

Sermon Sunday 13th December 2020

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8 to end and John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Is there someone you would really like to meet, listen to or even talk to? For me it would be John the Baptist sent by God to be a herald for Jesus Christ. The description of John of living in the desert, eating wild honey reminds me of the hippies from the sixties, I'm showing my age now! However, he was so much more, as we know. It was his job to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus Christ by preaching and baptising. This he did without fear or favour. First and foremost though he was looking for Jesus in the crowds beside the Jordan and it would be John who would baptise Jesus at the start of His ministry on earth.

Over the past few weeks our readings and preaching have been about what will happen to those who do not turn to God and have Jesus in their lives, when Jesus returns to this world. Now though, we move on or as one writer puts it 'the excitement begins to mount.' The excitement of Jesus the Son of God coming into the world to save it and its people, as the light of the world. Look at verse 4 from John's Gospel '**IN HIM, GOD, WAS LIFE AND THAT LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN. THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS BUT THE DARKNESS HAS NOT UNDERSTOOD.**' That now is all changing; the messiah the Old Testament Prophets declared or foretold was now coming and it is John's job to prepare the way; in verse 6 '**HE CAME AS A WITNESS TO TESTIFY CONCERNING THAT LIGHT.**'

So, there is John preaching and baptising people telling them about the coming of the Saviour Jesus Christ. John's testimony, as set out quite clearly in verses 15 to 18 is very clear and as such led to him being questioned by the Jewish priests and Levites. John told them in no uncertain terms that he was not a Prophet, that he wasn't Elijah and told them he was not the Christ. He sends them away with the words in verses 26 AND 27 '**I BAPTISE WITH WATER BUT AMONG YOU STANDS ONE YOU DO NOT KNOW. HE IS THE ONE WHO COMES AFTER ME, THE THONGS OF WHOSE SANDALS I AM NOT WORTHY TO UNTIE.**'

Isaiah the prophet, as did many others, foretold Jesus' coming quite clearly. The words used by Isaiah in verses 6.1 and 2 are exactly the same words Jesus used when He reads in

the synagogue to the people. Luke 4:18 tells us Jesus rolled up the scroll and said **READ VERSES ONE AND TWO FROM ISAIAH**. The Old Testament has so much to tell us about Jesus and His ministry when He comes from God.

Recently I read an article about the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy being recognised in the Advent Antiphons, something I must admit I hadn't heard of, so much so I have ordered the book of which the article was one part. The Antiphons have an ancient pedigree but we don't know who wrote them although they are referred to by a Roman writing in the sixth century, so they had probably been around for many years, if not centuries. They are based on the prophecies of the Old Testament Prophets such as Hosea, Jeremiah and Amos and can be described as 'Praises of Hope.' The seven hopes are those of people in every age: for truth, justice, freedom, a new beginning, light, peace and love. Those words echo to me of Jesus' coming, John's mission to prepare the way and Jesus' life and ministry, as the light of God in this world and things we as Christians should be striving for in our lives and in the lives of the people around us and throughout the world.

Therefore, as we approach the celebration of Jesus' birth as well as celebrating please remember it is you and me that now has the task of taking up John's message of telling people about Jesus Christ and God the Father who sent Jesus into the world as a light to lighten the darkness. Amen.