

DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

In Israel, the great sequence of Prophets, had come to an end. For 450 years, the people were without a messenger from God. The people lamented that the spirit of their God had become silent. And now, God only spoke through the echo of his voice. But **then** along came John the Baptist, the **last** of the great prophets. The emergence of John was like a sudden sounding of the voice of God. He was the one who marked the end of their time of waiting. Because, in John the Baptist, the people could see an end to God's silence.

About thirty years earlier, an angel announced to Zechariah a priest of the Temple, that he would have a son, even though his wife Elizabeth was barren and advanced in years. And that his son was destined to be the **Precursor**, who would announce the arrival of the long-expected Messiah.

John, the name given him by the angel before his conception, spent his youth and early manhood, as a hermit in the desert of Judea, preparing himself for his exalted office. And when God revealed to him that the Messiah was soon to begin his public life, John set out for the banks of the Jordan. The word of John's arrival at the Jordan, spread quickly, and the people flocked to hear him. The people believed he was the new Elijah, who was to come.

John began to preach **repentance**, in order to prepare the people for "**him who was to come**". And he **baptised** them. This was not the sacrament of baptism, later instituted by **Christ**. This was a symbolic washing, to indicate repentance and a resolve to avoid sin.

John the Baptist didn't care about offending the religious leaders, because through them the people were living lives unaware of God. He was a light to illuminate evil, a voice to rebuke sin, and a signpost to God.

John the Baptist turned on the **two** main religious groups of Jews, at that time. The **Pharisees** were strict observers of the Law of Moses, but their good works were ruined by their pride. The **Sadducees** were more political than religious. **They** denied the resurrection of man, and other beliefs, that were held by the Pharisees and the majority of Jews.

But **John** did not mince his words when addressing them: "**you brood of vipers**". He told them that descent from Abraham, and membership of the chosen race, would **not** save them, **unless** they truly repented. And he said that God would find a **new** Chosen People ... and He **did**.

John knew that he was only the Precursor. And that **his** baptism has no effective power, because its value, only comes from the personal repentance of those who receive it. But the **One** he is preparing them for, will truly cleanse them from their sins, and give the Spirit of God to those who **accept** him.

Meanwhile, John, in true humility, feels he is not worthy even to be a menial servant of the Messiah. And he warns them that the Messiah will separate the wheat from the chaff, the good from the bad, and **each** will receive what he deserves.

In this holy season of Advent, as we prepare to welcome Christ at Christmas, John the Baptist has **words of advice** and **warnings** for each **one** of us. He advises us to "**prepare a way for the Lord**". This we do by **true** repentance of our past sins, and a firm resolution to straighten "**the ways of the Lord**". And that **is, not** to deviate from the true Christian way of life in the future. Because, heaven help us, **none** of us deserve the reproaches that John addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees. However, most of us perhaps, can find traces of some notable vices in our innermost selves.

It was the **pride and self-righteousness** of the Pharisees, that **ruined** their otherwise good lives. And it was the **worldliness** of the Sadducees, that made them lose interest in the future life, causing them to go as far as to **denying** any future existence after death.

Of these **two** vices, the vice of the Sadducees is the more prevalent today, and it is to be found in the best of us. Whilst all Christians repudiate atheistic beliefs, with its denial of the existence of God, and a future life. **However**, many people become **so immersed** in the things of **this** world, that they have **no time**, or **thought**, for the world that is to **come**. They become **fully** immersed in materialism, and **inject** this materialism into those whom they influence.

Are we, **so** full of pride and self-righteousness, or **so** materialistic, that if John the Baptist re-appeared today, would he call **us** "**brood of vipers**"? A sincere examination of our outlook on **life**, and **death**, and our current way of life, will tell us how we stand in our relation to Christ.

And as we prepare for Christmas, let us ask ourselves, **if** we were to come before Christ our just judge, before Christmas, how would we fare? **Would** we be gathered up with the wheat into his granary. **Or** would we be bundled up with the chaff, into the unquenchable fire.

We **can**, by true repentance, **change** ourselves from chaff into wheat. Each one of us has that decision in his own hands. But once we draw our last breath, not even the infinite mercy of God can do that for us.

But! Do not fret. It is **not** Christmas **yet**, it is still Advent. The **time** of **true** Repentance.