

### **3B Advent sermon notes Revd Lizzie Baughen**

Last week the Archdeacon spoke to us about the Season of Advent and about John the Baptist and he challenged us to find new ways of experiencing Jesus, in what has felt like living in a kind of wilderness over the last few months, and we are building on this theme today.

**This week is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent** which is sometimes known as Gaudete Sunday which means “rejoicing” in Latin.

Hopefully our excitement is beginning to build as Christmas approaches, not because of all the lights and gifts and the food we look forward to, but because it’s a time to rejoice for the Lord is near and his spirit is with us every day even into eternity.

In our readings this week the focus changes away from the first coming of the baby Jesus, that we automatically think of at Christmas, to the reality of his presence with us today, towards how we live in the light of his second coming.

It’s an opportunity to think about the joy we can experience as we live in his kingdom on a daily basis, learning to recognise the spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon each of us, guiding us, speaking to us, and transforming us as he draws us deeper into God’s salvation plan for the world and it’s a time to be thankful.

According to the prophet Isaiah, when Jesus comes as a baby it begins the time of the Lord’s favour when he brings salvation, freedom from the bondage of sin and the assurance of eternal life, and For the Prophet Isaiah, when the Messiah comes it’s time to rejoice, for Righteousness, Salvation, Justice and Praise will rise up everywhere and we will finally know what God is really like.

Isiah is painting us a joyful picture of flourishing and growth, Just as a garden can’t help growing the seed that is in the earth, when Jesus comes the world won’t be able to ignore his righteousness.

This is what Isaiah and all the Prophets longed for, and what John the Baptist was pointing towards as he preached repentance and prepared the way for Jesus.

This is the joy of forgiveness and freedom we can know when we give our lives to Jesus and notice the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our own lives.

This isn’t superficial joy or hyped-up feeling we can produce ourselves

Paul says to the Thessalonians -it’s the gift of deep joy we can know in spite of our circumstances, because the Spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon us and working through us. It’s truly amazing. **His Spirit is uniting us with the wisdom and light of the world- Jesus himself.**

Both the great Prophets, Isaiah and John the Baptist, knew the anointing of the spirit in their lives, it manifested whenever they found themselves unable to stop speaking out, they were full of the spirit and couldn’t help being part of what God was doing as his salvation plan unfolded.

There's no doubt that John the Baptist had a strong sense of self and of his mission- He wasn't the Messiah, so he simply got on with what God required of him, because he understood the implications of his message and he identified with the joy it brings.

He took courage and spoke out, recognising that the words of Isaiah were truly Good news, he would be seeing the lives of the oppressed, the captives and the bereaved changed forever.

If John were alive today and walked down the High Street I'm sure we would all recognise him as someone who stood out, not only because of his strange appearance, but because of his Holy passion and enthusiasm and the same is true for us,

**When we speak the truth about Jesus, it's always noticeable and it's always a Holy moment.**

When I was a curate here one of my lasting memories was 2 years ago when Lynn and I along with some of the teachers and year 6 pupils from the school went into the West end to deliver gifts to the homeless.

We didn't plan where we would go exactly, as we didn't know where we would find people, we simply set out to look around and see who was in need, and as you can imagine it didn't take long for us to find people in almost every shop doorway, and even in tents outside the Tube stations.

As we walked quite a long way that day and as the children gave out their gift bags, they were welcomed by total strangers and it was incredibly moving to watch how it affected everyone involved.

We wanted the children to notice who was around and see the need for themselves. Sometimes the children said a few words but that was all. We didn't prompt them to say anything.

As you can imagine, the circumstances were difficult.

On the one hand it was humbling, and incredibly sad to see just how many homeless people were in such a small geographical area and the enormous need in front of us, but on the other hand all who received the gifts were extremely grateful and often surprised and any reservations we had about the risks involved in doing this were instantly dispelled.

Just a few gifts of hand sanitizer, socks, scarves, and food, just a few words made a big impact not only on the lives of those we met, but for each of us who took part, especially the children who hadn't done anything like this before,

**the joy of being part of what God was doing in those people's lives was tangible.**

At the end of the day, a couple of the girls started singing as we walked past St Pancras station and then others

joined in and their joy was infectious as they rejoiced in the Lord.

Looking back now, it was wonderful to be sharing the real joy of the kingdom of God, of bringing the light of the Holy spirit into the darkness,

and as we think about some of the great Prophets this morning, that day was proof **that anyone can be a Prophet.**

That day the children were the prophets.

They were speaking and living God's truth and will into an everyday situation.

It would have been so easy for the adults to quench the spirit in a situation like that and it's something for us to be aware of, particularly when we are living in such difficult and demanding times.

We can quench the spirit though- Perhaps when we know others are hurting and we are not sure what to say or do- **so we do nothing**, or when we see the enormity of the poverty and suffering so many are facing and don't respond to the prompting of the spirit,

And we can sometimes find our own circumstances or anxieties leave us feeling overwhelmed and imprisoned. We can easily build up walls of unforgiveness that ruin our relationships and forget that Jesus has come to bring us freedom, we always have the Spirit of the Lord to share with others and we can always be prayerful and thankful in all circumstances because he has **anointed us** to be good news to the poor, to give sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free and to bind up the broken hearted.

Perhaps not in hugely dramatic ways, but he is still speaking to us and using us as **his voice**, his hands and his feet. Very often it's in the small ways, when we empathise with what others are going through and speak a word of God's truth or comfort to them, or when we stop our business to make time to listen to someone in need, when we share a burden, or cook a meal.

Advent can be an incredibly busy time especially for families, but every time someone is saved or healed or set free from oppression of some kind we are seeing something more of the future, a little glimpse of heaven **and we can rejoice!**

It's not long till Christmas so, during the rest of advent let's keep on rejoicing, and continue thanking God for his favour for the freedom and peace he brings as we continue to look for new ways of experiencing the Holy spirit in our lives and let's also be praying for his favour to rest on others, especially those who need to know him as their Lord this Christmas.