jewish faith), this person undergoes a baptism. That baptism symbolises the parting of the old ways. It is a one-off baptism.



Icon of John the Baptist from: <https://iconreader.wordpress.com/2010/08/29/icons-of-john-the-baptist-john-the-forerunner/>

Fun fact: John's style of clothes isn't completely random, rather it is in the fashion of Elijah (see 2 Kings 1:8)

- What other connections can you think off with regard to baptism? Think of Noah's story, or Israel crossing the Red Sea and the river Jordan. What do you make of John's baptism in relation to those?
- How does all of this tie in with John's message that 'the kingdom of heaven has come near'?

Application

- Last week we read about watchfulness with regard of Jesus' second coming. What might we learn from John about how we prepare the way for Christ?

Week Four – Matthew 11:2-11

Acts of Service

This week we reflect on our Christian calling to outreach, mission and service.

Read Matthew 11:2-11

Here Jesus gives us a summary of what he is doing. If you turn back a page to Matthew 10:6-8 you read that Jesus sends out the 12 with a very similar message. In what ways does this set us an example of what we should be doing as Christians?

Last week we read about John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. Is it possible that he has started doubting whether Jesus is the Messiah since he (John) is now in prison? What role does doubt have in our faith and how does it affect our mission?

The report Jesus gives contains familiar phrases for those who are familiar with OT prophecies. It echoes part of Isaiah 35:6, 42:7, 61:1 for example. Note that many of these passages talk of 'setting the prisoners free', but Jesus seems deliberately (?) to omit that part – which would have been relevant to John's imprisonment. Do you think Jesus does this for a reason and if so why? How should we respond when God does not do what we expect or want him to?

Talk with each other about the things you expect from God, and what God might be calling you to. Discerning what God is calling us to is often not straight forward. There is great value in being part of a group where we can share situations to discern together whether God is saying something or whether it is our own voice or someone else's. Do pray with each other.

Week Five – Matthew 1:18-end

Bible Study

*Christ born for us,
Son of God, given for us,
help us to know you,
to worship and to serve you.
Amen.*

Read Matthew 1:18-end

Let us read our text carefully and try to imagine what is going on. We will read it verse by verse in **'Lectio Divina'** style, which is a traditional way of reading Scripture slowly allowing the Spirit to enlighten us. Read a verse out loud, then hold the silence for a while to pray with it and imagine it. Then share some thoughts with each other and move on to the next verse. If it helps to have some questions to think about as you go through the passage:

18 'she was found to be pregnant' – How do you expect people reacted to this?

19 How do you imagine Joseph reacted to all of this?

20 Has God deliberately not told Joseph this before? Why let him suffer the doubt first?

21 How might Joseph imagine that the baby Mary is carrying might save God's people, including himself, from their sins?

22, 23 How might Joseph think about the unborn baby as 'God with us'?

24 What do you imagine the conversation with Mary—after this dream—was like?

Some music if it helps to reflect on this:

Mary Did You Know – Pentatonix:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZVjXsf_7aI