

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 7 December 2025 - The Second Sunday of Advent

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Isaiah 11.1-10; Psalm 72.1-7 [18-19] Romans 15.4-13; Matthew 3.1-12

Homily

Today's homily has been written by Mrs Pat Blyth, LLM, The Ouse Valley Benefice and Anna Chaplain

“The voice of one, crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight’”

As we begin Advent in the year of preaching from Matthew's Gospel, one of the things we quickly learn is how important to Matthew was seeing Jesus as the fulfilment of long-ago prophecies recorded in the Old Testament. This pronouncement from the prophet of Isaiah, written several centuries earlier, is fulfilled in Matthew's interpretation by the life and works of John the Baptist, a cousin of Jesus on his mother's side.

Matthew describes how John ‘appeared in the wilderness’, living on insects and honey, and clothed in camel's hair and a leather belt, primitive clothing even in Jesus' time. We are given this description, because it was widely believed at that time that the promised Messiah would not come before the prophet Elijah had reappeared on earth. John's reclusive existence as described by Matthew is deliberately written to encourage the people to think that John is the returned Elijah. There is a passage in John's Gospel which describes how the people actually asked John who he was, whether he was Elijah, one of the other Old Testament prophets, or even the Messiah himself? John humbly replied that he was none of the above, just a forerunner of the one who was yet to come. But why did Jesus need a forerunner, someone to make his path straight? There must be a better reason for that than simply fulfilling predictions?

And Matthew gives us some possibilities. The mysterious man in the wilderness attracted a great deal of curiosity, and people started to seek him out. After hearing him speak, many of them started to be baptised in the River Jordan. John spoke about repentance, regret for the wrongdoing and the turning away from God that had characterised centuries of different rulers in Jerusalem and Judea, as well as individual failings. Recognising these failings and being symbolically washed clean of them by baptism in water prepared the people, as John made perfectly clear, for a further baptism with the fire and energy of the Holy Spirit that the promised Messiah would bring. Jesus himself, before the start of his own ministry, accepted the cleansing baptism of John even though he was without sin. A clean start for his own ministry.

But, Matthew says, John was able to recognise hypocrisy in certain of the people who approached him for baptism, namely the Pharisees and Sadducees. These were the people who at the time were looked up to as the scholars of the Jewish faith, the people who were 'in the know'; they must have been truly shocked to have heard themselves described as 'a brood of vipers' - and mystified by the allegation that in seeking baptism they were somehow 'fleeing from the wrath to come'. That was the wrath that Jesus would show towards them for assuming they were somehow superior to others in their descendancy from Abraham – a descendancy, as John pointed out, that was shared by a great many, and many more yet to come. A foretelling of John's own making, if you like, of the opposition that Jesus would suffer at the hands of the Jewish authorities, as he tried to explain God's loving inclusiveness, rather than endless petty rules and regulations.

We can only assume that John the Baptist continued his work of a baptism of repentance after he had baptised Jesus. We will hear little more of him as the Gospel story unfolds; in Matthew 11, we learn how John, by then in prison, has a moment of doubt about Jesus, and sends messengers to ask him if he is indeed the Messiah? Jesus tells the messengers to return to John with reports of what they have seen him do and heard him say. Jesus then speaks to the crowds about John, how he would be both greatest and least in God's kingdom, and reinforcing his role as his forerunner. Jesus asks them what they had been expecting? Describing now John was criticised for his asceticism and reclusiveness, and himself for socialising with tax collectors and sinners - Jesus asks if there is any way of pleasing everyone?

And then John is beheaded, in Chapter 14, by King Herod who falls into a trap set by his own family. In an untimely, unjust, and cruel death, the end of the forerunner's life is an indication of what will eventually befall the one who came after him, the one whose sandals John was not worthy to untie. When Jesus hears of John's death, he tries to escape in a boat to grieve, but the crowds will not leave him alone. Having compassion for them despite his own moment of great sorrow, he performs one of his best-known miracles, the feeding of the five thousand.

So why is the forerunner, John the Baptist, important to us in Advent? Perhaps it is to remind us that we too need to be cleansed and made ready to receive the fire and energy of Jesus' Holy Spirit again in our annual celebrations of Christmas. Even if the words, the songs and the rituals are the same as every year, we should still be renewed by Christmas, enthused by the yearly remembrance of the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Advent is often seen as a time of gloom and of mystery, of darkness and of winter, as we wait for the arrival of the light of the world. The forerunner leads us through this time, preparing us for its arrival. It is time for us to offer to God the events of the year that has passed, its triumphs and disasters, both collective and individual. And to receive the great joy that is the gift of Christ as we top up our faith, hope and love for each other in anticipation of the year that is to come. Amen.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

The Collect for the 2nd Sunday of Advent

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us,
and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness
we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us,
your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us;
through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and forever. Amen.

And a prayer for lighting the Advent Wreath if you have one (Week 2)

Lord Jesus, light of the world,
the prophets said you would bring peace,
and save your people in trouble.
Give peace in our hearts at Christmas,
And show all the world God's love. Amen.

With grateful hearts we give thanks for the season of Advent, for a time of anticipation and preparation for the great joy of Christmas. We give thanks for the patriarchs and prophets, for John the Baptist, and for Mary, the mother of Jesus, for their faith and obedience in bringing about God's purpose for us all. Help us to share that purpose with all those we meet, this Christmas and in the year that is starting anew.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Let us offer to God all the things that have happened in the last year. Especially we think of events abroad, and the progress that has been made towards peace in the Middle East and in the Ukraine. We continue to pray for those who have lost homes and loved ones in both conflicts, and those still weakened through famine and illness. We remember other places where there is warfare, or where natural disasters have occurred, and people have been left hungry and homeless. And we pray for those who leave their home to seek refuge in other countries, that they will be received with kindness wherever they may turn for help.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

This Christmas, we pray for those who are struggling in our own nation to heat their homes, and to provide for the needs of children or the elderly. We ask for guidance for our politicians as they prioritise the demands made on their resources, and work for a fairer and more equal society. Please bless King Charles and the Royal Family as they take the concerns of the nation to their hearts.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for Dame Sarah Mullally, taking up her position as Archbishop of Canterbury in January, and for the Church of England as it moves on from the problems of the past. We pray for the new Bishop of Ely (????), as he/she takes over from Bishop Dagmar, and for all priests, deacons and lay leaders across the Diocese of Ely that all may serve God with true hearts, and love the congregations that they are privileged to serve. We pray for your blessing on this church of St....., and for the community ofthis Christmastide.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

And at Christmas time in particular, we remember those who are no longer with us, in our homes and at our tables, and whom we miss so much at this time of year. We thank you for the memory of them, and of Christmases shared in the past. Make them to be numbered with your saints in glory everlasting.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Suggested hymns/songs

God is working his purpose out
Hail to the Lord's Anointed
Hark! A herald voice is calling
Hark the glad sound
In heavenly love abiding
Lord, thy word abideth
O come, O come, Emmanuel
On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
The Lord will come and not be slow
Thou didst leave thy throne

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)