**Advent 2**

**Mark 1.1-8**

How are your preparations going for Christmas?

Making any sort of plans this year has been extremely difficult, hasn’t it? We’re not sure from one week to the next what we will be allowed to do, where and with whom.

Last week, on the first Sunday in advent, as we lit our first advent candle, we were reminded of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David, and how they looked forward to the coming of God’s son.

This week, on the second Sunday in advent we are reminded of the prophets, through whom God spoke to his people about the coming of Jesus.

These prophets spoke over several hundred years, beginning some 800 years before Jesus’ birth.

Let no one say that God sent his son into the world on a whim!

Our reading this morning from Mark 1 focuses on John the Baptist (who gets a whole candle to himself next Sunday!).

And we might say that John, standing in the line of the prophets before him completed the prophetic work of pointing to the coming Messiah.

At the beginning of his Gospel, Mark presents John as fulfilling the prophesy of Isaiah... John is the promised messenger, who will prepare the way for God’s coming messiah.

And John certainly has a prophetic air about him.

Like Elijah before him, he heads out into the wilderness, confronts those in authority and even dresses in a similar way.

When Jesus is questioned about why people say Elijah must return as a precursor to the coming of the Messiah in Matthew 17, Jesus affirms that Elijah has already come.. in the form of john the Baptist.

And so John prepares those who are willing, for the coming of Jesus by his preaching and baptising (Mark 1.4)…

Not of course before Jesus’ birth – John was born only a few months before his cousin…

But before Jesus begins his public ministry, probably at the age of 30 or so.

The focus of John’s preaching is twofold.

Firstly, John points to the person of Jesus: “after me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie” (verse 7). He promises that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit and not just water (verse 8).

And secondly, John points to the response people should make to the coming of Jesus – repentance…

A turning away from sin and lining one’s life up with the purposes of God.

Matthew and Luke, in their longer gospels flesh this teaching out a little further.

So, let me share three things from our gospel passage this morning that might be of help to us as we journey through advent.

One. Let’s keep our focus on Jesus.

Christianity has may important aspects to it.

And there’s much involved in keeping our churches alive and active.

But at the heart of everything is the person of Jesus.

He is the one who’s sandals *John* was not worthy to stoop and untie, let alone us!

He is the one who comes to bring the presence of God and his kingdom into our midst.

He is the one who pours out the Holy Spirit.

In whatever way we find helpful let’s make sure we keep our focus this advent and Christmas on Jesus.

Let’s talk with him in prayer and listen to him through the Scriptures.

Let’s try not just to sing carols, but to worship and pray through their words.

Let’s seek to love and serve Jesus practically as we love and serve those around us, and especially the poor and needy.

Two. Let’s align our lives with God’s purposes.

In Luke’s Gospel, Luke records a bit more of John’s teaching in the wilderness.

When the crowd ask John what they should do, John replies:

*“The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.” (Luke 3.11)*

He tells the tax collectors to be honest and fair.

He tells soldiers to be content with what they have and not take advantage of others by force.

Being a follower of Jesus has very real, practical, implications.

We are called to be concerned about the things Jesus is concerned about.

We are called to model the values of Jesus in our own lives.

We are called to act like Jesus.

In the person of Jesus, God’s heavenly reign was brought to earth.

We are called to continue the growth of God’s kingdom, and to pray for it, ‘on earth as it is in heaven’.

What has God laid on your heart?

As you think like Jesus, model Jesus and act like Jesus, what can you do to extend God’s kingdom?

Maybe what’s on your heart is the lonely in your parish – give them a ring.

Maybe what’s on your heart is the homeless – volunteer at a shelter or with the foodbank.

Maybe its those persecuted for their Christian faith – get involved in writing letters to persecuted Christians through the charity Open Doors.

Whatever it is, let’s align our lives with the purposes of God and act accordingly – being not just hearers of the word but doers.

And three:

Like John the Baptist, let’s point people to Jesus.

In John’s gospel, chapter 3 vs 30, John says of Jesus, “he must increase and I must decrease”.

John, for all his greatness, knew that his job was simply to point people to Jesus.

This is our job too.

Its interesting that John didn’t head for the Temple to preach his message. Instead he headed to the Judean wilderness.

The wilderness was often a place of encounter between God and his people – think of Moses and the burning bush, or God’s people at Mount Sinai.

Away from the religious trappings of the temple. John began to form a new people, ready to welcome Jesus when he came and to work with him in building his kingdom.

We need to take our faith out into the communities and world in which we live, sharing the good news of Jesus so that others might know what it is to be a follower of Jesus and have the opportunity to chose to follow Jesus for themselves.

We have a wonderful opportunity over Christmas to invite people to church – either in person or online.

We’ll try to use our services to share the good news of Jesus and give people an opportunity to invite people into their lives.

Let’s pray that God will do what only he can do, giving people the gift of faith and new birth as his children.

Let us pray:

Father God,

You sent your prophets and John the Baptist to prepare your people for the coming of your Son.

Please may we focus our lives on Jesus,

Align our lives with your purposes

And point people to Jesus.

For your glory’s sake.

Amen