

## 2nd Sunday of Advent, Year A

### GOSPEL

Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Company Inc.

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

*A voice cries in the wilderness  
Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight.*

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'

(Matthew 3:1-12)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Luke's Gospel suggests that John the Baptist and Jesus were cousins, but there is no hint of this in Matthew.
- John the Baptist was not alone in his criticism and rejection of the soft religious life in the cities of Palestine. There were others, too, who withdrew from what they saw as the corruption of the temple cult and retreated to the desert to live a life of prayer and asceticism. The best known of these groups were the Essenes of the Dead Sea region. It is likely that John was in some way associated with them.
- The Essenes established a community at Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea. It was this community that left the wonderful legacy of the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in the 1940s. These scrolls have proven invaluable to scholars in throwing light on the religious practices of the day.
- Advent is a time in which we too are invited to withdraw a little in prayer and contemplation.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

During Advent in Year A, the first reading always comes from the prophet Isaiah. It is useful to pay particular attention to his voice, noticing the development of the vision and images he puts before us relating to the meaning of Jesus for the Church and the world. In last week's reading, Isaiah sees what is to come: the nations assembling, surrendering to the Lord, laying down the weapons of war, beating them into the useful tools of farming and peaceful life. Today, Isaiah describes the qualities of the Spirit of the Lord and the just judgments this brings, resulting in a world of no conflict. In next week's text, Isaiah describes the glorious and triumphant coming of the Lord and the healing of all that is broken. In the final week of Advent, Isaiah speaks of the maiden who will conceive and give birth to one who is 'God-is-with-us'.

- Explore together these readings from Isaiah and the idyllic, joyous and triumphant world they depict.
- In what ways are these readings a reflection of the kingdom of heaven that the Baptist says is near at hand?
- What insights does Isaiah offer to the Church for our understanding of the mission and ministry of Jesus?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- In what ways are you preparing a way for the Lord to come into your life at Christmas and at baptism?
- What 'good fruit' have you produced so far in your life?
- Recall some occasions when you were very conscious that you had produced 'good fruit' or done something really well. Have there also been occasions when you failed in such a task or were found wanting, when you knew you could have done better? Share your reflections.
- Withdraw a little this week from the hectic celebrations of Christmas cheer and concentrate instead on waiting and prayerfully preparing for what is to come. Give thought to the real meaning of Christmas and contemplate what the 'advent' of Christ meant to the world.
- Use today's gospel acclamation as your prayer this week:

*Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:  
all people shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia!*

