

Make way for Jesus

YEAR B – ADVENT 2 – 10 DECEMBER 2017– SPRINGLINE PARISH

[READINGS: ISAIAH 40. 1-1, MARK 1. 1-8]

Introduction:

Let us look at the key verses in the Gospel reading of today:

Mark 1. 1-8 : Although this passage appears to be about John the Baptist, the real focus is Jesus.

Verse : 1 : *“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”* It is a dramatic beginning, clear and unequivocal. Note especially Mark’s declaring of Jesus Christ as the “Son of God”. The gospel of Mark is the first gospel written and so it has a special significance for us. Mark had seen Jesus in his youth and had heard of Jesus from Peter of whom Mark was a disciple. So his testimony is of particular importance. Mark clearly states right at the beginning of his gospel that Jesus is not just the carpenter of Nazareth, not just any Jew or Galilean, not just any teacher or religious leader. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

The point of the matter is that as we are preparing ourselves for Christmas, we are not just going to celebrate the birth of any baby-boy --- it’s all about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Redeemer, our Saviour, truly our God made flesh.

Verses: 2 and 3: *It is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”– “a voice of one calling in the desert”, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him”*

Mark recalls the prophecy of Isaiah 20.3, the lesson that we read in the first reading. Mark is very careful to demonstrate the continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophecies. John is the messenger who prepares the way for the Lord. Mark gives a lot of importance to John the Baptist as he begins the New Testament unlike the evangelist Luke who considers John the Baptist as the last of the Old Testament prophets.

Verse : 4 : *And so John came, baptising in the desert region and reaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* John preached a baptism of *repentance* and *forgiveness of sins*. This is actually the central message of the gospels as well as the Christian proclamation. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mk 1. 15)

The “kingdom of God” is not something spatial, material, but the “rule of God”! “Repentance” is change of mentality to that of Jesus’ outlook. The baptism of water is the symbolic sign of the cleansing of sins.

Verse : 7 : *And this was his message : “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.”* John is a very humble man. He doesn’t take any credit for himself. He says : “I’m just a messenger.” In fact, John points to Jesus as the one who would take people back to God.

Verse : 8 : *I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.* Jesus is the one, John points out, as the one who will baptise us with the Spirit.

(10.15 Morning Worship. There are several family units here. Each one as an individual and as a family respond to God's word in different ways. I have asked David and Sylvia Johnston to come forward and tell us how they, as a family, have responded to the Word of God that we have just now heard.)

WHAT IS THE WORD OF GOD TELLING US TODAY?

Isn't it wonderful to relive that time just before Jesus came in to the world. Every year, this special season of Advent gives us that chance to 'remember' and to 'relive' and to 'make way for Jesus' in our hearts.

The four weeks before Christmas Day are called Advent (The Coming) because the Church focuses on the coming of Christ to the world, both as a baby in Bethlehem about 2000 years ago and also at the completion of all things, as our Judge and King.

So it is a time of individual and collective preparation and expectancy as we focus on those 'end things' of such deep importance for us. We are watching and waiting, doing some honest soul-searching, living through the bustle of pre-Christmas as with a rather wider agenda than presents, tinsel and turkey. *It is as if, deep in the heart of us as God's people, there is in Advent an insistent and urgent drumbeat, summoning us to be watchful and attentive to what God has done, is doing and will do.*

Although the passage that we have heard tells us a lot about John the Baptist, **the real focus is Jesus**. The gospel is all about Jesus. The New Testament is all about Jesus. He is the 'good news' in a world filled with 'bad news' of humanity's ongoing sinfulness. Sin divides us from God and from each other. Jesus, instead, unites us (and redeems us) to God.

John invites us to repent and confess our sins. **Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to God**. Last week, did some of you watch the inauguration of John Sentamu as the archbishop of York? In his sermon he recalled England back to her 'christian' roots!

That is what John the Baptist did. He recalled people to their senses and pointed to Jesus. Jesus must again become 'absolute' and 'central' in our lives and in our country. England must return to her 'Christian' roots. The question is :

God has done so much for us. Do we witness Jesus in our lives?

Do we give testimony by our lives that we have repented of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Master of our lives?

Do we manifest to others that we are 'redeemed'?

It is never too late to repent, to turn away from sin, to turn to Jesus Christ and make a fresh start.

The season of Advent is the best time for that!

[ST Mattapally]