

Advent 3, Year A - 14 December 2025

Today's Bible Readings

First Reading Isaiah 35:1-10

Isaiah speaks of a time when God will come in judgement, but will also bring great joy, healing and salvation to the people.

Gospel Matthew 11:2-11

John the Baptist, now in prison, seeks reassurance from Jesus that he is indeed God's chosen one, Messiah. In turn, Jesus affirms John's identity as the great prophet who came to prepare the way for Jesus himself.

HOMILY *"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Matthew 11:3*

"It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, everywhere you go! Take a look in the five-and-ten, it's glistening once again, with candy canes and silver chains that glow. It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, toys in every store; but the prettiest sight to see is the holly that will be on your own front door."

"It's Beginning to look a lot Like Christmas" is one of my favourite 'Christmas songs' that seems to mark out December. Its origin is Canadian, written in 1951 by Meredith Willson while staying at the Grand Hotel in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. A popular hit, released by many of the Crooners, from Perry Como to Bing Crosby, Johnny Mathis and my favourite, Michael Bublé. But the words betray something deeper – it's beginning to look a lot like – a lot like what? Mince pies? Tinsel? Fairy lights? What does Christmas really look like – to you? What are you really preparing for? John the Baptist in today's Gospel suggests preparing requires change – and Anglicans are not very good at change, so perhaps a better word is transformation!

The people of Israel also struggled with change, and they were not really sure what to make of Jesus when he did appear – if they believed he was the long-awaited messiah after all, because he wasn't preparing his Kingdom in the way they had expected or indeed the way they wanted!

Their song of preparation would more likely be, "All I want for Christmas is... a new King!" Because the long-promised Messiah was supposed to claim leadership over the people of Israel, overthrow the occupying Roman forces and establish God's kingdom of peace, justice, joy and gladness in their promised land. That is what they thought they want for Christmas. But the scriptures speak more of a Messiah who would bring judgement. It's beginning to look a lot like...?

Our Lord's words of judgement, like those of John the Baptist, and thrown straight back at the religious leaders of their day and in truth, they confront us also. John had been right in his proclamation that someone much more powerful was about to come in judgment, sorting the wheat from the chaff and condemning the sinful. It doesn't feel so festive now! And John believed that Jesus was that expected one.

Yet Jesus is all about transformation. Far from claiming kingship in earthly signs of power and delivering the people of Israel from Roman captivity, our Lord renews relationships, he heals the

sick, shows mercy and forgiveness to sinners, he loves untouchables and restores the lost to their rightful places in society. What on earth is he doing, people ask? Is this what Christmas is all about – relationship, justice, love, healing, mercy and forgiveness?

What are our expectations this Advent as we look to the coming Christmas feast, on this day when the priest wears pink, the half-way point in our journey to Christmas? it beginning to look a lot like Christmas for us? Is our Christmas going to be about relationships, justice, love, healing, mercy and forgiveness? These are transformational themes, light which overcomes darkness. For God, has chosen to act in creation in a new and fundamentally revolutionary way. The Incarnation, God with us – the very child whose birth we will recall in just two weeks' time, is the new Adam, the Emmanuel – yes, the promised messiah for Israel, but even more than that, God's new relationship with each one of us which heralds judgement and justice, mercy, love and forgiveness.

With the birth of a baby in Bethlehem comes the much longed for hope of salvation that is God with us. This is so much more than birth – this is completely new life and renewal of a long relationship that reaches back in time, before the Prophets and Patriarchs, before the first living beings represented by Adam and Eve, back to the first day of creation itself when the creator spoke and light overcame darkness. As John describes it in the prologue to his Gospel that we read on Christmas morning: *'The Word became flesh and lived among us.'* (John 1: 14)

Perhaps today, more than ever, we need to listen to the proclamation of John the Baptist; we must prepare for the coming of one who is more powerful, more holy and more gloriously loving than we could ever truly comprehend – the new Adam. We need to look forward, mindful of the judgement to come, always seeking justice in every aspect of life and living in complete Christian love. We start this process of transformation by examining our heart intentions. Is it really beginning to look like Christmas?

Our hearts know that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah, the new Adam. We start our process of looking to Christmas by opening our hearts to the Judgement of the Lord, and recognising that in every aspect of our lives we must seek that justice which speaks of his Kingdom and that love which is service and sacrifice – the model Christ himself sets for those who follow him.

You know, looking at Meredith's song again, perhaps I have been a little hard on the crooners! The last verse points us in the right direction: *It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas; soon the bells will start, and the thing that will make them ring is the carol that you sing right within your heart!* We start with our hearts – we must sing the joys of the Incarnation – our heart is where the work of preparation for Christmas really begins, deep within our very lives. Friends in faith, each soul needs to be prepared for the coming King – Emmanuel – and that requires transformation indeed. Amen.

Father Damian Harrison-Miles, December 2025