

We continue on the 3rd week of Advent to explore how the message of Advent, although a time of reflection and inner soul-searching, is also a message of HOPE. **Read Mark 1: 1 – 8.**

1. The Importance of 'First Lines'. Mark 1:1

- The first line in a book can either grab your attention or make you decide to discard it: **Mark 1:1** may not seem earth shattering in English, but the words '**good news**' or '**gospel**' would have meant 'an epoch-making event' to Greek speakers, like the birth of a future Emperor.
- To the Hebrew mind it meant 'the in-breaking of God's Kingly rule, the Advent of His salvation; it was so important because it was foretold in **Malachi 3:1. Isaiah 40: 1-3; 52: 7; 61: 1-2.**
- Peter began his gospel knowing everyone wanted a Leader who could point the way to a better life.

2. How has God Prepared the Way for us?

- God has stepped into time: a baby cradled in a manger is fulfilling the prophecy of **Isaiah 9: 6-7.**
- His Kingly rule is one of justice, righteousness and peace for all who own Him as Lord, without distinction. The Grace of God is revealed in a human who lived and died that we might be forgiven.
- God cancels His people's debts, **Is. 40: 1-2.** Those who commit to God are not in arrears with their sins anymore, they don't owe Him anything and can stop trying to earn His approval.
- This is **grace**: the unmerited favour of God, bestowed on us through His beloved Son, born to a virgin 2,000 years ago. Only Christianity understands God's love as completely free and unconditional.

3. How are we to prepare a way for Him? Mark 1: 2-5

- By listening to the message of John: he preached a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- By understanding our very human nature and the faithfulness of our gracious God who will always forgive a genuine 'sorry'. **1 John 1: 8-10.**
- Through confession which leads to a change of life that will be noticed for its holiness. Holiness is beautiful and radiates from within. It is something we should all aspire to and is not to be confused with 'intensity'. A sense of *humour* is the link between *holiness* and *humility*. Holiness is not boring, '.....when one meets the real thing it is *irresistible*'. C S Lewis.
- By developing a heart of love for the poor and service to the poor. Keeping the Royal Law is evidence of a living faith: 'Love your neighbour as yourself', without distinction.

4. What does it mean to be 'Baptised in the Holy Spirit?' Mark 1: 7-8

- Before His ascension, Jesus told His disciples to wait for the '**gift** my Father promised ...' Then on His last day on earth He said, 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you': **Acts 1: 4 & 8**
- On the day of Pentecost at least 12 male disciples and who knows how many others were set on fire with the Holy Spirit and the news of Jesus' resurrection began to turn the known world upside down.
- There are many stories of men and women being baptised with the Holy Spirit in e.g. **Acts Ch.10 & 19**
- Jesus is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit and bestows some of His many gifts on us. The Giver is much more important than the gifts, and they are given to equip us to proclaim the 'Good News' or the Gospel to the poor, the prisoners and the oppressed. **Luke 4:18.** The in-breaking of God's Kingdom into our world came with the birth of a baby and it continues today with you and me.

Points to Ponder:

1. *Do we really listen to the words we are singing at a carol Service? Some are very profound: any favourites?*
2. *Advent is a season for taking time rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.*
3. *Trying to repent to God on one's own often leads to an inability to forgive oneself. Healing and forgiveness comes when we have the courage to confess to another person: someone we love & trust.*
4. *When we think about 'the gifts of the Spirit' are we thinking of them as giving us power to witness courageously? Perhaps if we did we'd be bolder about inviting someone to one of the Christmas Services.*