

THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD:CHRISTMAS DAY 25 December, 2005

1. **Today we celebrate one of the great Christian mysteries.** “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart”. Let us ponder with her some of the things she heard on the night of the birth of Jesus. “Don’t be afraid! for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people...” .
2. **Many people in Jesus’ day lived in fear:** of illness, poverty and starvation, of Roman oppression ; of religious disapproval. The reasons have changed but in our society many people live in fear—of growing old, of getting sick, of unhappiness and loneliness, of their children’s behaviour, of road accidents, drugs, career failure and aimlessness, of marriage breakups and unruly grandchildren... Sometimes it is on the surface, sometimes deep in the hearts of people.
3. **As Luke presents the nativity,** Mary knew from the annunciation that Jesus was born to be king to rule over the house of Jacob forever in a kingdom without end. But this night there was a new dimension. The child was hailed as king by the lowliest of shepherds on earth to the angels of heaven. Peace was being offered to the cosmos!
4. **Why is “a child wrapped in bands of cloth lying in a manger” a sign of good news?** Here is God incarnate: a baby giving love unconditionally, trusting without question, holding no hate or judgment. In the midst of the poverty of the stable, a fragile child, brings joy and the promise of peace which casts out all fear.
5. **Mary pondered these seemingly disjointed things:** a helpless child, yet the Prince of Peace, a Saviour for the world. In Jesus God’s presence in the world takes a human form: love incarnate, a baby whose life will bring healing and forgiveness and freedom from fear to all who believe and follow him.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT 4 December, 2005

1. **We all know what it is like if we are preparing for important visitors.** Use various examples: the garden for an open inspection; the house for a family wedding; the guard of honour for the queen! Tidying up, cleaning, polishing, training, practising, perfecting.
2. **Such is the season of Advent!** A time of preparation for the coming of Jesus and a time to reflect on the preparation of the Jews for the Messiah, (Isaiah 40.1-11); the preparation by John the Baptist for Jesus (Mark 1.1-8), and the preparation of Christians for the return of Christ (2 Peter 3.8-15a). Common to them all is a call to repentance of sin so that ‘we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ’. (Collect)
3. **Peter’s letter,** was probably written around 150AD in difficult times in the Church as Gentile converts sorted out what it meant to be Christian - their beliefs and their values- especially during times of persecution. There were doubts about the Second Coming of Christ and so the writer reassures them of Jesus’ promise to return.
4. **We are still living between the Resurrection and Christ’s return.** Perhaps we too are doubtful about the form that Christ’s return will take. We may reject the fiery imagery and the other apocalyptic events yet we proclaim “Christ will come again” and ‘we look for his coming again’. The need to be in a state of readiness for the day, means that we need to tidy up, cleanse and polish our lives; train, practise and perfect our discipleship.
5. **The question the writer of the epistle asks is still relevant:** ‘What sort of persons ought we to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness [as] we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home’. This vision gives us hope as we prepare personally for the coming of Christ believing that at last his righteousness will reign and the whole world will know his peace. This hope sustains us through our troubled times too.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

11 December, 2005

1. **We know a lot about John the Baptist, the last of the great prophets of Israel:** son of Zacharias and Elizabeth, lived in the desert in self-imposed abstinence; began ministry of preaching and baptizing for the repentance of sins in the 15th year of Tiberias Caesar, baptized Jesus, was imprisoned and executed by Herod Antipas. He attracted a great following and had a profound impact.
2. **The gospels record John the Baptist as humbly pointing beyond himself to the coming Messiah** whose sandals he was not worthy to untie. He introduces Jesus as the one the world has been waiting for to bring us out of darkness and back to God (John 1.6-8, 19-28)
3. **We look back to the prophecy of Isaiah (Is. 61.1-4, 8-11) and Mary's words in the Magnificat (Luke 1.47-55)** to spell out what changes the coming of the Light will make to a world in darkness—good news, for those who are oppressed, broken-hearted and imprisoned. Christ offers freedom, justice and peace to a world groaning for redemption.
4. **In Advent we prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus.** The doctrine of the incarnation affirms that the eternal Son of God took human flesh from his mother and that the historical Jesus is both fully God and fully man. Our faith is therefore anchored solidly in the world. God became flesh, part of the world. He came to bring the kingdom of God into the world and what happens in the world is of his concern. Humbly we need to recognize that by ourselves we cannot redeem the world of its ills.
5. **In their humility John the Baptist and Mary** were able to know the purpose of Christ in the world. May we too humbly prepare for his coming and be ready to welcome a saviour who will graciously offer us his forgiveness, freedom, justice and peace so that his kingdom will come.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

18 December, 2005

1. **“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight”** sums up today's advent theme as we focus on the annunciation to Mary. Annunciations are a literary form (cf. Isaac, Sampson, Samuel, John the Baptist) with their purpose to inform the reader of the role of the expected child. and in this case the creative power of the Spirit of God.
2. **The scene is full of hope and fear.** First of all for Mary: How can this be? She is deeply troubled yet the messenger also assures her of peace and blessing and a son who will be great. The promise that there is nothing that God cannot do fills her with hope. The fulfilment of the promise of God is found in her simple words of trust. (Luke 1.26-38)
3. **Secondly for the Jewish people:** 2 Sam. 7.1-11, 16 gives a classical expression of the Davidic-Messianic hope. God promises his people that the Davidic dynasty will last forever. David intends to build a temple, a permanent house for the Lord, but God's intention is not so limited. God promises to build a dynasty, the house of David. In this context the people hope for a Davidic king, a messiah to rescue them from their oppressors. These centuries of hope and fear reach their culmination and fulfillment with the birth of Jesus in the City of David. .
4. **Thirdly for us today:** We long for peace, justice, righteousness. And security in our own lives and in the world. Christ offers the hope of fulfilment of all these things for he is the one whose kingdom knows no end.
5. **Why then do we not see it now?** We wait still, in hope and fear for the return of Christ and the coming of the kingdom in its fullness. The secret that was revealed in Christ has not yet come to fruition. (Romans 16. 25-27) It awaits the submission in faith and trust that Mary gave from a world which does not know the hope he offers.