

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 12 DECEMBER 2021 – 3rd OF ADVENT

COLLECT

O Lord Jesus Christ,
who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you:
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 50: 1-6

- 1 The Lord, the most mighty God, has spoken ♦
and called the world from the rising of the sun to its setting.
- 2 Out of Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth; ♦
our God comes and will not keep silence.
- 3 Consuming fire goes out before him ♦
and a mighty tempest stirs about him.
- 4 He calls the heaven above, ♦
and the earth, that he may judge his people:
- 5 'Gather to me my faithful, ♦
who have sealed my covenant with sacrifice.'
- 6 Let the heavens declare his righteousness, ♦
for God himself is judge.

Philippians 4: 4-7

⁴ Rejoice^[a] in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.^[b] ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Luke 3: 7-18

⁷ John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹ Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" ¹¹ In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." ¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" ¹³ He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,^[a] ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with^[b] the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

A Reflection from Hannah...

How many coats do you have?! Probably more than one... There is a real call to humility in our Gospel reading this week. There is no doubt that John the Baptist caused a stir, and that people (both from within and outside the Jewish community) took his words seriously. His advice is very practical, his words are courageous and blunt, and his call is to transformation- to real change in the way people lived, their attitudes and their priorities.

There are parallels with Christ- as Jane Williams writes:

'We do not know if John was ever tempted to believe that he was more than a forerunner, or whether he was confident in his humility all along. He had reason for confidence: just like Jesus, ancient prophecies were seen to be referring to John; just like Jesus, an angel came to announce the forthcoming arrival. Like Jesus, people flocked to hear John's preaching, and he, too, attracted fascinated and terrified notice from those in power.'

Despite the special circumstances of John's life, he always pointed to Jesus. With humility, he encouraged everyone around him to look for the one who is more powerful, whose sandal straps they were not worthy to untie.

It's been a humbling week for us all. Plan B is coming into effect, and it has been revealed that last year's restrictions were broken in more places than we had perhaps realised, by those who were imploring us to keep them. As the relentless march towards Christmas (and all its emotional

weight!) continues, we once again realise that we, and our plans, are not at the centre of it all. That's why John the Baptist is an excellent Advent companion- in all things he drew people's gaze away from himself and towards something more. He sought, and pointed, to Christ. John didn't always have absolute certainty about the identity of Jesus. You will remember the heart-breaking insight into his own internal wranglings when, sat in prison and awaiting execution, we hear that he sends a message asking 'are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'

We too may feel confused, unsteadied and let-down by the world we greet this Advent, especially as the promise that this Christmas will be better than last seems to be somewhat hollowed out by recent events. We might have big questions that we bring as we gather again to hear the familiar yet dazzling story of Immanuel. But like John, in faith, in doubt, may we too seek Christ and in all our actions, all our words, point to him.