

## Bennochy church: 9<sup>th</sup> December 2012

You wait in for that parcel. You know it is coming, sometime between the hours of 8 am and 5 pm. It is already afternoon, you keep looking at you watch and out the window, but it has not yet arrived. You begin to wonder if you have the wrong day. So you decide to go out. You miss the parcel. The delivery note is behind the door on your return. You knew it was coming, yet you still went out.

After their return from exile in Babylon, the prophet Malachi declares to a disillusioned people in Jerusalem, the messenger (Malachi means 'my messenger') has almost arrived. There are some parallels with the time of Malachi in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and today. Read *DSB on 12 Prophets* p.226. It was a call to wait, be ready and be prepared

Advent is a strange time. We wait for something that we know has already happened, and we do it every year. After all Jesus was born over 2000 years ago. We know the story. Yet every year as a church we wait. If we are honest with ourselves, what impact does Advent, and I would also suggest the birth narratives of Jesus, actually have on us? Does it go any deeper than a nativity play? After all '*Christmas is for the children*' and as a church we have bought into that myth and promoted it as such!

The question we need to be asking ourselves is this, what do Advent and nativity point to? The church must never believe that the story ends with shepherds, angels and wise men.

If we agree that the world has commercialised Christmas, and see its meaning as no more than a time to eat, party and exchange gift, we as a church must use the time of Advent & Christmas to point forward; to see them as the beginning of the most important story of all time, where the baby of the nativity becomes the man of Easter.

John the Baptist certainly knew that there was something special about him. Jesus is now into his thirties; the narrative leaping from birth to Baptism, and note the specific historical facts given by Luke. It is the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the rule of the Emperor Tiberius and John gives his warning to the people, it is old fashioned language, 'turn from your sins and be baptised', even the Jews, who believed they were already God's people. Why, because says John, he, the Messiah is here. The Kingdom of God has arrived, the words of the prophet Isaiah have come true and the waiting is over. In the words of Isaiah, you can imagine a new Exodus or a new return from Exile.

But Advent is not that simple, for the Kingdom of God is here but not yet fulfilled. We are the 'in-betweeners' who live in the knowledge that nativity, crucifixion and resurrection are history, but the Kingdom of God is still to come. In other words, we have

more waiting to be done. Read the narratives of the life of Jesus and you will find the clues.

*Watch out, then, because you do not know what day your Lord will come. <sup>43</sup> If the owner of a house knew the time when the thief would come, you can be sure that he would stay awake and not let the thief break into his house. <sup>44</sup> So then, you also must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him. (Matthew 24: 42-44)*

So the words of the Old Testament prophet Malachi are still true today; a messenger is still to come. Nativity's love and the grace of the cross, still refining, cleaning and judging

The words of John the Baptist are still true for us today; this is a time of preparation. We might not today commonly use the word 'Sin', but we have all failed God in some way and need to approach the nativity child as the shepherds worshiped, and as wise men did, where the gift we offer is our life.

It is clear that scripture promises another return of Christ. How that will happen and when no one knows. It is Advent all over again, but not just for 4 weeks leading up to Christmas, but every day. This is the time in which we live. A time to wait and be watchful, a time to wait and be prepared and a time to wait, seeking first the Kingdom of God.

We will be ready for Christmas; we always are, but what about the new Advent that is still to come? Amen.