

11th December 2005 Third Sunday of Advent

Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11
- Psalm 126, page 125
- 1Thessalonians 5: 12-28
- John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Sunday 11th December 2005 - Third Sunday in Advent

The Third Sunday in Advent is the JOYFUL Sunday and we light the Pink Candle. Some churches have rose coloured or pink vestments for this day! — Don't you think I would look "pretty in pink"?

The theme of rejoicing of joyful expectation is evident in the readings.

Isaiah 61: 1-3

note verse 3; to provide for those who mourn in Zion

—

to give them:

a garland **instead** of ashes

the oil of gladness **instead** of mourning

the mantle of praise **instead** of a faint spirit

they will be called oaks of righteousness

the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

When this portion of Isaiah was written it was about the restoration of a people to their homeland, the restoration of a temple which had been destroyed,

As well as the restoration of their religious traditions. It was also the restoration of their standing as a people among the nations. **AND**

their restoration as a people whom THE LORD had blessed.

therefore Isaiah can say:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord! my whole being shall exult in my God

etc.

etc.

I imagine it is what the people of Iraq hope for! The prophet describes this as the mission of "the servant of the Lord" and the words are used by Jesus of his own mission in the synagogue in Nazareth (recorded in Luke 4:16-22).

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring:

- good news to the poor
- release to the captives
- recovery of sight to the blind
- let the oppressed go free

and — proclaim the year (the time) of the Lord's favour

and he also used these words to John the Baptist in Matt 11:2-6 and Luke 7:18-23 to indicate that he indeed was the one who was to come.

Pause...

As we read the gospel today you probably thought "We heard that last week!"

But when we examine the two readings more closely, we can see that last weeks' presented John the Baptist as the "prophet" looking to the future. But today's reading from John (not Mark) has a closeness, an intimacy and a sense of immanence — of immediacy.

"Among you... stands one whom you do not know...

he is here and he is about to do his work!"

As we focus down on Christmas, we seem to go back down the years

from Jesus' words of a new age
to John pointing to his coming
to the story of Mary
and the birth of the Lord.

As we move towards Christmas, the level of excitement and expectation builds:

- secular activity
- children's hope of Santa
- looking to holidays
- seeing friends and relatives again

but also in that deep spiritual sense that something in my life might be different — better.

Chris reminded us last week about **repentance** — essentially it is making up our mind to change direction and seeking God's help in so doing.

We were reminded of how devious we can be in the "devices and desires of our own hearts" —

How can we be joyful in such a situation?

By knowing we approach the celebration of the coming of Christ who comes to liberate

- good news to the oppressed
- binding up the broken hearted
- liberty to captives
- release to prisoners
- proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour.

I take that to mean not only those in prison but those held captive or imprisoned by their own failure and sin.

Boy, how this message of Joy has a hard edge!

I wonder too how much we are all captive to our own

materialism, especially at Christmas — how much we need to turn up at the RIGHT Christmas party!!

In Germany I hear that they are trying to restore the place of St Nicholas and downplay the image of Santa Claus because Santa Claus has developed from a 1930's as for coca cola and represents something very different from St Nicholas whose generosity bought liberty and I imagine REJOICING for the daughters of a poor family.

The joyfulness of Isaiah was liberation after years of oppression and the psalm celebrates much the same — moving out of sadness into joy.

The rejoicing of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is about having that sense of the joy of God in the midst of tough times — A christian community under social pressure and open persecution!
And so resisting forces which wanted to drag them back into old ways!

Chris said last week "as healing progresses, repentance does work its way from the head to the heart. It is the heart of course, that ultimately has to learn how to surrender — and repentance is the way through." and he drew our attention to the confession from Morning and Evening Prayer; the "devices and desires"

I want to remind **myself** and in so doing to remind you that one of the introductory passages to that confession is 1John1:8-9:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is **NOT** in us.
If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

John the Baptist points out the need for genuine repentance but he also points out the one who comes.

Among you stands one you do not know
But when you do know him you rejoice in the knowledge of
God's:

liberating
healing
forgiveness

John the Baptist symbolizes the Church's task calling for a turning to God in repentance but also pointing to the Joyful Christ, the one who comes to stand among us.