

# SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

## YEAR B

7th December 2008

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, practicing, 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 IN ADVENT

## YEAR B

14th December 2008

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 sandal 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 IN ADVENT

## YEAR B

21st December 2008

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 fulfillment 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.

# THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD. CHRISTMAS DAY

## YEAR B

25th December 2008

1. **The first paragraph of the story** of the birth of Jesus in today's Gospel (Luke 2.1-20) gives a very ordinary account of what seems to be an ordinary child. It is the story of the shepherds which tells us he is no ordinary child and in doing so reveals something of his nature and mission in the world. Heavenly angels declare the child's glory to the lowliest in society. Here is God who has sought out the poor and weak in order to raise them up and give them hope.
2. **Isaiah 62.12 reminds us that God is one who seeks us out.** So often we believe that we are on a search for God but it is the opposite. So much of the New Testament points to a God who comes to us, who seeks us out: the parables of the lost, the call of the disciples, the challenge to Zacchaeus, and the coming of the Holy Spirit with power, all point to God as the one who seeks and finds. The birth of a child, God come to us, God with us, is the prime action of his search to bring us to him.
3. **The festival of Christmas** is a celebration of the Incarnation, the great salvation event in which God sent his only son to live with us and draw us back to him. He came searching for the lost to bring them back to God, he came with compassion that we might be whole, he came humbly and self-sacrificially to give life to others. He revealed to us the nature of God and showed us how to be children of God.
4. **Christ alone is the child of God by nature;** but we can become children of God by grace and adoption, not by what we do but by humbly submitting ourselves to God's grace in baptism and then daily being renewed by the Spirit of God to live our lives as Christ did: in humility, in compassion, in self-giving, in seeking the lost and bringing them home to him.
5. **When we celebrate the Birth of our Lord,** it is not just the celebration of the birthday of Jesus. It is much more than that. It is the celebration of the great mystery of God who sought us out and reveals himself to us in a lowly, ordinary child, so that we might too become children of God .

# FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS YEAR B

28th December 2008

1. **Today we have a story from Jesus' childhood** which is found only in Luke. It is a very fitting reading for this day which traditionally celebrates the Holy Family. Luke 2.22-40 includes this narrative probably with several things in mind. Let's just see some interesting things in the passage and ask some rhetorical questions for you to think about during the week.
  - **Luke points out the piety** of this family (vv 1 and 27) They acted according to the Law of Moses, bringing Jesus for presentation to the Lord in the Temple, offering a sacrifice as they should. Those born Jewish would be glad to hear this about Jesus' family. It would validate their own upbringing. It would help them accept him as the Messiah. Is this just obedience or do parents everywhere and every time share this desire to offer their child to God?
  - **The two devout Jews, Simeon and Anna**, proclaimed Jesus as the long-awaited messiah. Simeon quotes from Isaiah, and there is no doubt their commendation 'of Jesus is to be an assurance to Jews of Jesus' status in fulfilling prophecy. Why do we so many centuries later love Simeon's words?
  - **There is no mention of the birth or of Mary** and Joseph's pre-knowledge that Jesus was special in any way. They are called 'the parents', 'the child's father and mother'. It is as if they did not know of the angels' messages, the Magi's visit. They are a devout Jewish family doing the right thing. Why were they 'amazed' at what Simeon said?
  - **Right from the beginning of Jesus' life**, the shadow of death begins to fall as Simeon's gave a warning in v. 34 that Jesus would be a sign that would be opposed. Yet, life seems very normal. The family returns to Nazareth and in the care of both parents, Jesus grew physically, and intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. How do you think this warning affected them?
2. **This rich passage has many questions** about it and you can go away thinking about them. However, it presents to us the picture of a loving family, bringing their child up within the context of faith, an environment for proper growth and development of a special child and a model for us, bringing up our own children.