



Sunday 5th December 2021.

**Preparing the way
for the Kingdom of God.**

Scripture: Psalm 25:1-10
and Luke 3:1-6

Advent – the season of preparation and the season of anticipation – a glorious gift is coming soon and we need to be ready to receive it.

Our reading from Psalms provides us with a prayer that we can keep close to our hearts and lips as it conveys the spectrum of feelings that we experience in the world. Sadly, society is increasingly moving from a relational one toward a functional one. We are often so caught up in what we need to serve ourselves, that we miss seeing the needs and serving others.

What are your hopes and expectations as you anticipate these weeks leading up to Christmas?

Are you expecting to buy and receive gifts; put up the lights and coloured tinsel and enjoy the many sights and sounds of the season? Perhaps you are anticipating eating a lot or having to wait in endless cues at the shops. Or maybe this year, avoiding the crush in the shops and ordering online. Maybe you are looking forward to being invited to a party or see family and friends finally – there is much expectation.

What do you think Mary was expecting – certainly not chaos and hardship as a result of a visit from an angel with news that, in reality, included scandalous, shameful and untimely.

We don't like the unexpected twists and turns of life that come our way, especially during this season where there seems to be so much happening already.

Maybe you were expecting to come to church at Christmas to hear about the Christmas story and then this morning, we read the story of John the Baptist. God did some pretty unexpected things that first Christmas – like coming into the world as an infant. But God has always done the unexpected and John the Baptist is one example.

Advent is a time to prepare for the coming of Christ and John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare for this. God used an unexpected time and an unexpected person with an unexpected message to speak His revelation.

In those days Jewish law provided for only one high priest, appointed from Aaron's line (Moses' brother) and they held the position for life. But the religious system had been corrupted as the Romans were appointing their own religious leader to maintain greater control over the Jewish people.

This meant that Pilate, Herod and Caiaphas were the most powerful leaders in Palestine, but God's plan was already in place and emerging.

God chose this strange man, who lived out in the desert, had a crazy wardrobe of camel hair and a diet of locusts and honey. Wouldn't you think that God, in His wisdom, would use one of the religious leaders or even one of the political leaders of the day.

No, God chose a crazy man from the depths of the desert to deliver His message to a hurting and longing world – John the Baptist. And John was calling all to repent and be baptized for the Kingdom of God was near.

Jewish people were familiar with the idea of baptism and any Gentile converts who came to the Jewish faith had to be baptized to be accepted. Now here is the unexpected twist – John was preaching baptism to the Jewish people. They needed to be baptized.

As I said earlier - it was an unexpected person in an unexpected time preaching an unexpected message.

What are the implications:

God is always near and life always happens in His time. God is always present, even in those times we can't see or feel Him. Even in those times when God seems silent. Time is a strange thing. We say we never have enough time or that we will make time for this and that; we mark time by dates on a calendar, by days and weeks and years, by hours and minutes and seconds.

The ancient Greeks had 2 words for time – Chronos which is the time we mark with a calendar and watch. We measure it.

And Kairos, which is hard to translate precisely but it refers to time that is opportune.

Chronos is quantitative and Kairos is qualitative. God operates from the quality time – He hasn't forgotten us – He hasn't forgotten the refugees; those enslaved; the poor; hungry; homeless; lonely; unemployed; ill. God has not forgotten you or I. When we least expect it, God will be right there, meeting our need, but more importantly, doing His will.

God wants to use us to make a difference.

The Church were putting on a Christmas play and 7 year old Ann given a part to play and she was so excited. But she wouldn't tell her mother what part it was – she wanted it to be a surprise.

Her mum wondered – Ann is so excited, I bet she is playing the main part of Mary or a beautiful angel. On the night the children took their places for the opening scene. Ann’s mother could see the shepherds fighting in one corner, Mary and Joseph sitting solemnly behind the manger and the 3 wise men impatiently waiting behind. She could see her daughter calmly sitting on a chair off to the side.

The teacher began – a long time ago, Mary and Joseph had a baby and they named Him Jesus. When Jesus was born, a bright star appeared over the stable. On that cue Ann picked up a large tin-foil star, walked behind Mary and Joseph and held the star up high for everyone to see. As the shepherds came to see the Baby Jesus, Ann jiggled the star up and down excitedly to show them the way. And when the 3 wise men came she used the star to lead them too.

On the way home, Ann said to her mother – I had the main part. Did you? questioned her mother.

Yes, Ann said – because I showed everybody how to find Jesus.

We all need Ann’s attitude – even if it is simply carrying a tin-foil covered star. God can use us in the most unexpected ways.

Advent reminds us that we “live in the meantime” – between His coming and His coming again.

Move to offer Communion here.

In the meantime, Jesus still meets us in a quite unexpected way. He meets us here at this table where we will share the bread and cup – we come. We bring all of ourselves to meet Him in this mysterious sacrament called Holy Communion and just as unexpectedly as He meets us here, He gives us strength and hope for all the twists and turns

of life. So, come, but come expecting to find Christ here – to meet Him to know Him.

Serve Communion then 2nd part of Sermon:

We long for hope at Christmas. Life can change in a moment and it often deals blows we don't expect.

Hope is the focus of Paul's prayer in Romans 15:13. God is the origin of hope, no matter how difficult our circumstances. We can have hope because of who God is – powerful, wise and good.

He gives us a rock-solid assurance that a favourable outcome will come our way.

God makes this hope by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us.

I encourage you to return to Psalm 25 in times of distress or uncertainty. Read the words and let them sink into every fibre of your being because it reminds us what it means to be shaped by the Word, to have everlasting hope, faith and trust in God.

We are called to be a people of hope, not in foolish optimism, but in the conviction that our destinies are powerfully presided over by the One who has greater plans for us than we can possibly imagine.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You that You bestow love, joy and peace upon us so that we can release that into our world.

May our words, thoughts and deeds be seasoned with salt, strengthened through faith and lived out in our lives.

In Jesus' name. Amen.