

## **Advent 2 2021**

### **Luke 3:1-6**

**In HTC – bit about the Advent bags. Wednesdays reflection.**

**At St Mary's, talk to the children about what jobs they think they might like to do when they get older. Maybe ask adults what they wanted to be when they were children – and what they actually did when they grew up.**

**Maybe ask if John the Baptist wanted to be a prophet in the desert when he was a child.**

**On the second Sunday in Advent we remember the Prophets and John the Baptist was the last of the great prophets. The job of the prophets was to convey the word of God to the people, and their message was always twofold. The prophets always called the people back to God, reminding them of how God wanted them to live, that they were God's special chosen people, set apart for Him. They also spoke of the coming Messiah who would save God's people. The message was always for now and for the future. John the Baptist does exactly the same, he called the people to repent, to say sorry to God and turn away from their sins, and to be baptised as a symbol of being washed clean and of their renewed commitment to God. But He also told them that the Messiah was coming. Being baptised was not in itself going to save them – Jesus was coming, and He was their Saviour.**

**Luke, we know was a doctor, he was a man of science and it shows in the detail of his writing. He gives us a lot of information about what was happening at the time. It was the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius. Tiberius was the Second of the Roman Emperors. Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judea. Now the Romans had occupied the area for quite a long time but it was fairly recent that they had appointed a Governor of Judea which was in the south. Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas was appointed by the Romans to rule in the Northern area of Galilee and his brother Philip in some of the surrounding**

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area. There were two high priests, Annas and Caiaphas, who were also appointed and manipulated by the Romans. And it was during the rule of all these people that John the Baptist came – but he had true authority, because it was the word of God that he was speaking.

Now on the surface it might look like the Jewish people at that time had it all sorted. The temple had been rebuilt, they had priests and other holy men to tell them what to do, they went to their synagogues to read scriptures and worship God, they went to the temple to make sacrifices at the appointed times. But actually, a lot of it was a sham. The temple had been rebuilt by Herod the great as a vanity project. But he wasn't a real king of Israel just a puppet king set up by the Romans and his sons were no better. The priests and holy men were equally hypocritical. They lorded it over the people and made life very difficult for them, imposing taxes and rules that they themselves did not keep. There was as you can imagine a lot of resentment and people were desperate for things to change.

So John called them out to the desert – this was significant because they had gone through the desert when they came out of slavery in Egypt, he was calling them away from the oppression that they were living under and back to God. Baptism was one of the rights of becoming a Jew, he was inviting them to be washed clean and make a new start with God. But as I said, baptism would not save them, anymore than it can save us. Jesus was coming to save them and John's job was to prepare the way, to ensure that they were ready to hear and receive what He had to say to them.

[Like Jesus, the coming of John had been prophesied hundreds of years before by the prophet Isaiah and Luke quotes these wonderful words about him:

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**“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare ye 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”.]**

**There are just two brief points I want to make. We too have to prepare our hearts to be able to hear, receive and respond to God’s word. If we believe in Jesus we are saved – like Jesus said to Peter at the last supper, we don’t need to be washed all over again, but we do need our feet washing regularly – to say sorry to God for the ways in which we have gone astray, taken on too much of the world, the things we have done wrong. We can’t expect to hear from God unless we make ourselves ready to listen to Him.**

**Secondly, He has prepared things for us to do. Our lives have meaning and significance. The first thing we are called to do is always the most important, to be in relationship with Him and to worship Him – that is our first and highest calling. Secondly if we are blessed to have families, we are called to care for them, they have been given to us to care for. Beyond that there will always be specific things that He wants us to do – they may not seem very big or important to us, but they are to Him, and we cannot see the bigger picture. Remember Anna in the temple. She lost her husband at a young age, spent all those years faithfully serving God in the temple, just fasting and praying, not doing anything significant at all, that was all God asked of her, but He did have just one important job to do when she was 84 - she was to recognise Jesus, give thanks to God and tell people in that moment about Jesus being the redemption of Israel. That was it – but she was ready. Are we ready to do whatever it is that God is asking us to do today?**