

In a few minutes, we'll be setting off on a sight-seeing tour –
that'll take us through time and space.

But before we depart –
let's meet our two travelling companions.

One is a fiery first-century prophet –
whom we call John the Baptist.

The other is scientific genius who was born in the seventeenth century –
Sir Isaac Newton.

We meet Newton hurrying away from a fruit tree in a state of great excitement.

He's just witnessed an apple fall to the ground – and it's given him a moment of
inspiration ...

Gravity!

Of course, people had known for centuries that things fell to earth – at least things with any
weight did.

So, *this* isn't Newton's insight.

No. – What Newton has realised this morning is that the *same* force is responsible – *both* for
the falling apple – *and* for the movement of the moon and other heavenly bodies.

The one force of gravity – explains things on the earth – and things in the sky.

And what's more – it turns out that gravity is responsible for – the tides on the ocean and a
host of other phenomena besides.

How much *better* to have one explanation for all these different things –
rather than each one needing its own account!

No wonder, Sir Isaac Newton is so happy and animated when we meet him.

Quite unlike our other travelling companion – John the Baptist.

John has had his moments of excitement, of course.

He's been filled with God's Holy Spirit – even from birth.

He's enjoyed a wonderfully successful ministry – baptising people in the river Jordan.

And he's known the joy and privilege of preparing the way for God's own Son – the Messiah –
Jesus Christ ...

or so he'd *thought*.

But when we meet him, he's languishing in Herod's prison – wondering if it's all been
worthwhile.

Is this how it ends?

Has his ministry come to nothing?

Was Jesus *really* the one...?

So, a few hours before we meet him – he'd sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask him:

“Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?”

And – just in the last few minutes – Jesus has sent back a reply:

“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.”

In other words, ...

If you need reassurance that your life has all been worthwhile –

If you want encouragement that your faith hasn't been in vain –

If you need proof that all that you've stood for is true ...

Then I'm *not* going to give you some kind of clever theological argument – instead –

use your eyes –

notice the signs of God at work –

see God's fingerprints all around you.

As we prepare to embark on our sight-seeing journey – in a few moments ...

It seems to me – that we Christian believers –

sometimes feel like John the Baptist.

Rather than being rock-solid in our faith – or growing steadily in our Christian beliefs and commitment –

we have those moments of doubt when we ask:

Am I sure?

It is all really true?

Has my faith been worthwhile?

When that happens – when we start to wobble – we need to do what Jesus encouraged John the Baptist to do –

to use our eyes –

notice signs God at work –

and God fingerprints all around us.

So, let's do that.

Let's set off on our sight-seeing tour – looking for signs of God.

For our first stop – we travel back to the very first moments of the universe – the tiniest fraction of a second after it's beginning.

There we see a quark-gluon plasma filling the rapidly expanding cosmos.

Matter – as know it – has yet to come into existence.

And as we watch – millions – even *billions* of years – speed by –

like a film on hyped-up fast-forward ...

We see the unfolding formation of ...

protons – neutrons – electrons –

atoms and molecules –

eventually stars and galaxies –
finally, planets –
and our own Earth filled with life.

We'd love to stay – staring in wide-eyed wonder at the sheer beauty of it all –
but it's time to journey on.

Now we're in a library somewhere in the Ancient Near East.

It's around the year 600 BC and a scribe is writing the words of a prophet onto a scroll.

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

Say to those who are of a fearful heart,

“Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.”

As he carefully forms each letter – by the light of an oil lamp, the scribe can't possibly imagine
–

that *these* very words – will become part of our Holy Bible –
and will be read by people in Britain – over 2,500 years later!

And that's – in fact – where we'd headed for our next stop.

Present day Britain.

St Albans to be precise.

This very Cathedral.

Pausing here – although we've seen this place many times before –

we take – with new eyes – the sheer magnificence of the building ...

its soaring ceilings and vast columns which have stood sturdily for centuries –

its intricately carved screen above the high altar –

the shrines of Alban and Amphibalus –

the wall paintings and art and music.

But – despite the familiarity – we don't linger for long –

because we're off again –

this time to visit a crowded throng of saints – holy men and women who've
dedicated their lives to God.

There's Mother Teresa – recognisable by her distinctive blue sari.

There's Saint Francis – living among the poorest of the poor.

There's our old friend – Alban – offering to exchange garments with the passing priest – so
that the man of God can escape persecution.

And look!

There are even people from *our* day. – Those who've dedicated *their* lives to serving the
Church and the Christian faith –

a bishop – in a splendid mitre –

a friend – faithful in prayer –

a stranger – working diligently – unseen.

We'd love to stop and listen in to their conversation – but we have one more final stop on our journey.

Yes. — There's one more sight to see –but it's a *different* place for each of us.

For we visit – finally – scenes from *our* own lives –
moments when we have felt a touch of the divine –
times when we've been aware –
of God's blessing and peace –
of God's presence and love.

John the Baptist – in his hour of doubt – was urged by Jesus to –
use his eyes –
notice the signs of God at work –
see God's fingerprints all around him ...

In just the same way –
we – who are so often weak in our faith – have travelled with John to see signs of
God.

But you're probably wondering —
What about our *other* travelling companion?
What about Sir Isaac *Newton*?
What part does *he* play in this journey?

In his discovery of gravity –
Newton found the *one* thing that could explain all kinds of phenomena –
from apples –
to tides –
to the stars.

And we might be tempted to explain everything we've seen on our tour –
each in its own distinct way.

The universe could be the result of random fluctuations in the quantum field.

The words of the Bible could simply be the creative writings of wise poets.

This magnificent Cathedral might just have been built as an expression of local pride.

The commitment of holy people might be nothing more than ordinary human altruism.

And it might be that *our* feelings of the divine are simply the stirrings of an overactive
imagination.

We can find individual explanations for each one of these different these things.

But – inspired by Isaac Newton ...

Is there *one thing* that accounts for them all?

One thing that explains everything that we have seen this morning –
the universe and the Bible –

this magnificent Cathedral –
the lives of holy people – and
our own spiritual experiences?

And might it not be – that –

the explanation – is *God*?

God who creates – and speaks –

and who inspires worship –

and transforms lives – and

who longs to be known by *us*.

Some people seem sure – fixed – dogmatic in their faith.

Nothing ever seems to shake their belief.

But for those of us who doubt – who's faith is sometimes weak and fragile –

we can – with John the Baptist –

consider all that we have seen and heard.

For when we *do* – we will find the fingerprints of God.