

## *DECEMBER 9 SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT*

**READINGS:** Matthew 3:1-12; Romans 15:4-13; Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7,18,19

### *SERMON A*

Today's New Testament readings deal with the way people responded to the arrival of Jesus.

In the reading from Matthew's Gospel we hear about John the Baptist, who was sent to prepare the way for Jesus. John was a challenging preacher who called people to confess their sins and turn their lives around. In his appearance, his lifestyle and his message, he shocked, challenged and inspired. Many responded by being baptised, but some found it difficult to cope with what he had to say. John told the Pharisees and Sadducees that it was not enough to have Abraham as their father; they must also produce 'fruit'.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks about the instruction, encouragement and hope that we can gain from the Scriptures (which in Paul's time only comprised the Old Testament). There was often a conflict in the early Church between those who wanted Christians to be circumcised and those who believed that Gentiles should be accepted as they were. Paul points out that Christ's actions confirm the promises given to the patriarchs but he also lists a number of references to Gentiles being called to welcome God with praise.

Paul and John share with Isaiah a vision of the Kingdom which is universal, stretching beyond the Jewish nation. God's people will be known by the fruit they produce, the lives they live; God's people will be known by the praises they sing; God's people will be known by the hope they have in Christ.

Both New Testament passages also mention the Holy Spirit. John speaks of the way Jesus will baptise people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Paul prays that the Romans will be empowered by the Spirit to have an abundance of hope. This ultimately is the answer to John's challenging message. We cannot save ourselves, but God does it for us by transforming us from within. Salvation doesn't come through our ancestry, it comes from our willingness to welcome Jesus and put our trust in him.

## Sermon B

### Welcoming Jesus

The reading from Matthew introduces us to John the Baptist who is sometimes known as the last “Old Testament prophet” because of his warnings about God’s coming judgment. His arrival on the scene announced the coming of a new age, the coming of God’s Kingdom, that would be ushered in by Jesus. John stood at the threshold of this new age, showing up in the Judean desert wearing a tunic made of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist – clothing that closely linked him to the prophet Elijah who was to return before the day of judgment: “Before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah.” Further on in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus himself compared John to Elijah, pointing to John’s work in preparing people for the coming of God’s kingdom.

“Someone more powerful is going to come,” John says, one who “will baptize [us] with the Holy Spirit and with fire”. This second Elijah and apocalyptic prophet speaks with urgency and calls us to “do something” to show that we “have really given up our sins.” John urges us to get ready for the Lord’s coming and echoes the prophet Isaiah: “Get the road ready for the Lord! Make a straight path for him!” Are we ready to listen to the shouts from this messenger? How are we to prepare for the Lord’s coming?

John urged people to repent, or to turn back to God, and he proclaimed that “the kingdom of heaven will soon be here” (Matthew 3:2, CEV). In the Bible, the word “repentance” involves more than being sorry for past sins or regretting the way we have lived previously; it involves a true conversion, a total turnaround of lifestyle, a complete change of direction in our lives; it involves a deep-down change of heart and warmly welcoming Jesus into our lives. As the well-known Advent hymn puts it:

*O, come to my heart, Lord Jesus,  
there is room in my heart for thee.*

In this season of Advent, we are once again called to welcome into our hearts the Holy One who is to come – Emmanuel – God with us – the King who will see to it that “the poor and the needy are treated with fairness and with justice”; the King whose Kingdom will be filled with people who know and honour him”; the King whose reign will be marked by inclusion and acceptance.

Jesus the Messiah is coming! “The Spirit of the LORD will be with him.” Let us focus our complete attention on the messenger’s voice by getting “the road ready for the Lord” so that we may joyfully respond, “Lord Jesus, welcome into our hearts, our lives, our homes, our work, our town. With open arms and warm hearts, we welcome you.”