

### Jesus' Second Cousin

Jesus' Mother Mary had a cousin Elisabeth and Elisabeth had a baby who was six months older than Jesus. This little boy was, therefore, Jesus' second cousin and his birthday comes six months before Christmas on 24<sup>th</sup> June – which is near enough mid-Summer's Day, just as Jesus' birthday comes in the middle of Winter.

Elisabeth's son was called John and we call him the Baptist because he baptised thousands of people and he was the first person to do so. John baptised people in the River Jordan and Halling Church is next to the River Medway. I guess that is why our Church is dedicated to St John the Baptist.

John's task was to tell people to get ready. *The Kingdom of God is at hand.* God's Kingdom is a kingdom of justice. That's good news. There's far too much injustice in the world. I should think all of us have, at some time or another, been victims of injustice. It smarts. Even young children become indignant and make a fuss when something bad happens. They cry, *It's not fair!* As you grow older, there are far worse injustices than getting a smaller piece of cake than your sister. There are really serious injustices in the world and we cry out for justice. God's justice is good news. There is a God. He is in charge. He is just. We shall all get what we deserve.

But, hang on a minute. As well as being the victims of injustice, haven't we all also been perpetrators of injustice? Haven't we all sometimes treated other people unfairly? Can any of us honestly say that we have always treated other people the way we ought to have treated them? If you think you have always treated everybody else right, may I suggest that your standards are too low?

We cry out for justice, for people to get what they deserve, but would we really want to get what we deserve? If we had to give account to God for our lives today, could we honestly say that we deserve a place in heaven?

So how do you prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God? The sword of justice cuts both ways! John says that the answer is to repent and to be baptised. People ask him what *repent* means. It's simple enough. If you've got two coats, he says, give one to someone who hasn't got a coat. If you've got food, share it with someone who's hungry. If you're in business, don't cheat your customers, your workers or your employers. If you're in a position of power, don't bully people weaker than you. Being baptised in the River Jordan was a sign that you meant it. Your sins were washed away. You made a new beginning with God.

Thousands of people went to hear John and were baptised. He told them, however, that someone else was coming, much more important than he, someone who would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Of course, John meant Jesus. Jesus came to John on the banks of the River Jordan and insisted on Himself being baptised by John. When Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit was seen to come upon Him in the form of a dove and the voice of God was heard from heaven acknowledging Jesus as His Son.

Three years later, when Jesus had been crucified and was risen from the dead, before He ascended into Heaven, He told His disciples to tell the whole world about Him, to teach people what He had taught them and to obey His commandments. All those who repented and believed were to be baptised in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. All those who are baptised in His Name are born again, born from above. We make a fresh start. Our sins are washed away. We receive God's Holy Spirit. We pray to God as *Our Father*.

Because Halling Church is dedicated to St John the Baptist, his birthday is special to us in this village. We keep the 24<sup>th</sup> June as our Patronal Festival. This year it falls on a Saturday and we shall be celebrating with a service of Holy Communion at 9.30 am. I hope Halling people will want join us. I wonder if some who don't normally come on a Sunday might think of this as something different which they could try? Maybe see you then.

Roger Knight, Rector of Cuxton and Halling.

