



## GOSPEL GOSSIP

**'Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'**

**St Matthew 3. 1-12**

**Sunday 7 December**

On this second Sunday of Advent, our attention focuses on John the Baptist. A cousin of Jesus, John was called to prepare the way of the Lord – Jesus. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets, whose duty was not to foretell the future, but to recall people to God. John proclaimed that God was coming in person, and prepared people for his coming, associated with the 'kingdom'. Just as we prepare for any major event, such as Christmas, so we must prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus.

The way that John tells us to prepare ourselves is through repentance. We wouldn't welcome people into our homes at Christmas if they weren't ready: cleaned, tidy and decorated. Our guests wouldn't think much of the fact that we couldn't be bothered, that they weren't worth a bit of attention. And either we wouldn't really care if our guests felt welcomed or not, or else we would be embarrassed that we weren't prepared. Advent is a time for such preparation; not just for Christmas, but for the coming of Christ again in glory as he said he would.

- What do you understand by the word 'repent'?
- How would you go about it?
- Is it just you as individual that needs to be prepared, or is it others – the whole world perhaps?
- What preparations need to be made?
- Is it your job to be a 'prophet' like John the Baptist today?

It is interesting that John, like Jesus was to, condemned the 'religious' people of his time, calling them a brood of vipers – hardly welcoming words! But John is aware that some people hid behind their religion, following the letter of the law, but not the spirit. They had become complacent and smug, and used their faith as a means of exerting authority over others. Although the religious people, the Pharisees and Sadducees had 'heard' the message of the prophets before John, they weren't really living their lives in expectation of the coming of the Saviour, Jesus.

John was also very determined to point people in the direction of Jesus, not towards John himself. This isn't a case of 'don't shoot the messenger', but the important fact that John was only the forerunner to the person he was proclaiming. By all accounts, then and today, John was not a charismatic figure in terms of appearance, nor of consoling words. Yet people flocked to him, to hear his words, and above all, the Word for whose coming John was preparing God's people.

- Do you think you might be self-satisfied and complacent in your faith?
- Is the letter or the spirit of the law more important to you?
- How prepared are you to be challenged in your faith?
- What is more appealing to you: the shop window or the interior?
- Are you really living in the real expectation of the coming of Jesus?

Advent is a precious opportunity to look at consider things we might otherwise ignore in the busyness and ordinariness of the rest of the year. It is a time when we are reminded again about God's love in sending us his son as our Saviour. It is a chance when we can review our lives, the way we live, our values, our attitudes, our actions, in the light of Jesus' coming, and to make ourselves, and others, and even the world, ready for that which is to be.