

## **Sermon, Second Sunday in Advent**

**Holy Trinity Church, York, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2021**

*Readings: Malachi 3:1-14; Song of Zechariah, Philippians 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-6*

*Hymns: O Come, O Come Emmanuel, Christ whose glory fills the sky, Hail to the Lord's Anointed, There's a light upon the mountain*

The cover of the WISH magazine, which weighs down your Friday edition of “The Australian” newspaper, begged the question “Are you there yet?” I smiled, as I hoped you recognise that title is not very different to the title of our Advent Bible Series, “Are we there yet?” Somewhat intrigued, I opened what is a very glossy magazine, and as I flipped from page to page of glamorous models, stunning accessories, be they PRADA, Paspayley, BULGARIA, Swiss watches, it was not until page 34 that I discovered any editorial material. I had cast my eyes ever so briefly over thirty-three pages of consumerism, appetite, sensuality if not sexuality, even decadence, and wondered if I wished to get there, wherever “there” might be!

It was a striking reminder, and encouragement to realise in this Season of Advent, when we are making ourselves ready yet again for the birth of Christ, the arrival of the Messiah; as well as reflecting upon what we understand by the Second Coming of Jesus, we need be also in the mode of John the Baptist about whom we heard in our Gospel account from St Luke. In this passage John the Baptist, not only receives the word of God, stuck in the Wilderness as he was, but moves out of it into the region around the River Jordan, to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, living out as he does the prophecy of Isaiah:

*The voice of one crying 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.*

This man, John is so convicted by this Word of God he has received, that he is not only making ready himself, but he goes out to ensure others are ready, by sharing this Word of God with others, speaking of how the world can be a better place where all people shall see the salvation of God.

May I suggest that while we will not find the mode and method of John the Baptist in the WISH publication, we can find it in our other readings set for today. In the Canticle, called the Song of Zechariah, which we said instead of a Psalm, we meet Zechariah giving thanks for the joy of the birth of his son, this John. In such a way, we are reminded of what a blessing John's birth had been to Elizabeth and Zechariah in their old age, and how he would be for others, described as it is in our Gospel account.

How might you and I go about not only being ready ourselves, but encouraging, exhorting, even cajoling others to be ready? May I suggest we find some very solid evidence in the writings of the Prophet Malachi which we heard read as our Old Testament reading, and in the words of wisdom from our New Testament reading from St Paul to the Church in Philippi. Malachi speaks of the need to be open to and subjected to refinement and purification, so to be ready to present offerings with righteousness. To not do so is to be associated, according to Malachi, with the evils of sorcery, adultery, false witness, labour exploitation, bad treatment of the vulnerable such as the needy, the widow, the orphan, the alien, and finally to be associated with those who fail to fear the Lord God. We are reminded also to be people of the full tithe and offering. In doing these things we please our God and are ready to be in right relationship with him. Malachi reminds us that God will always return to us, even when we have turned away from him and his ways.

St Paul in reminding the Philippians that he rejoices in their faithfulness, alerts them that they must let their love overflow more and more, so that with knowledge and full insight they can determine what is best, and in doing so be pure and blameless before God, gaining righteousness through Jesus Christ.

What then might we do in Advent 2021 in the Avon Valley to make others ready for the Good News of Jesus coming at Christmas; indeed, in coming again? How do we engage with a society, or a community, in which many believe they are all doing very fine and believe they don't need the Good News of our Lord in their lives!

While there may not be any easy answer we are called to try; let us ensure that our lives keep the story and truth alive; let us speak and act as if we are ready, be fearless in reminding others of their need to be ready. Let us remind people that satisfaction does not come from being the slave to consumerism, greed, or consumption. I often wonder if people sense in their own "heart of hearts" that they need something better, more fulfilling, and enduring. The problem we find is how do we get through all their barriers so they can hear of, and understand, something far better. As G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), the English essayist, novelist, and poet said "When a person stops believing in God, they don't then believe in nothing, they believe in anything" -the PRADA bag, a new TISSOT watch, a string of Paspaley pearls, the latest Christian Dior tie! We know these are cursory and that they will need be replaced by the next new, bigger, trendier, item of desire and kudos! What they yearn for, and truly need, is to be found in the love of him who loves us always and brings us joy, peace, and hope, Jesus Christ.

May I urge you go out and tell the story, put out the Nativity Scene, invite the outsider to lunch, send the Christmas Card, give the unsuspecting a gift, tell of the liberation of repentance, and the fulfilment that comes when greed, superficiality, and temporary and skin-deep delight, are shunned. Let us go out ever ready to meet Jesus, and in doing so, make everyone ready for the Comings of Jesus Christ!