

3rd Sunday of Advent – John the Baptist :-

Read Malachi chapter 3, verses 1 - 4 and chapter 4, verses 5 – 6; Luke chapter 3, verses 1 – 18 and the Gospel of John chapter 1, verses 19 – 23.

As we read these verses remember that the last Jewish prophet recorded was the book of Malachi, written in about 425 B.C. There was then silence for some 450 years. The appearance of John the Baptist “*in the wilderness*” brought a realisation that ‘things were happening’! The Lord God of Israel was ‘on the move’.

The question arises in Luke chapter 3, verse 15 - “*As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ,*”. It may be, as some have suggested, that the timing of the appearance of John the Baptist was seen as the beginning of the fulfilment of the prophecies in Daniel chapter 9 verses 24 – 25. The expectation of the appearance of the Messiah at that time is referred to in several places as we have seen in the readings given above.

A look at some of the questions asked of John the Baptist:-

“Are you the Christ?”, Luke chapter 3, verse 15 and John chapter 1, verses 19 – 20:-

Although the people at the time looked for and hoped for ‘the Christ’, John the Baptist clearly said no “*I am not the Christ*”. (John chapter 1, verse 20).

“Are you Elijah?”, John chapter 1, verse 21:- In his answer, John himself denied being the new Elijah. However, when asked about the coming of Elijah, our Lord referred to John the Baptist as being the fulfilment of the prophecies and as being the Elijah who is to come. See Matthew chapter 11, verses 11 – 15.

“Are you the prophet?”, John chapter 1, verse 21:- For an answer to ‘which prophet’ we need to remember that the priests and Levites who questioned John were well versed in their scriptures. This prophet which was expected was promised by their great prophet and leader Moses. Read Deuteronomy chapter 18, verse 15. In fact that prophecy can be taken as referring to the coming Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah! Again the answer is a straight forward “No”.

The final question! **“Who are you? What do you say about yourself?”** John chapter 1, verse 22. Here John the Baptist quotes the passage from Isaiah, chapter 40, verses 3 – 5. - see John chapter 1, verse 23 and Luke chapter 3, verses 4 – 6. Note that this meant that he was fulfilling the words of Malachi chapter 3, verse 1.

Remember during Advent that - **“According to His promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”** 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 13.

1. On Jordan's bank, the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake, and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings

2. Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
Make straight the way for God within;
Prepare we in our hearts a home
Where such a mighty Guest may come..

3. For Thou art our Salvation, Lord,
Our Refuge, and our great Reward.
Without Thy grace we waste away,
Like flowers that wither and decay.

4. To heal the sick stretch out Thine hand,
And bid the fallen sinner stand;
Shine forth, and let Thy light restore
Earth's own true loveliness once more.

5. All praise, eternal Son, to Thee
Whose advent sets Thy people free,
Whom, with the Father, we adore,
And Holy Ghost, for evermore.

Charles Coffin 1676 - 1749