

Thought for Advent 3: Isaiah 61: 1–4; 8–11; John 1: 6–8; 19–28

This morning, in our New Testament reading, John the Evangelist introduces us to John the Baptist – the great herald of Jesus’s coming. But the Baptist is quick to shift the attention away from himself and towards the greater one who is coming after him. What might we learn from his behaviour?



Actually, we hear very few of John the Baptist’s words in this Gospel account. All he says really is that he is NOT the Messiah – and then that Jesus is. After that he encourages his own disciples to follow Jesus instead.

How humble he is! How easy it might have been for him to feel challenged or threatened by the arrival of someone who is greater, better, more important than he is. But not at all. This is John, who three months before his birth, leapt with joy in his mother’s womb when she welcomed the newly pregnant Mary into her home. This is John, who was never afraid to speak the word of God without thought for his own comfort or safety. This is John who Jesus himself would call the greatest of the prophets. And yet John, important though both he and his message are, is after all merely human.

Unlike Jesus.

Let’s look again at the first reading, the Messianic declaration from Isaiah 61:

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good tidings to the afflicted;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;*

This is the passage Jesus reads in the Synagogue at Nazareth before declaring ‘Today the scripture is fulfilled’ – to the rage of his hearers. For it is Jesus himself who binds up the broken hearted and sets the captives free, who turns mourning into gladness and spreads God’s grace and favour freely. This is what John is urging people to prepare themselves for, and these same words remind us today that Christ will come again to make this fallen, broken world perfect once more.

Today we hear the voice of John the Baptist, calling us to prepare ourselves for the coming of our Saviour. Let us listen to this message, and take time to think about what it means for us, in this Advent, in mid-winter, in Covid time. It is a message of such hope.

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