

Foreword

written by the Archbishop of Canterbury

The Gospel according to St John is, by common consent, one of the most inexhaustibly fertile biblical texts. Generation after generation, some of the greatest Christian minds have explored their theological commitments through meditation on this book. For myself, the theme that most clearly comes across in its pages is this: we are told right at the start that the eternal Word who becomes flesh in Jesus exists 'in the bosom of the Father'—next to the Father's heart, as some have translated it; and from then on, the gospel relates how by relation with Jesus we may come to see 'where he lives'—like the first apostles—and to make our home there.

But that journey to the Father's heart through Jesus Christ is a journey to and through the cross, where Jesus is lifted up for the world to see and his glory is displayed in the deepest weakness and apparent defeat. The follower of Jesus, called to be where Jesus is, in his glory, walks towards his cross.

Richard Burrige's commentary on St John's Gospel, which is being offered for reflection at the Lambeth Conference 2008, is one of the finest and most accessible of modern studies, looking not at individual verses in isolation but at the narrative pattern of each chapter and of the gospel as a whole. It is designed to help us be drawn into the flow of Jesus' life as St John records it, so that our stories are caught up in that of Our Lord. In the months leading up to Lambeth, I hope that bishops and their spouses will spend time with this commentary (there is a suggested plan for daily reading at the back of the book), and that lay and ordained Anglicans across the world will join them in this study, seeking to share a vision that all may work with and learn from.

I am deeply grateful to Richard Burrige for allowing us to use his work in this way; and also to Gerald West and his group of co-workers for the superb way in which they have laid the foundation for our Bible study together. We are also much indebted to the Bible Reading Fellowship for their partnership in issuing this special edition of the commentary.

May these pages open up for you the Good News of God's living and everlasting Word, made flesh for our life and salvation.