

Parish of Esher

Christ Church, Esher with St George's, West End

SERMON

Third Sunday of Advent, 16 December 2018

9am Sung Communion, St George's, West End

Zephaniah 3.14-end; Psalm 146.4-end; Luke 3.7-18

Rev. Judith Roberts

Advent

- Advent is a wonderful time to pause and ponder
- And it is a time of hope, expectation and transformation
- And a time to be serious and reflective amidst all the frenzy, colour, sound and activity that December brings
- Possibly we spend more time in church than usual – sometimes with fluffy sheep, angels and bells and sometimes being challenged by strong readings
- Beginning with “ye brood of vipers” – not the most- friendly opening statement – but quite an evocative one
- The crowd had come to John for baptism – searching for meaning and understanding – a desire for holiness and goodness
- But it is another example of the thread running through all the Advent readings – the coming of Christ is disturbing and brings about radical change
- Last week we read of a transformation of a desert and the removing of obstacles to the King's coming –
- Here this is translated into the spiritual and ethical spheres of our lives

How does the crowd respond to John the Baptist?

- Well they don't run away! – they stay to hear more – however uncomfortable they may be feeling

- This coming King requires genuine and committed allegiance rather than thinking that direct descent from Abraham would suffice – baptism without repentance is meaningless
- The crowd ask – “what then shall we do?”
- This ethical transformation is to do with how we behave towards each other
- To share goods and food – fair taxes – the equitable administration of justice – all examples of the coming Kingdom
- In an occupied and humiliated province this was indeed radical good news

The language of baptism

- The apocalyptic language of baptism with fire shows that Advent is far more than just changes in society
- This is the coming of God – the fire that accompanies his coming recalls the flaming sword at the gates of Eden, the bush that burned, the fiery pillar and other manifestations of God’s holiness
- As well as looking forward to Pentecost when one of the signs of the Spirit is tongues of fire
- The imagery of Advent does not allow a gentle stroll – it is demanding, fierce and inspiring

Some Advent thoughts

- Advent is a time of deep and dark shadows – short days – the light is scarce and shadows and darkness reign
- We also recognise the shadows of the world – terrorism, political uncertainty and financial challenge
- AND PERHAPS
- The shadows of our own personal life – shadows of death and illness – unemployment or broken relationships
- The Advent voice calls to us across the centuries – it is the call of God – a call of salvation and a call of hope

A prayer

I have found this prayer particularly appropriate for many of the patients I meet in my work as a chaplain at Kingston Hospital – but it is a very profound prayer for all of us

God of the waking night – stay with me til sunrise

God of the dark shadows – be with me til birdsong

God of the long hours – inspire and comfort me

Note: This was a basic sermon script. Some content may have been added or indeed left out during the delivery of the sermon!