

2nd Sunday in Advent - Year C

Something very significant is heralded in today's Gospel. Luke starts off by detailing the specific time that this occurred, setting out who was in power and where, and in such a way that it apparently formed the basis for all our subsequent AD calendar dating.

He wanted to make it clear precisely when the long revealed divine plan from ancient scriptures had entered an important new stage. The story of the birth, infancy and youth of Jesus was now over, and the great work of the proclamation of the kingdom, and the salvation of all mankind had begun.

To help prepare the people to receive Jesus' message was the work of John the Baptist. He was the voice in the wilderness calling the people to be aware of and repent for their sins, which were keeping them from a close relationship with God. This preparation by John was itself also foretold in scripture.

John was able to reach out to many people and gained many followers and our Gospel readings this week and next, invite us to consider the specific role of John the Baptist and his relationship to Jesus; and therefore, how we ourselves also prepare to welcome and follow Jesus in our lives. Even as an unborn child, John had recognised that he was in the presence of Jesus when his mother Elizabeth greeted Mary who had come to visit her, and John leaped for joy in Elizabeth's womb. He recognised the very real presence of Jesus and calls us to do the very same.

John's preaching about the coming of Jesus, and his call for the need to make ourselves ready, is a key theme of the Advent season. John's message prepared the way for Jesus at that time in history, and today we too are called to prepare ourselves for Jesus' next coming. What John called the people to do then, we are also called to do now as it is just as important and relevant for our lives today.

We are all able to make time to prepare in some way for other important life events, maybe applying for a job or retiring from work, a marriage or birth in the family, we even prepare for smaller events such as to go shopping or to go out for a meal. We know how to make ourselves ready. This season of Advent should encourage us to make a special effort of preparation, one that helps us to get closer to Jesus.

Good preparation takes time. We need to actively find time to think, to listen, to pay attention and to quietly realise that Jesus is calling out to each of us constantly.

During Advent, we are invited to consider our attentiveness to Jesus and to one another. In the pace and noise 'that often', understandably, characterises our lives at this time of year, we should ask ourselves - How well do we listen – to Jesus and to one another?

What opportunities do we create for quiet prayer?

How do we shine out and make a difference in the lives of others?

We can certainly feel assured that in seeking closeness to Jesus, we truly are pushing on an open door.

Jesus actively desires to come into our lives in the present through his Word, his Sacraments, his grace, his mercy. He chooses to come to imperfect people in a struggling and imperfect world. As I have said previously, and find great comfort knowing, He comes not looking for saints but for those who need him most.

It is the re-welcoming of Jesus in our lives that Advent is all about. We can of course look forward to the fulfilment of the gift of the resurrection when we will join with him in his heavenly kingdom, but we need to prepare for that time by recognising that he is also with us now, in a special way. And we can know that because he was born and lived among us and gave himself to us completely in birth, life, death, and resurrection.

God's plan for mankind, of which John the Baptist had such an important part to play, hasn't stopped, it is exactly the same plan, yet now it also includes each one of us in our own unique way.

John calls us to prepare a place for Jesus in our lives, and importantly as part of that he also calls for repentance, which is in fact a positive act, that looks forward not back. To repent is to start anew, to recognise and strive to make sure that former ways change, that a new way of living comes to the fore.

What really matters then as we get into the heart of the Season of Advent — is that we make time to get closer to Jesus, and that we repent for the ways we have turned away from him.

We all want this advent, this year to be different, and it should be because every advent, every year, should be different. Advent is a special time in the life of the church and what will make it different, is the order in which we place the things in our lives that matters. Let's all revisit and re-evaluate our priorities this week and before we start thinking about the gifts of Christmas, let's firstly remind ourselves about the great gift of advent.