

Reflection for 3rd Sunday of Advent

For the second week running the Gospel reading speaks about John the Baptist denying that he is the Messiah but confirming that the Messiah is coming soon. But what were the Jews expecting the long-awaited Messiah to do? Today's reading from the prophet Isaiah gives us an idea.

Isaiah was speaking to a Jewish Kingdom threatened by their war-like Assyrian neighbours. Too many people had turned away from God, everything was falling apart, and the promise God had made to Abraham, the covenant he had made through Moses, and prophecy he gave to King David all looked to be receding into fantasy. In this dark hour God spoke through Isaiah to confirm that his holy power would bring about the better time the Jews all longed for. The Jews couldn't save the situation – in fact they continually made things worse – but God could, and would. Because of what God would do, broken-hearts would be bound up, captives would find freedom, gladness would replace mourning, the nations would look up to the people of God with admiration, and all would rejoice in the Lord.

In this difficult year it can be hard to see, even with the prospect of vaccines, how our world will recover from the problems it has got itself into. But we have the assurance from God that we *will* recover in the long term; even if (for example) the incredible sacrifices of the front-line workers and the wisdom of leaders falls short, we see in Jesus that God's plan to bring us, and all creation, into his Kingdom is sure. The final outcome was settled on the cross on that first Good Friday; and we have been given the privilege of being part of how that victory works out across the world.

So, as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, let us rejoice always, give thanks in all circumstances, and hold fast to what is good; because the one who calls us is faithful!

Ian Totterdell
Churchwarden

Codes for the Zoom worship at 10.30

These are codes for Sundays from 6 December to the end of January:

Meeting ID: 894 0983 2572

Passcode: 061920

Telephone numbers: 0203 051 2874, 0203 481 5237, 0203 481 5240, 0131 460 1196

NEXT SUNDAY 20.12.20 4th Sunday of Advent

SERVICES 10.30 by Zoom, 12 noon in Church



READINGS

OT 2 Samuel 7: 1-11,16

NT Romans 16: 25-end

Gospel Luke 1: 26-38

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St Thomas, Exeter

Sunday 13th December 2020

3rd Sunday of Advent

10.30 by Zoom (phone-in available)

12 noon Mass in Church

The 3rd Sunday of Advent is traditionally a moment to lighten our seasonal penance, (though this year feels very different), and for that reason is often called **Gaudete Sunday**—a parallel to Laetare, the 4th Sunday of Lent. So the liturgical Advent purple is relieved a little to become pink.

As we get closer to Christmas, saints day are less frequent, but an important exception is 14 December, **St John of the Cross** (1542-91). John worked with Teresa of Avila to reform the Carmelite Order of which he was a member, was a mystic and a poet. He is always associated with the phrase 'the dark night of the soul' which is one of the titles of his poems. From *Spiritual Canticle*:

"There are depths to be fathomed in Christ. He is like a rich mine with many recesses containing treasures, and no matter how we try to fathom them the end is never reached. Rather, in each recess, we keep finding here and there new veins of new riches."

Fr David



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**

Isaiah 61: 1-4. 8-end

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations.

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

John 1: 6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptising.

Post Communion

We give you thanks, O Lord, for these heavenly gifts; kindle in us the fire of your Spirit that when your Christ comes again we may shine as lights before his face; who is alive and reigns now and for ever. **Amen**

NOTICES

Revd Sarah is collecting donations and pledges for the Exeter-wide **Ecumenical Christmas Present Project**. This aims to provide all the children in Exeter whose families are using the Food Bank with a voucher for a Christmas present. Cheques to St Thomas PCC please.

There is the possibility of a **Zoom Nativity**. Questions and volunteers to Revd Sarah asap please.

Community Larder The Community Larder will be collecting on **Tuesdays only** from 10am-12noon, and is allowed to continue operating during the period of lockdown. The collecting point will now be back in the hall. Please continue to be generous.

Knit and Natter 24th November 2020 We shall continue with Zoom meetings on Thursday mornings. 11.15-11.55am, for the time being, thanks to Vanessa for setting this up. As always, we shall move with the times when we know more clearly what we can safely do together. Details from Jenny on 01392 498725

Ian Totterdell has completed the **Hospiscare Marathon in a Month**. Thanks to those who have given already; with gift aid the total is now just over £400, which is amazing! Ian is still accepting donations in person or through a just giving page. Details below: www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Ian-Totterdell1

Pat Mounce will not be sending individual Christmas cards this year but she wishes everyone a happy and peaceful Christmas and New Year.

