**Sermon 6th December 2020 Advent 2 – Colin Hurford**

Listening to the news the last week I heard two very excited people talking about the future.  The first was a professor specialising in space research talking about a Chinese expedition to the moon which was shortly going to land with rocks from the moon.  The interviewer asked if she was excited about this and she replied “Very excited”.  I can’t say I can get excited about a few rocks but this was her speciality and would add a lot to her knowledge.  The second, as you can guess, was when the announcement was made about the new corona virus vaccination. The one who was being interviewed was, understandably over the moon about it - sorry about that.  And I think we can all share his excitement although I must confess to totally unworthy relief that I will not be the first to receive it.  Why I should be worried?  I don’t know as no one this week will be the first, it has been tested on two or three thousand people already.

Excitement.  Well, nothing like this can compare with the excitement the Jews must have felt when John the Baptist started preaching and baptising.  The Jews hadn’t had a prophet for centuries and now John appears, reminding by the way he dressed of Elijah.  Most Jews believed that Elijah would come back before the Saviour who would restore God’s Kingdom to Israel.  They believed that they, the Jews would really head all the nations of the earth when the Messiah came. Further, John first appeared in the wilderness and again the Jews would be well aware of the prophecy from Isaiah we heard in our first reading, “A voice crying in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord ..Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.”   The huge excitement is shown by the fact that people flocked  from Jerusalem (a days journey) and the whole Judean countryside to be baptised by John.  John must have had a huge influence for we know John’s followers were widespread - in the New Testament as far as Ephesus - over 1,000 miles by land.

As I was thinking about the excitement of all these people flocking to hear John and then the huge crowds excited by Jesus as he preached and healed, I wondered about how much excitement we have about our own Christian faith.   How excited are you, how excited am I about Jesus, about the faith we profess.   And there seem to be two sides to this.  The first is our personal experience of Jesus, or God and the second is the importance of the message we seek to proclaim.

Personal experience.  There have been many times in my life and I hope times in yours when the presence of God or Jesus has been very real - times of prayer or in the services in this or Longden church which have given us the sense even the thrill of knowing we are in the presence of something wonderful.   There have been some outstanding times as well - I’ve mentioned before a service I attended many years ago which lasted three hours and we simply didn’t want it to end so clear was the presence of God among us.  Then there was a time when I received a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit when I couldn’t stop reading the Bible and services came alive in a way they had not done before.  But, of course, you can’t live on a high for long and faith becomes a matter of, dare I say it, plodding along, doing what we  believe to be right but at the same time knowing we are on the right track.  But the realisation that God is there and is deeply concerned with us and all that we do is a background of excitement - we are on the right path.

The second strand for excitement is the Christian message itself.  We really do have the faith that gives meaning to the life of every person on this earth and, in fact, meaning to the whole of creation, moon rocks and stars and galaxies.  Each of us is unique and destined to a resurrection life and if we fail or do wrongs things in this life, our sins are forgiven.  I love the verse from Psalm 103 “As far as the east is from the west so far he removes our sins from us”.

No doubt the crowds which flocked to hear John the Baptist had to return to their normal pattern of life in the towns where they lived - farmers, carpenters, priests, shopkeepers -whatever they had to do - but they had the expectation of something wonderful to come.  So we, as we go about our daily lives we have our faith in Jesus as the background.  Something really to be excited about.