
Scripture, Reflection, Church news and up-to-date info

15th December 2024

**Third Sunday of
advent**

The lead up to the
birth of Jesus

This week

St Barnabas -
Eucharist
9:30 am

Holy Trinity -
Eucharist
11 am

Bible Study (St
Barnabas)
Wednesday
10 am

Worship on
Wednesday

Holy Trinity
(WOW)
7 pm



Collect

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee: Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Old Testament Zephaniah 3:14-End

Sing, Daughter Zion;
shout aloud, Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
Daughter Jerusalem!

The Lord has taken away your punishment,
he has turned back your enemy.

The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you;
never again will you fear any harm.

On that day
they will say to Jerusalem,

“Do not fear, Zion;
do not let your hands hang limp.

The Lord your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.

He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.”

“I will remove from you
all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals,
which is a burden and reproach for you.

At that time I will deal
with all who oppressed you.

I will rescue the lame;
I will gather the exiles.

I will give them praise and honor
in every land where they have suffered shame.

At that time I will gather you;
at that time I will bring you home.

I will give you honor and praise
among all the peoples of the earth

when I restore your fortunes^[a]
before your very eyes,”

says the Lord

Epistle - Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The Gospel - Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

"What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

"Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

Reflection

We have arrived at the third Sunday of Advent, the Sunday when we focus on John the Baptist and his role as a prophet pointing to the coming of the Messiah.

Often, we look at the beautiful words of his father, Zechariah, in his song, better known as the Benedictus, but today we have John in his own words and those words don't pull any punches!

Jumping to the end of the reading, Luke says that John 'proclaimed the good news to the people with many exhortations' but I wonder how baptismal candidates and families today would react to being called a 'brood of vipers' as they arrived for their baptism! Luke saying that John's words were to encourage the followers, so let us look more closely at them.

Not only did John point people towards the coming of the Messiah, but the words John spoke also pointed to the words that Jesus himself would later use. It is easy to think about John saying that the Messiah is coming, but he is also saying that if you listen to and hear my words, they will help you recognise the Messiah when he comes. John is preparing the way.

John called the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers!' (Lk 3.7). This phrase takes us back to the garden of Eden and the serpent deceiving Eve, tempting her to eat the forbidden fruit (Gen 3.3-5). Jesus himself later cries out 'You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure (Mt 12.34-35)'. The words we speak come from our hearts. If our hearts are good, our words will be good. A good heart will not speak evil just as an evil heart will struggle to speak good words.

John says that claiming ancestry back to Abraham is not a guarantee of eternal life (Lk 3.8). John's words look forward, pointing to Jesus's words when he says that people claiming

ancestry to Abraham should behave like Abraham, loving and obeying God and trusting in his ways (Jn 8.39). We cannot gain eternal life by another person's actions.

John says, 'every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Lk 3.9).' Jesus himself often speaks about the nurturing of good trees to bear good fruit and the destruction of bad trees that bear little or no fruit (Mt 16-20), saying that it is by our fruits that we are known. This echoes the idea that our fruits, words, or actions come from our hearts or roots. Our words and actions come from a place of nurture or neglect and have consequences. Plants either bear good fruit and are nurtured or they are fruitless and are cut down.

John gives people the opportunity to ask questions, just as they did later on with Jesus, and John gives many of the same answers that Jesus later would. When the people asked John how they should live, the answer is to share their clothing and food with people in need. Jesus later will tell the rich young man, wondering how he could achieve salvation, to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor (Mt 19.21). We do not live in isolation; we should care for our neighbour whether they live next door or further afield.

Just as we see later with Jesus, people such as tax collectors and soldiers came to John seeking baptism and asking how they should live their lives. Both occupations gave the post holders the opportunity to extort large sums of money from ordinary people; Once tax collectors had paid the Romans their dues, they were free to charge people whatever they wanted to, and many became rich through their extortion. Soldiers too, would look for ways to make people pay. John, taking insight from the rules of the Torah, told both groups to take no more than they were owed or earned (Lk 3.13-14). We might remember how Jesus tackled this in his meeting with Zaccheus (Lk 19.1-10).

All his words and wisdom led people to wonder whether John himself might be the Messiah, but John puts them straight by stating that while he could baptise with water, the coming Messiah would offer them something much more powerful (Lk 3.16).

John stated that he himself was not even worthy to untie the sandals of the Messiah. Not only is this a powerful statement of humility but it points towards Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. Even if people were freshly bathed, they walked on dusty streets in sandals and their feet got dirty pretty quickly. Slaves or servants would wash the feet of their masters and visitors; it was not something that well-to-do people would do for themselves. It was important to be clean. Jesus talked about being the servant rather than the master and washed the feet of his disciples despite Peter's protests (Jn 13.3-16).

We see Jesus echoing John's statement that he would not be worthy to untie the laces of the one who was to follow when, after the foot washing Jesus says to the disciples, 'Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them (Jn 13.16)'. Jesus was not putting John down but acknowledging John's place in God's plan.

Our initial response to reading this passage may be to ask, 'how can I avoid being part of the 'the brood of vipers?'" However, John was firmly pointing to the Messiah, and this is where the remedy for the viperous condition comes. Jesus will bring healing and grace. John's focus on Jesus, on goodness that comes from within, along with his care for the poor, are a preparation for the coming of Jesus, which is inspiring. There is more to his man than simply the wild looking prophet with the strange diet, he truly did point towards the coming of the Messiah.

To close, the Message translation may make us smile, 'There was a lot more of this - words that gave strength to the people, words that put heart in them. The Message!' (Lk 3.18). I pray this morning that like John, we too will be able to speak words that give strength to people and put heart in them.

Amen

Notices

15/12/24 @ 6pm: **Annual Carol Service** @ St Barnabas
18/12/24 @ 7pm: **Annual Carol Service** @ Holy Trinity
24/12/24 @ 4pm: **Christingle Service** @ Holy Trinity
24/12/24 @ 11.30pm: **Midnight Mass** @ Holy Trinity
25/12/24 @ 9.30am: **Christmas Service** @ St Barnabas

Useful Contacts

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