



This second week in Advent draws us into the possibilities of real peace and our world – God’s Shalom realm. Ironically, there is so much in this time of year that works against a sense of peace – and much of it is the product of misguided faith and exclusivist religion.

What would it mean if we really began to embrace the peace, the mutuality, the community and the enemy-love of the Gospel? These are the very powerful and practical challenges of the Lectionary this week.

May our worship lead us into God’s Shalom and transforms us into agents of Shalom in every moment, every situation and every interaction.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

The First Reading - Isaiah 11: 1-10

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Many ancient prophets foretold the day of the Lord's coming. He will be within the dynasty of Jesse's great son David, and once again there will be peace and harmony. All peoples, and all the natural world too, will be reconciled.

The Psalm - Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19

A prayer for the King to rule wisely and justly, protecting the weak and vulnerable and refreshing the world and the godly who live in it.

The Second Reading - Romans 15: 4-13

Paul quotes the scriptures for evidence that Jesus always considered others before himself. so let all Christians now agree in a common hope, joy, and perseverance.

The Gospel Reading - Matthew 3: 1-12

The last of the old prophets, the one whom Jesus called greatest in his kingdom, was John the Baptist. John like Paul, quotes Isaiah, to explain his function of preparing the way for the Lord's coming.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

<http://bible.oremus.org/?>

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LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE

ADULT: Today - the second Sunday in Advent - we hear about Isaiah's vision of a new and transformed world.

CHILD/YOUTH: A world where all creatures live together in harmony and peace.

ADULT: We wait with hope for this vision to become reality.

CHILD/YOUTH: The God of hope fills us with joy and peace in believing. We light the candle of hope. (*The first purple candle is relit*)

ADULT: We proclaim our belief in God's faithfulness in keeping promises, as we light the candle of peace. (*A second purple candle is lit*)

PRAYER: God of all faithfulness - Isaiah's vision paints a picture of a world
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shaped in accordance with your will and your design. He tells of One so enlightened by your Spirit that he would open eyes and ears and hearts to a new understanding of your will and your design for the world. Isaiah described the one for whom the people waited - the Messiah .

We wait also, but we wait in the joyful knowledge that the Messiah has come in the form of your beloved Son. We wait in faith, praying that through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus - Prince of Peace - will be born anew in our hearts and in our lives. Amen

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

O Lord,

Raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us,
and with great might succour us;

that whereas, through our sins and wickedness,
we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us,
thy bountiful grace and mercy
may speedily help and deliver us;

through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord,
to whom with thee and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, world without end.

Collect of 5th before Advent may be used.

Collect Two

Father in heaven,

who sent your Son to redeem the world
and will send him again to be our judge:

Give us grace so to imitate him
in the humility and purity of his first coming
that when he comes again,

we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

Presider or deacon

As we prepare the way of the Lord, let us offer prayers to God who will
baptize us with
Spirit and fire.

Deacon or other leader

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For the peace of the world, and for our unity in Christ.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For our bishop and all bishops, for the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister

in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For the church throughout the world and the faithful in every place.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For justice, peace, and freedom among peoples of the earth.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For travellers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, and for

those in prison.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For the dying and the dead.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

Joining our voices with St _____ and with all the saints and angels of God, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

O Root of Jesse, who rises as a sign among all peoples, in whose presence rulers stand

silent and nations bow in worship, come and deliver us without delay. Glory to you for

ever.

Amen.

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

P Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

P God of love, you call your people to live in harmony with one another. Where there is discord in your church, restore it to unity and truth. Where there is strife between peoples, bring repentance, reconciliation, and peace. Where we have harmed ourselves through our own sinful action, grant us true repentance and the assurance of forgiveness. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P Lord, you call us to various vocations and responsibilities. Bless our daily work, and inspire us to faithfulness in our callings both great and small. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P Grant peace to regions around the world that are afflicted with warfare (*especially...*). Guard and protect all those who serve the cause of freedom and justice in our armed forces (*especially...*). Strengthen also the families of the soldiers during their difficult time of separation. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P Grant hope to those who are hopeless, and strength to those whose strength is failing. Grant your grace especially to _____, and all who are sick. Lord in your mercy.

C Hear our prayer.

P Prepare our hearts to welcome your Son, as he comes to us through the gifts of bread and wine. That having welcomed Christ, we may declare in word and deed His presence among us. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P We give you thanks for the saints, who through their lives bore witness to you. Keep us in unity of faith with them, that we may share in their eternal joy and with them the salvation you have prepared for all your children. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

C Amen.

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POST COMMUNION

Lord,
here you have nourished us with the food of life.
Through our sharing in this holy sacrament
teach us to judge wisely earthly things
and to yearn for things heavenly.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Father in heaven, who sent your Son to redeem the world and will send him again to be our judge: give us grace so to imitate him in the humility and purity of his first coming that, when he comes again, we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

PRAYERS

God of timeless grace,
you fill us with joyful expectation.
Make us ready for the message that prepares the way,
that with uprightness of heart and holy joy
we may eagerly await the kingdom of your Son, Jesus Christ,
who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

God of hope,
you raised up John the baptizer
as a herald who calls us to conversion.
As we joyfully await the glorious coming of Christ,
we pray to you for the needs of the church and the world.

Intercessions...

Hear our humble prayer
that we may serve you in holiness and faith
and give voice to your presence among us
until the day of the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Labouring God,
with axe and winnowing fork
you clear a holy space
where hurt and destruction have no place,
and a little child holds sway.
Clear our lives of hatred and despair,
sow seeds of joy and peace,

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that shoots of hope may spring forth
and we may live in harmony
with one another. Amen.

Almighty God, purify our hearts and minds, that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again as judge and Saviour we may be ready to receive him, who is our Lord and our God. *Common Worship Shorter Collect*

God of all holiness, your promises stand unshaken through all generations and you lift up all who are burdened and brought low: renew our hope in you, as we wait for the coming in glory of Jesus Christ, our Judge and our Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen. *Methodist Worship*

God of all time and space, who are we, that you should come to us? Yet you have visited your people and redeemed us in your Son. As we prepare to celebrate his birth, make our hearts leap for joy at the sound of your word and move us by your Spirit to bless your wonderful works. We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose day draws near, even your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen. *Methodist Worship*

We are sent In the name of the Father of the Poor; in the name of the Son of Justice; in the name of the Spirit of Love; To live God's promise that transforms and makes us new; to be signs of hope to all who struggle for a new world of justice & peace. **Amen.**

Teach us, O Lord, to love you, to trust you and for ever to praise you. Let us exalt your name both in the day and in the night. Let us serve you both in the house of prayer and in the world about us. Let us ascribe to you with all your saints both wisdom and majesty, both honour and glory, world without end. Amen. *Henry Vaughan, 1621-169*

Our loving Father, we give thanks for your goodness and love; for the joy of home and family, and the companionship of friends and neighbours; for the strength that supports us and the love that surrounds us, both when our joy is complete and when it is touched by pain. We give thanks for your Son Jesus Christ: the glory of his humble birth, the graciousness of his selfless life, the obedience and trust that led him to the cross, and the triumph of his resurrection and ascension. We give thanks for your Holy Spirit at work in your Church and in our hearts, revealing your truth, renewing our lives, and bringing us to your eternal Kingdom. *Alexander Siatwinda, Zambia/Halifax*

O God of all hope, we thank you for your promises which find their fulfilment in your Son. We rejoice in His coming in the flesh and look for His coming in

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glory. By your word, sacraments and Holy Spirit make us ready to receive Christ as our Lord and Saviour, and with thankfulness praise Him, now and for ever. Amen

O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we wait for the coming of your Son; then when He appears, He will not find us sleeping in sin, but active in His service and joyful in His praise, for the glory of your Holy name. Amen

Lord Jesus, redeemer and judge of all people, who came that we might have life eternal, you have taught us that you will come again in great glory to take account of your servants and reward their faithful service; help us to live as people who wait for their master, prepared, engaged in service, and ready for action; that we might not be ashamed before you at your coming so that we might enter into your eternal joy. Amen

Grant, O God, that as we rejoice in the hope of the coming of our Saviour, we too may seek to prepare the way of His coming by demonstrating His love as we care for others. Amen

Christ the Son of Righteousness shine upon you and scatter the darkness from before your path; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit, O Lord, and our minds with your light, our hearts with your love and our souls with your presence. Day by day may we live to your glory and rejoice in your praise; through Christ our Lord. Amen.
Mozarabic Liturgy (seventh century)

BENEDICTION

May the God of all hope fill you with the all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

And may the blessing of God nourish you,
the faithfulness of Jesus sustain you,
and the fruit of the Holy Spirit grow in you.

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

When Light in the Darkness

At this time of year with the cold temperatures, long nights and short days, life

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can seem quite lonely and desolate at times. Advent is a time to reflect on our life and look forward to the coming of Christ, both as infant Messiah and as the returning Lord and King. We're encouraged to ensure Christ is at the centre of our lives, helping us focus on the God who became incarnate so that our lives don't become a desolate wilderness, or a dark and hopeless place where we are trapped by our own humanity. As we open ourselves to Jesus, the light of the world, He releases us into new life and restores those places in our lives that have been marred, or even devastated by the effects of the darkness of the world. As Advent passes into Christmas we look to the light of Christ, who will return in a great blaze of glory to complete that work of restoration, but who first came as a small pinprick of light in a stable in Bethlehem. For some, all they ever see is the pinprick of light at Christmas and for the rest of the year the Christian faith means little to them. For others, the light in the stable at Christmas is the dawning of the realisation of Christ in their lives, lives which continue to be changed, transformed and restored by His incarnation. We are called to point to that light, and reflect its transformation and glory in our lives.

In a world that predominantly only sees the pinprick of light at Christmas it's not surprising that many people are largely indifferent to God and the true meaning of Advent and God's first incarnation in obscurity and His second to come in glory. They believe they have no need of God and don't want to be inconvenienced by Him. And in their self confidence, God becomes remote or absent for them and many go for days without any sense of God in their lives, and certainly no recourse to worship or prayer and communication and communion with Him. It is a situation similar to that which Isaiah found himself in, Israel had become indifferent to God and stagnant in their ways and worship. Isaiah's calling was to prepare the people, through a call to repentance, so that God could break through their indifference and self confidence and become real and relevant to them once again. A message as relevant today as when it was first preached. The root of Jesse, as we looked at last week, will bring hope and revelation. John the Baptist too calls people to repentance and preparation for the coming age for when Christ would break through. His sole mission was to serve God, and he gave all he was and all he had so that others could come to see the Messiah who was shortly to be revealed. He was clear that His role was not to be the light which would break into the world, but to point people to that light.

The Christingle too reminds us of that light which came into the world. The orange represents the world. The gospel writer John reminds us that 'Jesus was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognise Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him'. (Jn 1 v 10 – 11). The red ribbon of the Christingle represents

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the blood of Jesus which was shed for us so that our sins may be forgiven. 'But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from every sin'. (1 Jn 1 v 7). The fruits and sweets on the four skewers represent God's gifts to us, the fruits of the earth and the four seasons. 'As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease'. (Gen 8 v 22). The lighted candle, pushed into the centre of the orange, represents Christ, the light of the world. 'He [Jesus] said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life".' (John 8 v 12).

The coming of Christ at Christmas is an event for the universe. It is an event for history and an event for each of us in our daily lives and the lives of those we touch. At Advent His teaching and His light penetrates the darkness of the Genesis world and our Genesis lives. It invites us to evaluate our lives and transform them in the light of His Advent and Christmas coming, and to point others to that light so that all can be ready and be prepared and so experience the true meaning of His coming. *Rev Dr Sam Cappleman*

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

John the Baptist adopted a very specific lifestyle, and a very public ministry . He was unafraid to point the finger at leaders of the people who let people down and behaved badly. Very forcefully he made his most vehement statements against the spiritual elite. . Everybody had to 'make straight paths for the Lord.' We are tempted sometimes to think that scriptures are directed at people outside the church, to imagine that we are the good ones and that the challenge is to people who are outside the church. The teachings of John the Baptist and Jesus of course, were always strongest to those who were most religious 'you brood of vipers' he said to the professionally religious. His parables taught that the wheat and the weeds were mixed together in the field, the sheep and the goats also shared the same field. Perhaps the greatest challenge from the reading today is to us who think that we are OK.

So we ask ourselves this morning whether we have paths which are suitable for the coming of our Lord this Christmas? Is our religion lifeless and boring? Our religion should be life changing, about a meeting with the living God, that is when it becomes a real faith, not just a set of rules and practices. How many Christians have slipped into a non-threatening cosy religion, like an old pair of slippers which fit us nicely. How easy it is for us to become accustomed to our Christianity, so that the words of Jesus no longer challenge and frighten us.

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Yes, John the Baptist would be speaking to us this morning, us inside church, not those who are in bed sleeping off Saturday night. He would ask us to say how our religion was changing us and making a real difference. If it is not doing this, then sing no more hymns, say no more prayers, God does not desire our religion, he wants so much more.

John the Baptist tells us to make our paths straight. The Kingdom is not a far off event, the kingdom is here and now. It breaks into our lives every day and we do not need to ask when it will come. The kingdom seizes us, embraces us, challenges us, in the ordinary events of life. A sick friend, a discouraged spouse, a troublesome person on the telephone, a demand which is made on us which we think to be unfair. Situations which cause us to question how we will respond. Times when we can perhaps do much good with very little effort. How we react determines and tests our faith and questions our membership of the Kingdom. These are the places where we really show God's loving power coming through in our lives.

It is as we do this of course that we become like John the Baptist in declaring God and proclaiming the coming of our Lord. Our life, our deeds our words, all speaking of the Kingdom of God. It is when we do this that are perhaps the most powerful advertisement for our Lord, in so doing we make straight paths which perhaps allow others to see more easily the living Lord, the worship of whom transcends human religion. *Charles Royden*

Commentary John The Baptist

The Gospels do not offer much biographical detail concerning John the Baptist. Rather, we are given an impression of what John was like, what his preaching was like, and the effect that he had on the people of ancient Israel. The picture we get is of a prophet, i.e. a public preacher with a message from God.

John is portrayed as the fulfilment of prophec (Matt 3.3 citing Isaiah 40.3). Note that this is a reinterpretation of Isaiah 40.3, which in its own context dealt with the return of the people of Israel from exile in Babylon. In Isaiah, the text emphasizes the way that God was preparing for the people to come home to Israel through the wilderness; Matthew's focus is on a person (i.e. John the Baptist) in the wilderness who is preparing the way for the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

John lived a life of asceticism (denial of the flesh/body) in the wilderness (Matt 3.4). In the Jewish tradition the wilderness symbolizes a place of repentance

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and purification (e.g. the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before they were permitted to enter the promised land). In other words, the wilderness symbolizes a place where human beings struggle with the powers that resist God.

John's work consisted of preaching and baptizing (Matt 3.1-2, 5-6). For background to the importance of the river Jordan as a place of cleansing, see the story of Naaman the leper in 2 Kings 5. John's baptism was an innovation: for example, its once and for all character differed from the daily washing for purification that was practiced among the Dead Sea Scrolls community at Qumran.

John's preaching and baptizing focussed on the theme of repentance (Matt 3.1-2, 7-10). Repentance (Greek *metanoia*) is not an instantaneous experience, and it is more than just a matter of emotions, more than just an act of the will: it means turning one's whole life toward God (cf. Joel 2.12-13). According to Matt 3.5, many people responded to John.

John recognized that someone far more powerful than he would come and baptize with the Holy Spirit those he had baptized with water (Matt 3.11-12). The coming of the Holy Spirit was connected with the end of time and the coming of the Messiah, based on Joel 2.28, Isaiah 44.3, Ezekiel 36.26-28.

John the Baptist is an appropriate person to focus on during the season of Advent: during Advent we prepare for the Lord's coming, and of course in the Gospels the story of John the Baptist is all about preparation. But preparation for what ?

John's whole work and his whole ministry was all about getting ready for the Lord's coming.

Of course it is easier to think of the reigning of God as being in some other world - so as not to have to change this world! Matthew used the word Heaven because of a Hebrew reluctance to say the word for God. If the reigning of God was "in Heaven" the urgency of John's preaching would make no sense - nor would the teaching of Jesus! John's urging is that people should, "make the way straight - here and now! Change your attitude - NOW!!" John used words like, "Change your society so that your personal change will make clear your conversion!" John's audience wanted a ritual (bath) and to keep on being selfish - and so he calls them "brood of vipers" and warns of the danger of depending on one's own efforts for salvation (Mt. 3:7).

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John came to baptise so that people would change their attitude and look for the straight path to which Isaiah refers (Is.40:4). The ritual of washing with water alone would not do it. People have to change their attitude and become less selfish and start to live a radical love. John had announced that the Liberator (the Messiah) was near with his shovel ready to separate the wheat from the chaff (Mt.3:12). Wheat is a source of nourishment and is kept for its value. Chaff is no good as food, and has no other use so it gets thrown out. The chaff, it seems, is an image of selfish people empty of love for others. The wheat is an image of people who are devoted to the needs of others.
Charles Royden

LECTIONARY NOTES 3

Isaiah 11:1-10

In the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 11, Verses 1-10, Isaiah shares his prophetic vision, most likely revealed to him in a dream, of the coming of the long awaited messiah, who we as Christians now know to be Jesus, and life in the messianic age when the wait was finally over. We are told of his nature with the Spirit of God resting upon him, that he would be wise, just, righteous, and faithful. In this age there would be peace, an absence of evil, and all would know about God. We are even offered a utopian vision of an upside down inside out world where even different animals are at peace in each other's company, a world of dreams in this age of the messiah.

We could easily be critical of what the followers of Jesus have offered to the world in this age of religious conflict and ideological divisions within churches, making it hard to imagine the utopia that the prophet Isaiah offers us in his imagined age of the messiah. In our own reality it may be easy to overlook the many unimaginable acts inspired by Jesus happening all around us, but they are there if only we are willing to see them.

- Are you convinced that this vision of the coming messiah offered by the prophet Isaiah is Jesus? What would you say to somebody who is doubting that Jesus is really the expected messiah?
- Can you imagine a world without Jesus? How different would the world be now without his coming and is there any evidence of this imagined utopia in reality?

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

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In Psalm 72 the psalmist tells us of King Solomon's desire to be a good and respected leader, and so he asks God to grant him justice and righteousness, the qualities of God that the king most admires and which he hopes to imitate. The king succeeds in his desire and is loved by his people, however instead of being proud of himself for this achievement he acknowledges God as the source of his greatness and that God is much greater than he.

- What are the qualities you most admire about God? Have you ever asked God to help you be a great leader by imitating those qualities? What was the outcome?
- Do you know any great leaders that have acknowledged the role of God in their lives? What qualities do they demonstrate in their leadership?
- In what ways has God helped you in your achievements? In what practical ways do you or can you acknowledge him?

Romans 15:4-13

In the Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 15, Verses 4-13, the great missionary Paul writes to the Christians in Rome in his longest letter yet and perhaps the most influential of them all. In this part of his letter he is encouraging the Christians there to maintain hope in God and not to give up. He's also reminding them of the importance of living in harmony with other Christians and to be welcoming of each other just as Christ first welcomed them, and in so doing reflect positively on the God they all represent, especially to outsiders. Just as in the vision of the prophet Isaiah, all people should praise God and have hope in him, but this can only be possible by how outsiders see Christians behaving especially towards one another.

- As a Christian community and as individual Christians do we actively strive to live in harmony with other Christians and welcoming of them, even if we sometimes disagree with each other or struggle to relate to each other? Do our actions bring harmony or disharmony to the Church?
- In this age of divisions within the Church, in what practical ways can we attempt to bring harmony to the Church as Paul suggests we must do in order to allow outsiders to have hope in our God and praise him?

Matthew 3:1-12

In the Gospel According to Matthew, Chapter 3, Verses 1-12, we are presented with a somewhat eccentric image of a fearless man living rough in

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both his appearance and in his daily sustenance for what he knew was his life's mission, considered to be the fulfilment of a great prophesy from the visions of the prophet Isaiah. This fearless man was of course John the Baptist, and the prophesy, preparing for the coming of God in to the world, the hope and prayer of generations of his stubbornly rebellious and long suffering people, the Israelites. The primary act of preparation for John we are told was the humbling act of the confessing of sins, those thoughts and actions below the expectations God has set for us and with the best intention of no longer doing those things, followed by the cleansing waters of baptism.

Perhaps surprisingly, we are told that John was not impressed when even Pharisees and Sadducees turned up in the crowd seeking baptism, even comparing them to venomous snakes and implying that no good could come of it.

If we read further to the Gospel of John in Chapter 15, Verses 1-11, we find references again to bearing fruit in the parable of the vine and the branches and a more detailed indication of what this could mean. Further in to this chapter we are told by Jesus in very clear and simple terms that the fruit he expects of us is to follow his teachings, just as he himself has done for his Father.

This is not just any love, but a sacrificial love. A love that may be difficult, a love that may seem impossible, a love that we may not even be able to comprehend. It is not the love often shown to us in this world, but the love shown to us by Jesus and ultimately our heavenly Father who sent him to us. As Christians already baptised or those eagerly awaiting to be baptised, this is our final test if we are truly to consider ourselves as followers of Jesus, as branches of the true vine producing the fruit expected of the one who planted it and continues to nurture it with great hope.

- If we as a community of Christians turned up for baptism by John, do you think he would welcome us warmly or also consider us venomous snakes like the Pharisees and Sadducees for not bearing the intended fruit of our baptisms?
- Can we with confidence consider ourselves true followers of Jesus in showing sacrificial love to those around us? In what ways are we doing this or could be doing this?

A WORD WITH THE CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE

An idea from the church in Australia -

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Prop - a branch of a gum tree with leaves attached. Ask the children/young people if they have ever seen the bush after a fire has gone through it. How would they describe it? Someone once described such a scene as looking like a crowd of black skeletons - the trees looked lifeless and branches stuck out in the air without a single leaf left on them. Black and grey - no green at all. Yet - even when they appear dead - because the roots are usually still intact, growth can take place. Therefore, what seems like a miracle takes place just underneath all that charred bark. Immediately under the bark, many eucalypts have an emergency reserve of leaf buds. The changes made in the bark by the fire send a signal to these hidden buds telling them to shoot quickly - which they do and you have the wonderful picture of new shoots appearing out of the black, charred bark. Shoots that quickly grow into branches like this (show branch with leaves). Isaiah the prophet was using an example a bit like that when he described the coming of a new king from the roots of the previous kingship. Isaiah's vision was of a world shaped by justice, righteousness and peace, ruled by one with God's Spirit resting on him - so it is not surprising that, in time, the description came to fit Jesus.

Bushfires are perhaps most likely to occur when the hot north wind blows, but our hymn calls attention to the fact that we celebrate the birth of Christ in the heat of summer - "when the north wind is tossing the leaves..." that is when "we lift up our voices and sing to the Christ child, the heavenly King

SERMON OUTLINE

Matthew 3:1-12 John the Baptist appeared...

God was beginning a new initiative with His people in & through the ministry of John/Baptist after 400 years of prophetic silence.. Who was this magnetic preacher?...

1. A Hermit -1-4: *appeared in the wilderness of Judea* – as prophesied by Isaiah (40.3) - *The voice of one...* Note his:

a) Declaration – *Repent the kingdom of heaven has come near*

b) Dress - *clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt...* He lived simply & ate simply - *locusts and wild honey...*

2. A Hero – 5-6: with the crowds – going both to see him & hear his message - *the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*

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3. A Herald – 7-12: of the King – fulfilling in his ministry the Prophecy of old– Isaiah 40.3: *“This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord’* He truly prepared the way for Jesus...

He truly pointed to the Way- Jesus:- v11 *‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals*

In forthright terms John urges the people to

a) Repent: *for the kingdom of God has come near...*

b) Return: - turn away from sin & turn to God - *“Bear fruit worthy of repentance... Make ready your hearts and minds for the Coming of the Messiah/Christ – prepare to welcome/worship...*

Norman Porteous

SERMON

[\[RCL\]: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12](#)

One has to love John the Baptist! Not for his sense of fashion – although camel’s hair clothing is quite trendy. And definitely not his diet. But our fondness for John the Baptist can be rooted in the fact that he is a ‘tell it as it is preacher.’ He doesn’t fit in the box of safe, well-dressed, predictable, comfortable religion. He understands his purpose fully and is living into his calling.

As we read about John the Baptist’s preaching, it’s very clear that he wasn’t concerned about being Mr. Popular. When we read about John the Baptist, we see he was a straight talker, no filler words or smooth talking with John; and he wasn’t afraid to offend people in order to tell them the truth.

We meet John the Baptist at the beginning of each of the gospels – today in Matthew. He is an advance man for Jesus. He comes into the territory and gets people ready to hear what Jesus is going to preach.

He comes bearing news. He comes offering something amazing. But only if one’s heart is in the right place. John wants to see everyone around him benefit from what he has to offer.

We hear John tell his listeners in verse 8, “bear fruit worthy of repentance.” That is, if you repent of your sins, if you confess your sin, say you will turn to

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God, then there must be something to show for it. It **MUST** affect the way you live.

It might be helpful in this great season of our Church, to ask ourselves the hard question of what fruits are we bearing? What fruits are we bearing in this Advent season?

“Bearing fruit worthy of repentance” as Chris Surber puts it, is living in such a way, as to outwardly express the reality of what repentance has produced in our lives. In other words, it means that our lives reflect a lifestyle, action, and choice pattern which are consistent with having repented of sin – that is – with having made a declaration against the destructive things of this world in favor of aligning ourselves with the beautiful things of the Kingdom of God.

We are all being called to bear fruits that are worthy of the gift of repentance. The New Living Translation of the Bible breaks it down a little more for us, it says “Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones.” (Luke 3:8)

John the Baptist is telling us to live in such a manner befitting of having repented.

Repentance is an integral part of the Christian life.

Repentance is not a onetime act of confession or a onetime recital of a certain prayer or creedal statement.

Repentance is the declaration of the heart, of the soul, of everything that is in us, in response to the terrible burden of our own sin and the great weight of God’s love for us, in turning from that which is destroying us to that which saves us!

Repentance is more than a deep abiding inward decision to reject this life for the life of Christ! It is the ongoing and living decision to choose Christ and live for Him daily; even more so to allow Him to live in us!

Repentance is the attitude of the heart, which is thankful for the grace of God...

The papaya tree is a fascinating tree because sometimes there will be a papaya tree that didn’t bear fruit at all. It will go as far as flowering, but those flowers never produce fruit. It isn’t until the head is cut off, will it start growing again and produce fruit. There is probably a good scientific explanation for

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that – however for the purposes of this message, sometimes there are things, situations, people even, that we have to cut away from our lives in order for us to bear fruit.

When it comes to fruit trees, it's important to know that the quality and quantity each season is largely based on the watering, pruning, fertilizer and care the tree receives.

These analogies beg the questions, How are we the Church preparing ourselves to bear fruit? What is does the quality and quantity of our fruit look like? What are some of the things we have to cut away? And are people rushing into our doors because of our fruit?...

The season of Advent marks a time of preparation and hope for the coming of Christ. Perhaps in this Advent season we individually, as faith communities and as a Church use this time as a time to water, prune and fertilize so that we bear quality fruit in abundance.

Our brother John teaches us in this gospel several things – three things worthy of mentioning today.

The first is The Power of Preparation. In the seasons when we don't water, prune or fertilize our fruit trees our crop isn't as big or successful. Alexander Graham Bell got it right when he said "Before anything else, preparation is the key to success."

So how do we prepare? Well our brother John has laid the foundation for us. One of the first steps will be to repent. And because God isn't through with any of us, we might have to do it several times a day.

Preparation takes various forms. Some include praying, staying grounded in the Word of God because you can't live by it if you don't know it. One cannot practice what's not imbedded in them.

The second thing we can learn from this Baptist – is to Seek God. None of us are entitled to God's grace, favor and mercy. John reminds us ever so profoundly that not because we can point to God's inheritance as ours does that mean that we don't have to recognize that God could chose whomever God wants.

We heard in last week's gospel lesson "That two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. And we are charged to keep awake for we do not know on what day your Lord is coming." If we are seeking God

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daily, we don't have to worry whether we are going to be the one taken up or not.

Preparation and continuously seeking God helps with the third thing John teaches us today and that is humility. John was the forerunner for the modern day evangelist as he unapologetically shared the good news of Jesus Christ. He was a man filled with faith and a role model to those of us who wish to share our faith with others.

It was the late Nelson Mandela who described humility as a quality within easy reach of every soul – and among others is the foundation of one's spiritual life.

Mandela's life just like John's are examples to us of the seriousness with which we are to approach the Christian life and our call to ministry, whatever that may be.

John remained humble in his ministry recognizing that he was not Jesus; and that his purpose was significant and different from that of Jesus. John exemplifies humility in the lay leadership he provided as Jesus' forerunner.

When we prepare ourselves and consistently seek God daily we live lives that reflect a humble attitude of gratefulness to God for God's love and mercy. And we become more able to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God!

When we in reverence bow our heads, or kneel at the confession we are each offered an opportunity to repent. We are offered the chance to turn back from those thoughts and habits and actions that take us out of step with God. We are invited to move back again in harmony with God's vision for us and for our world as we remember the savior who died for our sins and rose again and will come again.

During this season of waiting and great preparation, as we seek to find again the one who first called us, to follow him; who still sends messengers like John to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. May that God, give us grace to heed their warnings and strength to forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ.

Amen!

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

"Not Much But Enough for Me," the Rev. Dr. Stephen Montgomery, Day 1
http://day1.org/2385-not_much_but_enough_for_me

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Waiting in Advent

In her book, *Amazing Grace*, author Kathleen Norris learned about waiting and about silence when she visited classrooms in North Dakota. She asked the students to sit still and to be as silent as possible – to listen, and not to make a sound. She then asked them to write about what they experienced in the silence. “It’s scary,” one fifth grader wrote. When Norris asked him why, he said, “It’s like we’re waiting for something – it’s scary.”

<http://aronkramer.blogspot.co.uk/2006/12/sermon-from-sunday-dec-10th-advent-2.html>

Repent!?

I must admit that in all my 22 years of ministry, It has never seriously crossed my mind to begin a sermon by calling my listeners a “brood of vipers!” I could be missing out on a great opportunity in preaching here, but somehow it just doesn’t seem to me to be the most tactful way of communicating my message. Evidently, John the Baptist didn’t have the same seminary courses that I had.

<http://stlukesburlington.blogspot.co.uk/2011/01/advent-2-repent.html>

An Undiluted Prophetic Hope

[Isaiah 11:1-10](#) If I were ever to be on a TV show, I think [Grumpy Old Men](#) might suit me. Not that I would ever be famous enough to be invited, but I can be the sort of person who thinks that [Ebenezer Scrooge](#) was given an unfair press. It’s not simply that this is the time of year when Debbie gets out all the Singing Santa toys that she and the children love (and which can drive me mad), it’s this Second Sunday in Advent.

You see, the grump in me wonders why it got changed in the current Lectionary. You used to know where you were in the four Sundays of Advent. The first Sunday was about the Advent Hope – not just Christ’s original coming but the promise of his appearing again in glory. The second Sunday was about the promise of the Messiah in the Old Testament prophets. Sunday number three introduced you to the man with the extreme diet, John the Baptist. Then on the fourth Sunday it’s the Annunciation by Gabriel to Mary.

<http://bigcircumstance.com/2010/12/05/sermon-advent-2-an-undiluted-prophetic-hope/>

CHILDREN

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Worshiping with Children, Advent 2A, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/year-second-sunday-of-advent-december-8.html>

"Gathering Advent" Fran Woodruff, On The Chancel Steps.

<https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2013/11/17/gathering/>

Faith Formation Journeys

Christmas Devotional Resource - scroll down

<http://faithformationjourneys.blogspot.co.uk/p/childrens-sermons.html>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

1st Reading Isaiah 11: 1–10

250* All hail the power of Jesu's name

296* Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire

297* Come, thou Holy Spirit, come

263* Crown him with many crowns

481* God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year

161 I know a rose-tree springing

133* Long ago, prophets knew

49 Lord, bring the day to pass

431* Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour

636* May the mind of Christ my Saviour

135* O Come, O come, Emmanuel

197* Songs of thankfulness and praise (omit v.4)

Psalm Psalm 72: 1–7, 18–19

688* Come, bless the Lord, God of our forebears

353* Give to our God immortal praise

481* God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year

125* Hail to the Lord's anointed

97* Jesus shall reign where'er the sun

166* [Joy to the world, the Lord is come!]

706* O bless the God of Israel

365* Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

140 The Lord will come and not be slow

2nd Reading Romans 15: 4–13

250* All hail the power of Jesu's name

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263* Crown him with many crowns
381* God has spoken – by his prophets
382* Help us, O Lord, to learn
161 I know a rose–tree springing
383* Lord, be thy word my rule
384* Lord, thy word abideth
385* Rise and hear, the Lord is speaking
386* Spirit of God, unseen as the wind
387* Thanks to God, whose word was spoken
372* Through all the changing scenes of life

The Gospel Matthew 3: 1–12

126* Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding
303* Lord of the Church, we pray for our renewing
136* On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
200* The sinless one to Jordan came
204* When Jesus came to Jordan

Please commend this resource to colleagues - they simply send an email to churchnewsireland@gmail.com with the message Passwords in the title

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