

Sunday, 5 December 2021 Second Sunday in Advent

Collect

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power
and come among us,
and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness
we are grievously hindered
in running the race that is set before us,
your bountiful grace and mercy
may speedily help and deliver us;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and for ever.

Psalm 75

- 1 We give you thanks, O God, we give you thanks, ♦
for your name is near, as your wonderful deeds declare.
- 2 'I will seize the appointed time; ♦
I, the Lord, will judge with equity.
- 3 'Though the earth reels and all that dwell in her, ♦
it is I that hold her pillars steady.
- 4 'To the boasters I say, "Boast no longer," ♦
and to the wicked, "Do not lift up your horn.
- 5 "'Do not lift up your horn on high; ♦
do not speak with a stiff neck.'"
- 6 For neither from the east nor from the west, ♦
nor yet from the wilderness comes exaltation.
- 7 But God alone is judge; ♦
he puts down one and raises up another.
- 8 For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, ♦
well mixed and full of foaming wine.
- 9 He pours it out for all the wicked of the earth; ♦
they shall drink it, and drain the dregs.
- 10 But I will rejoice for ever ♦
and make music to the God of Jacob.
- 11 All the horns of the wicked will I break, ♦
but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.

Philippians 1.3-11

³ I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Luke 3.1–6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,
'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." '

Reflection from Peter

Today the strange figure of John the Baptist steps into the picture. Parts of his story are so familiar that we easily overlook the strangeness. He arrived in the world as a surprise birth to parents who had long been childless. As a baby and

toddler he must surely have had a surfeit of parental care and affection – not to say smothering. Imagine then the disappointment, the shock and horror when this unexpected gift suddenly goes wild. Imagine the embarrassment for Elizabeth and Zechariah when John, who had already upset them by going off to the wilderness for his gap year with all the other weirdos and fanatics, suddenly reappeared, looking like a street person, wild and unkempt, raving on about repentance. His poor parents must have hoped that he would quickly come to his senses and that they wouldn't be too embarrassed in the meantime. But for us it is not so simple. We too may be embarrassed by the figure of John, but the Church sees the hand of God at work in this weird, uncomfortable prophet. John is the one who prepares the way of the Lord. And just think for a moment what a thankless task that was: he had no idea what was to come; he had a harsh and precarious life; he was executed in a ghastly episode of jealousy and injustice. How is all that a sign of God at work? As we prepare yet again to celebrate the gift of God in Christ at Christmas we may perhaps learn two lessons from John – neither of them easy, but both very important, especially right now. The first is that suffering, injustice and corruption are inevitable parts of life in this world, but, no matter how tough things are, Christ is still our Saviour and with hope and joy we wait, confident that in him there is no suffering, injustice or corruption. And the second is to underline the importance of that central Advent word, “Wait!” We are so often impatient and we need some real patience to turn our waiting into a positive, healthy time of growth. Eager hopefulness turns our waiting into an activity. As we wait and watch and pray we become ever more like the one for whom we wait. John, in his waiting in the wilderness, was conformed to the shape of the Spirit who sent him back to cry, Prepare the way of the Lord.