

‘Advent: finding time for the Lord’

Is 40: Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people ... Ps 84: a voice that speaks of peace,  
 peace for His people      2Pet 3: live holy and saintly lives while you wait ...  
 Mk 1: 1–8: *‘A voice that cries in the wilderness.’*

I expect that we all have lots to try and fit in in the next couple of weeks before Christmas Day. And we might be rushing around like scalded cats with the cards, presents, decorations, food and drink preparations.

Apparently, where St John the Baptist set up his ministry on the banks of the Jordan River was also a hectic place — it was a ford, where the road east from out of Jerusalem would allow a crossing of the river: a place of much hustle and bustle, then, naturally, people coming and going, no doubt in a hurry, with much to do. This is where St John the Baptist set up his place for preaching to all those who passed that way. No wonder, then, that he was heard by so many, as he came to be that prophesied “voice crying in the wilderness, prepare a way for the Lord.” Declaring forcefully to the traders, bankers, merchants and pilgrims that came to cross the ford, that they needed to change their lives, and experience his baptism of water, no doubt he had

a lot of shrug offs, “I’m too busy today”! John the Baptist also cries out to us in these two middle Sundays of Advent — this week and next week — that we are to take him seriously, that we are not to pass him by, but hear him as the final prophet of the Messiah’s coming. Along with the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, from 6 centuries earlier, John the Baptist is one of the great figures of Advent, and we would do well to heed him. Think of how all those who ignored John the Baptist were missing a crucial message — Jesus is coming, Salvation is near, Baptism in the Holy Spirit is around the corner. Those who ignored John the Baptist were ignoring God’s very own Son appearing in their midst. And we also must not ignore the appeal of John the Baptist in this season. We must make good use of Advent, to acknowledge the presence of Our Lord in our midst.

So, I ask you to consider well how you are using this precious season. This year it’s only three short weeks, but we’ve still got most of it to run. We must give ourselves some time and space to reflect on the sacred meaning of the feast of Christmas coming. We must give ourselves the

chance to allow the Lord's coming to mean something to us personally. If we do not *long* for His coming, then we are hardly in a position to rejoice spiritually when He comes, are we? Christmas will fall flat if it is emptied of its inner meaning. That longing desire is built up only through prayer and the quiet expressions of love achieved through contemplation. So, I would suggest three things:

1. To come to **weekday Mass** if at all possible. Even if you aren't able to come every day to Mass, then even if you can come on a few of the weekdays, you can hear in the liturgy the growing sense of expectation as Christmas draws nearer. The readings from Isaiah and the Gospel are powerful messages for us to hear each day as we approach the birth of our Saviour. We reflect on God's promises of old, and how they are fulfilled in God's ultimate gift of His very own Son.
2. Then, if you haven't made us of the **Sacrament of Confession** recently, for example during the Mission, then make sure to do so before Christmas. As well as the usual times at the weekends here, I'm also offering two

weekday evenings for an hour (Fri 15<sup>th</sup> and Tues 19<sup>th</sup>) when I'll be available; and if you'd rather go elsewhere, then Ware (this Thurs) and Waltham Cross (Mon 18<sup>th</sup>) have Penitential Services for Advent. All these times are listed in the Newsletter. John the Baptist's key announcement was to prepare the way for the Lord — and there is no better way to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord than to let Him cleanse our hearts from sin and make them a welcoming place for Him to be born anew.

3. And finally, next weekend, we will have a beautiful **Carol Service** in the afternoon of Sunday at 5pm. This is a chance to stop and pray, to sing and listen, and to adore Jesus who comes. By then the Crib will be set up, and we will have that final week ahead of us. How precious to come and pray, "Come Lord Jesus, come at Christmas ... Come into my heart and make me yours."

Let's not ignore the call of the Church in this holy season, but come and be with the Lord here in church, and prepare for Christmas (in your heart) in the best possible way.