

# 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

## Year B

### Our Joy In Christ.

We celebrate our joy in Christ's redeeming work among us, realising that he who is to come is indeed already with us, 'unknown to us.'

*Readings:* Isaiah 61: 1-2, 10-11. I exult for joy in the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24. May you all be kept safe, spirit, soul and body, for the coming of the Lord.

John 1: 6-8, 19-28. There stands among you - unknown to you - the one who is coming after me.)

When John the Baptist first burst upon the scene, there was a great deal of speculation about his identity. Consequently, the authorities in Jerusalem decided to investigate this strange man and learn more about who he was.

Today's Gospel reading gives us something of an account of that investigation. It also gives us a helpful insight into what the Baptist believed about his own life. One inescapable, overriding impression is clear. Here was a man who believed he had a God-given mission.

By the time we hear of him he is already a very well known, and much respected public figure, so much so, that his name is a household word. Crowds of people hang on his every word, many of them walking great distances, just to hear him preach.

It is not surprising, then, for such a man to have a certain bearing and confidence in himself. He *knew* who he was. And he knew what he had been sent to *do*. Even so, public opinion tried to make John into something other than who he actually was.

Some thought he was the Messiah. Others thought he was Elijah, risen from the dead. Still others thought that he was the prophet foretold in the book of Deuteronomy (18:15). But John disowned all such titles, refusing to be diverted from his mission. He simply went on being himself. In the same way, that he accepted himself as he was, so we too, must likewise, accept ourselves for who we are, and not try to be someone else.

The other thing we must do, is to recognise that, like John, we all have a mission in life. John was called, 'A man sent by God.' That same title can apply to you and to me, since everyone, every man, woman and child, is sent from God. We are all created by God for a purpose.

We know, of course, the story of John the Baptist's coming into the world. We know that he was conceived, and born when his father was an old man, and when his mother was well past the normal age of childbearing. In that sense, we know that John's life was a miracle. But what we don't know, or very quickly forget if we did, is that so is ours.

The circumstances of our birth may have been comparatively ordinary, but to God we are equally unique. Indeed, every human life, including yours and mine, is a miracle of God. The only thing

special about John was the cause that he represented.

When the delegation insisted that he tell them his true identity, he answered, 'I am a voice.' That is all he was, a voice speaking out for a cause. – Each of us is also 'a voice'. – John's mission in life was to prepare the people for the coming of Christ.

The good news is that you and I, can do precisely the same thing. Every one of us has a mission to witness to Christ. Even the very least, the humblest among us, can represent, and speak out, for the greatest cause in the world. By the words we speak, and by the deeds we do, and by the attitudes we display, we can all help to make the world a little more receptive to the coming of Christ.

John achieved his mission of preparing people for the coming of Christ. With the coming of Christmas, we have the self-same opportunity to bring Christ to the attention of people.

Society is swept on by a tide of relentless commercialism and flagrantly overt materialism, which can, and does, obscure the true meaning, the wondrous significance, and the real beauty of Christmas. The question we must ask ourselves is, are we going to allow ourselves to be swept along by this tide? Or are we going to organise our preparation for Christmas in a spiritual way?

We may not be great prophets or preachers like John the Baptist, but each of us, in our own quiet, unique way can, by what we do, and by what we say, make people think, and realise that there is so very much more to Christmas than the false, transitory happiness of glitzy, sordid commercialism.

This is *our* God-given mission, *our* special mission in life.