

At the time, people expected the Messiah to come at any moment (v. 15): perhaps John would restore Israel's fortunes and God's power would triumph now. John says that the baptism he offers is vastly inferior to Jesus' baptism: for Jesus, he is so unworthy that he cannot even do a slave's task ("untie ...", v. 16). (In Acts 2:3, fire is associated with the Holy Spirit.) V. 17 says, in agricultural language, that the godly ("wheat") will be gathered to Christ but the ungodly ("chaff") will be destroyed. John preached a message of forgiveness of sins and the advent of a new relationship between people and God.

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The Post-Communion Prayer

Father, we give you thanks for these heavenly gifts. Kindle us with the fire of your Spirit that when Christ comes again we may shine as lights before his face; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

~ Notices ~

Prayers - If you have any particular issue that you would like to be prayed for, do please email me on frkevinobrien@me.com or call me on 065 672 4721.

Talks at Killaloe Cathedral – A series of talks for Advent Wednesday at 8.00pm – Cathedral Church of St Flannan. Also streamed from their website and Facebook.

Week 4 15th December – An ecumenical church
Joc Sanders

Website: clareanglicans.ie

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Advent Wreath prayer: Blessed are you, Sovereign Lord, just and true, to you be praise and glory for ever! Your prophet John the Baptist was witness to the truth as a burning and shining light. May we your servants rejoice in his light, and so be led to witness to him who is the Lord of our coming Kingdom Jesus our Saviour and King of the ages. **Blessed be God for ever.**

Mission Sunday donations to:

Limerick & Killaloe Diocesan Council for Mission
IBAN: IE44OFI9045591214337 BIC: BOFIE2D



3rd Sunday of Advent (Year C) 2021

Readings and Hymns

Collect: God for whom we watch and wait, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son: give us courage to speak the truth, to hunger for justice, and to suffer for the cause of right, with Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Suggested Hymns: *In conjunction with the online service you might like to view these hymns on YouTube - with internet links and lyrics so that you can sing along:*

- 1) Rejoice, the Lord is King!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhEUCSzaU8M>
- 2) Ye servants of God, your master proclaim
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ9j3e8_yQc
- 3) Fill thou my life, O Lord my God
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2mpY0NahNQ
- 4) Lord of the Church, we pray for our renewing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRXWDANh69o>

Zephaniah 3: 14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away the judgements against you,
he has turned away your enemies.
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing
as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.
I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the Lord.

Canticle - Isaiah 12:2-6

Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the Lord God is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.
With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.
And you will say on that day:
Give thanks to the Lord,
call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.

Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.
Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Philippians 4: 4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Luke 3: 7-18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'

And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.'

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.' So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Commentary

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Earlier in the chapter, the author has spoken of Jerusalem (her inhabitants) and their crimes: they have failed to listen to God, accept his advice, trust in him and draw near (v. 2) to him. He has destroyed other nations as a warning to Jerusalem, but she has ignored it (vv. 6-7). In spite of this, he will cause Gentiles to turn to his ways (v. 9); they will serve him by permitting the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem (v. 10). When God does rise ("on that day", v. 11, in an ideal future time), he will bring about Jerusalem's moral recovery by removing the arrogant from their midst (v. 12), leaving as "the remnant" (v. 13), the "humble and lowly" (v. 12), who will be godly; they will live in tranquillity. Now the author (or perhaps a later editor) invites Jerusalem to rejoice because her salvation is about to happen. God has intervened (v. 15); he dwells with his people; he protects them. In a military image, God will lead Israel's army. He will encourage her people (v. 16); he will give them victory, rejoice in their return to his ways, make his love for them apparent again, and celebrate in song. As people expected to happen at the end of time, God will destroy Jerusalem's (and Judah's) enemies, look after those who suffer, bring the exiles home, and make the city to be honoured by all (v. 19). They will see Judah's fortunes restored! (v. 20).

Isaiah 12:2-6

This passage is in a similar vein to our reading from Zephaniah. V. 1 and v. 4 begin "... in that day"; 11:10 says "On that day" other nations will note that a king of David's line ("the root of Jesse") sits on Israel's throne; they will ask about him and the divine glory that is with him. "On that day", says 11:11, God will gather the remnant, the remaining faithful, from throughout the world. So the day is the end of the era, when the Messiah will come. "You" (12:1) is singular, so perhaps God instructs a herald of events to come. He will tell the people to give thanks for the end of God's anger and return to his comfort. Perhaps metaphorically, "salvation" in v. 2 and v. 3 is restoration to the Promised Land: note "wells of salvation". God's "strength and ... might" (v. 2) will protect his people. Life-giving water symbolizes God's saving power. In a second song (vv. 4-6), the people not only give thanks but also proclaim the good news to all nations: that all may know of him and his actions. His people are inhabitants of "Zion" (v. 6), "royal" because God, "the Holy One of Israel" dwells there.

Philippians 4:4-7

Paul began the conclusion to the letter back in 3:1a. After a digression – to warn against heresy and self-indulgence and to urge devotion to Christ – he tries to finish the letter, but certain concerns intrude. It seems that "Euodia" (v. 2) and "Syntyche", two workers for Christ, differ in their understanding of what the way of Christ is, and that this is causing disunity in the Philippian community. We do not know to whom Paul refers as his "loyal companion" (v. 3); he is asked to be instrumental in achieving reconciliation. V. 4 is the conventional Greek salutation (like our goodbye) but here Paul means "rejoice" literally. May you behave towards others as you should ("gentleness", v. 5). Paul expects the Second Coming soon: "The Lord is near." Then v. 6: rather than worrying on their own, the Philippians should ask God to help them, through prayer, both in prayers of "supplication" (petition) and of "thanksgiving". God's "peace" (v. 7) will protect them against their own failings and external threats. It "surpasses all understanding" either by being beyond the grasp of the human mind or by achieving more than we can conceive.

Luke 3:7-18

Luke has told us that "... the word of God came to John ... in the wilderness. He went into all the region ... proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins ..." (vv. 2-3). Now John the Baptist addresses people in general ("crowds", v. 7): he calls them "vipers" (poisonous snakes common in Judea), and accuses them of being baptised with no intention of starting a new, ethical, life. If they think that by being baptised they will evade God's judgement at the end of the era ("wrath to come", v. 7), they are wrong: they must also turn to godliness. Being Jewish, having "Abraham as our ancestor" (v. 8) is no assurance of salvation, for anyone who responds to God's gift of love with appropriate behaviour will be part of the renewed Israel. The people have a choice (v. 9): either respond to God's offer by beginning a new way of living, or face condemnation at the end of time. (Here "fire" symbolizes adverse judgement.) God will fulfil his promises to Abraham in unexpected ways! Luke gives us three examples of behaviour which fit with turning over a new leaf. The "crowds" (v. 10) are probably ordinary people; they should have selfless concern for the disadvantaged. In spite of attempted reforms, "tax collectors" (v. 12) still collected more than prescribed. The "soldiers" (v. 14) were probably Jews in the service of Herod Antipas; they too were despised. John tells them that they should follow the emperor's guidelines on military conduct. That "What should we do?" is answered here and elsewhere in various ways probably indicates that simply following rules is inadequate: we must ask again and again in openness to God's will.