



**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 8 DECEMBER 2024 – Advent 2**

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. Amen.

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.

A reading from the book of Malachi, chapter 3, verses 1-4.

Malachi 3.1-4

The Coming Messenger

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and is introduced in the same way as the first:

The second reading is from Luke, chapter 3, verses 1-6.

and then at the end:

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel. Everywhere except Fitz introduces it with an Acclamation (the blue bit), and then we all use the introduction and ending (the green bit):

Alleluia. **Alleluia.**

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Luke, Chapter 3, verses 1-6.

Glory to you, O Lord

And then at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Luke 3.1-6

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

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, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as 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.

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;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." '

A reflection from Hannah...

Do you feel a sense of urgency during Advent? We can certainly feel very stressed and pressured with getting all the cultural requirements of Christmas ready! There are the presents to be bought, there is feasting to prepare for, multiple parties or drinks or 'Secret Santas' lobbed into the fray, and there is the darker side of it all- the family politics, the grief and longings that this time of year can bring to the fore. And of course, everything has to be done and dealt with by 4pm on Christmas Eve. After that, it's simply too late.

The sense of urgency can help us to understand today's Gospel, but the reason for urgency is much more honest. Christmas preparations as we understand them are just a distraction for us, and, ultimately, they don't matter. They are the rituals we've created, and they often mask the very real problems we face and the existential questions we ask. John the Baptist came to a people on the edge to address the real issues (rather than the distractions); to help them to recalibrate their understanding of God's love; to wake them up from their societal slumber; to invite them to repentance.

Our Gospel reading begins by locating us in history. The people were on the edge because they were living under Roman occupation, 'ruled' by a puppet dynasty (Herod and Philip) and a self-seeking religious elite. They were desperate for something to change, desperate for revolution and liberation, desperate for the story of their people to move into a time of ease and freedom. John the Baptist speaks into that reality, but his answer is not an easy one. His invitation to the Hebrew people to 'repent' would have been hard to hear. Why would *they* need to repent, when they were the oppressed people group? Surely it was the powers and rulers who needed repentance? And even harder to accept was the invitation to baptism. Baptism at that time was what happened to gentiles in order for them to convert to Judaism. So by saying baptism was required, John the Baptist was clearly saying that identity wasn't enough- change was coming, but to their surprise, the change began with them.

And, possibly to our surprise, the invitation is the same for us. We may think we've got our lives sorted, but in the face of multiple crises and the manifold ways in which our world is less than it could be, at Advent we are invited to change. To look to our own hearts first, and to think about how (again and again) we can repent- turn- and find our way home. And there is a sense of urgency to all this- and a cursory glance around and within us is all that is needed to remind us of that. How we long for the Kingdom of God to come near, how we long for justice and mercy, how we long for 'all flesh to see the salvation of God'; but let's not pretend that's going to be an easy ride for any of us! We are all in this together, and change begins in our own hearts.