

Advent reflection Week 2
Week of Second Sunday of Advent – 6th December 2020

Opening prayer

Come Holy Spirit
And open us to the treasures of God's word.
Grant us a readiness to listen
and an openness to learn;
so that we can be alert to your presence
at this time of waiting
and ready to respond to
your call to us.
Amen.

Read through once quietly and slowly.

Gospel – Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.

A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptised by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey.

And this is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.

I have baptised you with water; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of the Lord

Sit for a moment as it percolates

Reflection questions:

- What words stand out for you in today's reading?
- In this reading we hear that John was a messenger declaring Christ's coming into the world. Can we see messengers of Christ's coming into the world today?
- Do you feel you have a role yourself in being a messenger of Christ? Do you find that easy or challenging?

- One theological perspective is that God is always coming amongst us, in the people we meet and the situations we face if we stop to notice. Where have you noticed God's presence amongst us, especially over the last few months?
- This reading declares the start of Jesus' ministry, and an invitation to all of us to a new way of living through baptism in the Holy Spirit. What gifts of the spirit might you ask for in your life today?
- What else comes up for you here?

REFLECTION:

The challenge during Advent and Christmastime is to hear anew the familiar story we all know – The Nativity - scenes with The Holy Family, the animals and the shepherds. It's become almost too familiar. In part, that's why we have the season of Advent. These four weeks serve to prepare the way to Christmas via a bit of liturgical wilderness. The penitential season provides a time of reflection and contemplation so that we can hear the good news of Jesus' birth afresh and let the gospel sink more deeply into our lives.

This year is a bit different, to say the least. For many, this does not feel like the usual joyous march toward Christmastide. Hundreds of thousands around the globe will be spending their first Christmas without a loved one who has passed on due to the pandemic. Millions more will be attempting a celebration without their usual large and festive gathering, due to coronavirus restrictions. For almost the entirety of the year, we have all been a people anxious and waiting in a lockdown-long Advent. And with no cure or vaccine yet, there is no clear path forward out of this dark season.

This has been a year full of novel experiences, and every little thing is cast in new perspective. And yet, while the harshness of wilderness may be felt more deeply this year, the same ageless truths remain constant. We are just able to see them more clearly. The fundamental truth of these wilderness seasons is that we are waiting on an imperfect and broken world to pass. The season of Advent reminds us that no matter who we are or where we are in time or space that the goodness of God will prevail.

In our gospel reading, we read the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark. Without much prelude or fanfare, we are thrust into the action in the desert. The prophet John the Baptist proclaims in the wilderness a familiar message. At this point in history, Israel has been invaded and occupied by the Roman Empire. And now John proclaims a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Though crowds flock to John—the reading says, “People from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him”—John still points away from himself and toward someone greater to come. John points to a hopeful future by promising one who will come baptising, not with mere water but with the eternal Holy Spirit.

The reading also shows us that waiting is not a passive action. We are to live out our hope and in waiting for the fullness of the Kingdom of God, we proclaim God's message of justice. We turn towards justice. We stand in the wilderness, pointing to the one more powerful than us. Where peace is actively enacted, God is there.

Our Advent message from John the Baptist is that we are called to be a people that await the coming of the Lord. We are always in waiting—through victory and defeat, triumph and loss. It is certainly our job as the Church to proclaim peace on earth, goodwill towards all, and joy to the world. But it is just as much our job to be visible in the wilderness, speaking up for injustice, oppression and persecution. We welcome the marginalised in our society and we stand in the wilderness and welcome all to journey with us in the power of the Holy Spirit. We walk towards something better. We walk to Christ, the one who is powerful, patient, and offers us unconditional love.

This Advent, many of us are already in the wilderness. Can we step back and pray for a glimpse of the divine?

Can we work this advent to embody God's patience and love here in this world?

How can we be signs, like John the Baptist, of the presence of God in our world, and here in our community, today?

(Reflection written by Ann Smith, St Martin's parish Tranent)

Intercessory prayers:

- Help us to notice you in the people we meet and the situations we encounter this Advent, and throughout the year.
Lord hear us
- We pray for our community in Our Lady of Loretto as we enter Advent, that we can be true signs of your presence in our world today.
- Lord hear us
- Thank you for your gift of forgiveness and reconciliation. BE with us in our efforts to forgive each other and ourselves.
- Lord hear us

Add in any other prayers you would like to include and then end with:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning
is now and ever shall be
World without end
Amen