

Prepare the Way
Rev. Rob Lamerton
9th December 2007, Advent 2

- Isaiah 11:1-10
- Psalm 72:1-7, 18-21
- Romans 15:4-13
- Matthew 3:1-12

The theme would appear to be "Prepare the Way" as we begin to focus very much more on the reality — the firm flesh and blood reality of the coming of Christ.

If Advent 1 emphasized HOPE then Advent 2 picks up this HOPE and (as they say) gives it legs. Isaiah expresses his hope that God will act in and through a human agency.

He hoped God would act to establish a branch out of a dead shrimp — the family of Jesse the Benjamite which had of course produced the great King David had largely disappeared BUT somehow Isaiah hoped that God would raise up someone of that lineage to rule.

v2 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him
the spirit of wisdom and understanding
the spirit of counsel and might
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

etc., etc.,

But there was more to this hope.

It was about a New era where natural enemies would live side by side in peace. The whole action of God through human agency was to establish peace and harmony.

In the gospel story John the Baptist prepared NOT for the birth of Jesus **BUT** for his ministry and teaching — the whole REASON for his birth.

and his framework for the coming of Jesus is more about judgement and the need for confession and repentance in preparation for the "more powerful" ministry of Jesus.

He readies people for the presence of God's ultimate human agent and for all that Jesus is about to say and do.

One needs to be open to see and recognise, hear and believe Jesus. I ask the question just HOW do we get ready — How do we Prepare the Way? How do we listen to and receive his word?

1. Stop — stop doing a lot of the stuff we are doing.
Advent takes time out from the busyness.
2. Look — look around at the things of God
Try to see the beauty of the human beings around us.
3. Listen — Be aware of what people are saying
Listen again to God speaking through Christ.

in quietness, prayer, meditation, in reading and hearing the scriptures where we see and hear the life of Jesus. These surely are ways of Repentance of turning our lives around.

Paul too, in the letter to the Romans, expresses harmony as an outcome of Christ's presence.
"May the God of Steadfastness and Encouragement
grant you to live in harmony with one another
in accordance with Christ Jesus.
so that you may with one voice
glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Welcome one another therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God."
I take this to mean that a common united action by a Church or Congregation brings glory to God — but it begins with our welcome, our acceptance of each other!

Paul goes on to point out that the mission of God which began with the ancient people of Israel is now broadening out to include the NATIONS OF THE WORLD. (that is what is meant by "Gentiles") He quotes Isaiah:

The root of Jesse shall come
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles
in him the Gentiles shall hope"

to show that he believes this has been God's purpose all along!

So today as we move into Advent, the focus moves from the big things of the end times, to the much more concrete and personal — the expectation of God's human agent — and the expectation that through our turning back to stop, look, listen once again that we might also be ready to receive the Christ and also as a people (not just as "individuals") ALSO be God's human agents.

"May the God of hope
fill you with all joy and peace in believing
so that you may abound in hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit."