



## *Message: Jesus is with us during Advent*

Greetings my brothers & sisters in Christ, what a joy for us all that here, and that we can come together to worship and give thanks and celebrate the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of Advent

I pray, that today's message, will lift all our spirits, as we journey together through Advent, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

*Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.*

*Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

So onto our readings and what is the message are they saying to us today.

The Book of Malachi was written somewhere between 500 to 400BC and was written to correct the lax religious and social behaviour of the Israelites, particularly the priests, in post-exilic Jerusalem.

We read, that there is an argument going on between God and his people. At the end of Chapter 2, Malachi says that the people have wearied God, and they ask indignantly what have they done? Malachi replies that they have called into question God's justice, and so God's very character.

The Israelites have said **"All who do evil are good in the sight of the Lord. Where is the God of justice?"** We could say that's a fair comment for many of us today! The verses set for today's reading, in this context, are in the nature of a threat.

But if we look at them carefully, they are answering the people's scornful question. The people don't recognise that God is a righteous God, and his will ensures that righteousness prevails.

So God will send his messenger and the people may well live to regret it. They are looking for the Lord, full of their own grievances, wanting to hold him to account, but they may find that it is they who are to be judged, not God.

They are to be purified and refined by fire until they recognize righteousness again.

It is not God who has changed but the people, and they must learn again, the hard way, that God is a God of justice.

The point of the passage from the Gospel of St Luke, **is to tell us who John the Baptist is and importantly, who he is not.** He is the messenger, but he is not the message.

The message of God to his people is Jesus Christ, and John's work is to prepare the people to receive him.

Both Malachi's audience and John's audience have made themselves unable to recognize God, because they are trying to make God meet their standards, rather than themselves to meet his.

***Are we guilty of this??***

Malachi's hearers have questioned the justice of God, and John's audience are going to fail to see God's justice in Jesus.

But another thing that both Malachi and John the Baptist have in common, is that they are there to be superseded. Malachi may not even have his name left for prosperity, since *malachi* comes from the Hebrew word 'messenger' and, once his message is given, he himself fades into obscurity.

Similarly with John, although we know his name, we are told that his mission is to be no more than a 'voice', and we know that even that must be silenced when Jesus starts to preach.

It is worth noting that although Malachi was written at a particular moment, for a particular audience, without commentaries beside you, you cannot tell what that moment was.

But Luke gives a detailed and circumstantial account of exactly when and where John the Baptist appears. God's message through Malachi could have applied to his people at a great many different points in their history, but John's preparatory work is directly tied to the coming of Jesus.

This moment, and no other, is the moment at which all the paths to God are suddenly made straight, there are no more valleys to be trudged through, no more hills to be climbed, no more winding lanes to take us out of the way. At this particular historical moment, God's salvation comes to us as a gift, not by our own effort!

The verses in Philippians, too, are about facing God's presence. Malachi warns that the people will be able to restore their old relationship with God only after a long a terrifying process of trial, whereas the words that Paul writes to the Philippians exude a quiet confidence and joy.

Despite the fact that Paul is writing from prison to a people who have suffered for the gospel, he is sure that they have already come through to the place that Malachi longs for. But there is still an element of caution. Until the 'day of Christ', Christians have to live in a world that is partly the kingdom and partly not.

So when he tells the Philippians to use their time well, he has practised what he preaches.

So what the points of our readings today?

- Fulfilment is something we all look for.
- Fulfilment is what life is about!
- Some of our needs are satisfied easily enough, but the deeper needs of our personality are not so readily met!
- When you think about it, we are always moving towards something, and the ultimate frustration would be if we never got there.

The Christian message to humankind is a message which is once again proclaimed in Advent, and is that we can only find fulfilment in friendship with God.

The Church continues John the Baptist's work, pointing to Christ, the only one who can take us into God's friendship.

Like John the Baptist, our mission is to prepare the way for Christ's coming, because he 'comes' continually.

The point of advent is to set about preparing ourselves as we would prepare our homes for the arrival of someone whom we love and respect above all others.

If the whole church tackles advent in this way, Christ's presence within her will be ever evident and she will be able to proclaim his presence more effectively to the world!

***Amen***