

Advent 3 – John the Baptist:- Isaiah chapter 40, verses 3 – 5: Matthew chapter 3, verses 1 – 17 and chapter 11 verses 7 – 19:-

Advent is a time of watching and waiting: of prayer and preparation for the forthcoming celebrations of the Incarnation of the Son of God, an event that ushered in the beginning of His Kingdom.

Watching and waiting can be stressful - think of the 'aggro' in supermarket check-out queues!.

Traditionally the themes of the four Sundays of Advent are 1st – The Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob);

2nd The Prophets; 3rd John the Baptist; 4th Mary mother of Jesus / The Incarnation. Now the themes of the Advent Wreath are apparently 'dumbed down' to 'hope'; 'peace'; 'joy'; 'love'. (search 'advent candles meaning' on the web). All good themes but avoiding historical Biblical teaching!

The Judeans (or at least the Observant Jews) had been waiting for many years for the promised Messiah. Isaiah had spoken of the coming messenger who would pave the way. "The voice of him crying in the wilderness.. 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord' (Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3)" - words we may be familiar with from Handel's oratorio "The Messiah".... . When a dignitary visited a city in the ancient world he would send before him a messenger, an envoy, to prepare the way. When John the Baptist emerges on the scene Matthew chapter 3, verse 2 sees this as a fulfilment of that promise of the prophet Isaiah. See also Malachi chapter 3 verse 1 and chapter 4 verses 5 – 6.

Matthew chapter 3 verses 1 – 17:- introduces John, describes his ministry - of calling people to repentance, highlights his ascetic dress and life-style (very much in the pattern of Old Testament Prophets) and tells us of John pointing to Jesus... "one greater than I is coming: "I am unworthy to carry his shoes..." (verses 11 - 12). Matthew describes the baptism of the Lord Jesus by John - an act of identification with those who saw the need for cleansing and renewal, an act of obedience- and also of affirmation, empowerment and equipping.

Matthew chapter 11, verses 7 – 19:- John now in prison sends his followers to ask Jesus if He is really the One John was expecting. The answer is in His miraculous work. Yes, John was the long expected forerunner, the Lord Jesus Christ was the long expected Messiah. The Lord Jesus himself in today's reading testifies to the role of John the Baptist. He was "*a prophet and more than a prophet*". The Lord Jesus affirms John as the expected 'Forerunner' - "*he is Elijah who is to come*".

Remember that at the traditional Passover celebrations a last cup of wine is still placed on the table and the doors are opened – waiting for Elijah to come and prepare the way for the Messiah.

For believers, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah has come. Born at Bethlehem. Offspring of David. Son of Man and Son of God, the Redeemer. Advent is a time of preparation, not just for 'Christmas' but for His coming in Glory at the Last Day.

As we wait and worship, read and meditate on the contrast between Luke chapter 2, verses 1 – 7 and Revelation chapter 1, verses 10 – 18.

1) Rejoice and be glad!
The Redeemer has come!
Go look on His cradle,
His cross, and His tomb.
Sound His praises, tell the story,
Of Him Who was slain;
Sound His praises, tell with gladness,
He liveth again.

2) Rejoice and be glad!
It is sunshine at last!
The clouds have departed,
The shadows are past.
Sound His praises, tell the story,
Of Him Who was slain;
Sound His praises, tell with gladness,
He liveth again.

3) Rejoice and be glad!
For the Lamb that was slain
O'er death is triumphant,
And liveth again.
Sound His praises, tell the story,
Of Him Who was slain;
Sound His praises, tell with gladness,
He liveth again.

4) Rejoice and be glad!
For our King is on high,
He pleadeth for us on
His throne in the sky.
Sound His praises, tell the story,
Of Him Who was slain;
Sound His praises, tell with gladness,
He liveth again.

Horatius Bonar (1874)