

## 2nd Sunday of Advent

Year C



Berner Melkenmeister

John the Baptist in the Wilderness

### **Malachi 3.1-4**

#### **The Coming Messenger**

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

#### **What's going on?**

The prophet Malachi sets out a vision of the way God will come to his people. A common theme in the prophetic writings was that a messenger, or angel, will announce a time of preparation and then God will be present among human beings. The messenger is coming, but, says the prophet, who is holy enough to withstand the challenge he brings? The message again is: prepare to meet God.

So God's messenger is compared to a purifier, a refiner of metals, heating them and filtering out impurities until the precious metal, gold or silver, remains. Or the messenger is like fuller's soap, an alkali derived from plant ashes which the ancient people used to clean and fluff up newly woven cloth. So God's purpose is to clean and purify people of all their impurities, their sins, and so establish his kingdom. The priestly people, the Levites, would be seen making offerings to God in the way they were intended when God first gave the rules of holy living to his chosen people.

This passage is used because it parallels the story of John the Baptist announcing the coming of Jesus and offering baptism in the river Jordan to wash sin away, so that people would be ready to meet God in Jesus.

## **Benedictus: Song of Zechariah**

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, “  
who has come to his people and set them free.

2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, “  
born of the house of his servant David.

3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old “  
to save us from our enemies,  
from the hands of all that hate us,

4 To show mercy to our ancestors, “  
and to remember his holy covenant.

5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham: “  
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

6 Free to worship him without fear, “  
holy and righteous in his sight  
all the days of our life.

7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, “  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

8 To give his people knowledge of salvation “  
by the forgiveness of all their sins.

9 In the tender compassion of our God “  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, “  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace. *Luke 1.68-79*

Glory to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

### **What's going on?**

This song, the song of Zechariah, praises God for remembering his people and the promise of a Saviour. God has promised to save the people of Israel from their enemies and grant them freedom of worship and the opportunity to live in peace and without fear. There will be a time of preparation when people learn about the salvation of God and how to obtain forgiveness for all their wrong doing. God's love will make it happen.

### **Philippians 1.3-11**

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

### **What's going on?**

St Paul is writing to his friends in Philippi (a city in Macedonia), telling them that he is praying for them and of his gladness that they have heard the good news of Jesus Christ and have become Christians. He hopes that their faith will continue to grow so that when Jesus returns they will be ready to meet him. Their faith will transform them into the kind of community that God wants and which will glorify God's name.

### **Luke 3.1-6**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” ’

### **What’s going on?**

Luke sets the advent of Jesus’s ministry in context. He refers to the Roman emperor Tiberius who ruled over the empire (AD 14-37), the local Roman governor in Jerusalem in Judea - Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas the ruler of Galilee in the north and his brother Philip, ruler of another region and sons of Herod the Great. Lysanias was yet another local ruler, north of Philip’s region. The people of Israel then, were an occupied and ruled people, overseen by the Romans. Among the Jews, Caiaphas was the high priest and Annas, his father-in-law, was a powerful retired high priest, the religious leaders of the people under occupation. Luke therefore sets the political scene and names the major players. Into this scenario comes John the Baptist, into the region around the river Jordan, calling on the people to prepare to meet God, offering baptism in the river as a way of declaring people free from sin. John was responding to the prophetic words of Isaiah in the Hebrew Scriptures to prepare for the Lord’s coming, to reconfigure the world to make it ready for God to arrive.