

## **Advent 2 – Sunday 9 December 2018 – Luke 3:1-6**

Advent marks the beginning of the Church year and also the beginning of a new Lectionary – and this year – Lectionary C – we will be following the Gospel according to Luke.

The lectionary is a set of appointed readings for each day of the year – in a three year cycle – A is Mark, B is Matthew and C is Luke.

We will be learning about Luke's Gospel as we journey with him – and together we will see how we can grow together in understanding of the scripture and the spiritual impact it has on our daily lives.

Setting the scene – putting things in context is so important – the background matters....

In the Gospel reading this week, we are getting a very clear picture of the historical setting – and the political climate of the day – and such a detail indicates to us that the social culture and political circumstances have relevance to how he offers his readers the Good News...

Picture the scene - We know that Judea is now under Roman governance, Jewish leaders under the authority of Tiberius. We know that Herod was ruler of Galilee and his brother Philip ruler of Ituraea and Trachonitis – and Lysanias ruler of Abilene – all during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. These are key players at the beginning – and the end of Jesus public ministry – and we will be following Jesus' ministry throughout this year.

If you read the verses before, you will see that John has already been introduced – we will know of the birth of John – born to aged parents, Zechariah and (barren) Elizabeth. We know that John is related to Jesus – and 6 months older.

John is the one that will be 'sent before' ....

The main thrust of all this scene-setting is to show Jesus as the divine fulfilment – with John leading the way.

The reading today highlight an appointed moment when God will change the flow of history.

Malachi warns us that this will be like fire purifying metal. Paul encourages us to overflow with love and understanding and Luke introduces us to the ministry of John the Baptist.

And each day at Morning Prayer we say the Benedictus – the song of John's father, Zechariah which you can find in the first chapter of Luke, verses 68-79.

It tells us that John will be called the prophet of the most high – for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way – to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

We hear how the holy prophets of old have promised that the people would be saved from their enemies – and are reminded of the holy covenant – the covenant made by God with his people through Abraham.

Luke has ended chapter two with the boy Jesus in the temple – and now – beginning chapter three we jump to hear about John his cousin – not as a boy but fast-forwarded and now an adult – why is that? these are the nooks and crannies of the Gospel we want to

explore – to crack open the texts and to see the hidden layers that can enhance and inspire us more deeply – and there enhance and inspire our faith journey as we see more clearly – more deeply – the amazing story of God’s salvation – through Jesus – of which we are a part today... Being part of a story is powerful – it roots us and binds us to each other in a common bond – and helps us to be secure in an insecure world - ...

I am inviting you to go beyond the words you read – to take a bit of time to open the Bible at home – use the study sheet – breathe through the prayers and enter into this journey of discovery with Luke at the helm – this is the longest Gospel – we are in for the long-haul...

So the big thing about the story today is wilderness...

The message comes to John in the wilderness – and Luke is showing us the significance of the wilderness tradition in Jewish times – long before John and Jesus came along – a place of desolation and scarcity –. Moses leads the people to freedom through a forty year wilderness time – David flees Saul’s pursuit in the desert – Elijah the prophet flees for safety into the wilderness - but also a place of promise and hope – indeed Isaiah tells us how the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom”). The wilderness demands we step outside of our comfort zone – become more accessible to God – a God who is at work in a profound, transformational way in that emptiness – the wilderness can take us beyond the barren isolation of being in the desert of our lives – it can be a place where divine help and comfort and strength is at hand in our hour of need...

And so back then – knowing what we know about it now – you can see that never more was a peoples in need – of a saviour – of a healer – of a deliverer –

And don’t you think that today we are saying the same thing – never more was a peoples in need – of a saviour – of a healer – of a deliver – and I am sure there are individual people all over realising the same thing about themselves in one way or another – are you in some areas of your life? I know in times past I certainly have...

And John was truly in the wilderness before he appeared in public - in Luke 1:80 we hear: “The child [John] grew and became strong in spirit, and he was *in the wilderness* until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.”

He didn’t just show up – popping into civilisation because it seems a good idea and making such a huge impact through his teaching and prophesying and preaching the transformative action of repenting – turning back – and offering oneself to God – for – there would have probably have been years of spiritual grappling and growing for John...

To reach Jesus – we need to cross the desert that leads to the Jordan and the water of life..

And actually, even Jesus was led into in order to grow and minister – remember he was led by the spirit into the wilderness – returning as one filled with the power of the Spirit (4:1) – and remember as more demand is make on him he withdraws to pray and be with God...

And actually – this is exactly what Jesus teaches us all – because he taught it first to this disciples. When they began their ministry in his name – and when they returned from their mission work - “he took them with him and *withdrew privately* to a city called Bethsaida” (9:10)

We can see Advent as that wilderness time – of waiting – preparing – a place that provides space – and permission to become a little more set back – using the space to wonder – and ponder – and pray...

This is a really good Gospel for us to be led into 2019 and the hope for tomorrow of greater fulfilment in our individual and family lives and in the life of our church family and our place within our community family

I invite you to consciously read the words that we sing this Advent – to feel the prayers that we prayer and the responses we make – to receive Communion as if it is the first time – and to remember we are on our way to meet our Saviour – our healer – our deliverer...

We come to you this Advent, Lord,  
with gratitude in our hearts  
for those who have led us to faith,  
for those who have prepared the way  
for us to hear your voice calling us  
and to receive your love surrounding us.  
May we too prepare the way for others,  
that all may feel a sense of belonging  
in your Church and in your world.  
**Amen.**