

Reflection, Service of Carols and Readings,

Brookton (Advent 2) and Combined Churches' Service, Beverley, Sunday, 10th December, 2023

One of the challenges during the seasons of Advent and Christmas is hearing the familiar story we all know so well. Not that there is anything wrong with the story, but sometimes we sort of switch off – we've heard it all before – perhaps we want to hear something new. We all know the story. We've all seen the Christmas pageants and know the script. We've seen the Nativity scenes with Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus in a manger, the cow, donkey, the sheep and shepherds, we've sung the carols. It's become almost too familiar; sometimes 'Familiarity breeds contempt'?"

The Season of Advent which we celebrate presently prepares the way to Christmas in part through the story of John the Baptist in the wilderness. In the Church the Season of Advent makes a straight path for Jesus – a path which in our lives is usually hindered by the busyness of shopping and food preparation and the organising of holidays. Every year there can be different challenges hindering our preparations for Christmas. During this coming season of preparation might there be a time for reflection and contemplation as we hear the good news of Jesus coming to us in the flesh. Let the gospel narrative sink more deeply into our lives, let the story of Jesus' birth speak to us differently this year. The story of Jesus may be familiar – it may be the same – but our lives are not the same, so let us hear the story with eager ears.

To that end, it probably helps us to remember how very different the seasons of Advent and Christmas were for many people throughout the world and Australia, if not so much in Western Australia, during COVID. For many, it was not the usual joyous march toward Christmas. Everything might have been planned – parents were thinking about roles for their children – the play was organised and being rehearsed; the carols and readings were all worked out. However, how do you fit the usual crowds into one per 4 square metres and 1.5 metres apart? How might we account for any visitors that may turn up? It was anything but the straight path to Christmas that John the Baptist proclaimed - for us there were some roadblocks and potholes to be faced along the way.

During COVID people were anxious and waiting in the wilderness of lockdowns; there seemed no clear path forward. It was a time of uncertainty, fear, and grief. Christmas may have been the same familiar story, but our lives were not. While the harshness of wilderness may have confronted many during times of church closure, the ageless truth remained the same, and that helped us through. When the angel announced to Mary and Joseph that Mary would give birth, he said that this child would be called Immanuel – which means God is with us. That kept us going, knowing that in the wilderness we were not alone.

The Seasons of Advent and Christmas remind us that no matter where we are, or what experiences we are going through, that God is with us in Jesus. Let our message today/tonight be that we are called to be a people that await the coming of the Lord in all circumstances. We are always in waiting—through victory and defeat, triumph, and loss.

As the church, we are to proclaim peace on earth, goodwill towards all, and joy to the world – all the messages of Christmas. Therefore, just as we are pointed by John the Baptist to Christ, we point the world to the Christ, the one who is more powerful, more patient, and more loving. We point to the Christ, the one who is to come. Therefore, I invite you to let your lives be shaped by the truth that God is coming – that God comes in Jesus who is with us always.
