

his subjects. After all, that was what they had seen of Herod and of the high priests. You wouldn't think of asking them to drop in for a drink when they were in the area. John the Baptist, on the other hand, had a reputation for enjoying locusts and wild honey – definitely not a royal diet. Many people didn't see that he was inviting them to see God in the ordinary, not the extraordinary.

Jesus would not be like a rare hothouse plant. He resembled the dandelion or the daisy, flourishing anywhere and everywhere. He'd welcome an invitation to visit people in their homes. John's childhood home in Ein Karem and Jesus' home in Nazareth were so ordinary that their contemporaries would not have expected the extraordinary to emerge from the two towns. The extraordinary is always a surprise: it's meant to be so.

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Most of us find it difficult to cope with the extraordinary, probably because we tend not to put ourselves into that category. We know our shortcomings, especially those we try to keep from public scrutiny. Yet we are also capable of greatness. We have seen that during the pandemic, when people have surprised us by the extent of their generosity and care. Have we ourselves been a source of inspiration to others, perhaps?

The ordinary gives birth to the extraordinary. That is one of the messages of Advent.

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near.

FIRST READING Zephaniah 3:14-18

PSALM Isaiah 12

RESPONSE Sing and shout for joy for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

1. Truly, God is my salvation, I trust, I shall not fear. For the Lord is my strength, my song, he became my saviour. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. R.
2. Give thanks to the Lord, give praise to his name! Make his mighty deeds known to the peoples! Declare the greatness of his name. R.
3. Sing a psalm to the Lord for he has done glorious deeds, make them known to all the earth! People of Zion, sing and shout for joy for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. R.

SECOND READING Philippians 4:4-7

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia! The spirit of the Lord has been given to me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor. Alleluia!

GOSPEL Luke 3:10-18

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do not fear. Behold, our God will come, and he will save us.

Next Sunday's Readings:

Micah 5:1-4
Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-45

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SUNDAY BULLETIN

THINKING FAITH

EXTRAORDINARILY ORDINARY

A joy of the coronavirus pandemic has been to see “unsung heroes” receive well-deserved appreciation for their generous and tireless self-giving which has made a difference to the lives of others. A common feature has been the genuine surprise – and tears – when that acknowledgement came. We would hear people saying, “I wasn't doing anything special.”

Captain Tom Moore wasn't looking for glory when, in April 2020, he decided to walk around his garden and raise £1,000 for the NHS before his hundredth birthday – but the news got out and, inspired by his courage and determination, people donated over £30 million.

Captain Tom died in February this year, but he had acted as a stone dropped into a pool of water, creating ripples which spread ever wider across the surface. “If he can do it, so can I” – and so five-year-old Tony Hudgell walked ten kilometres on new prosthetic legs and raised over £1 million for the Evelina London Children's Hospital which had saved his life. Six-year-old Frank Mills, who has spina bifida, hoped to raise £99 for NHS Charities Together by daily walking ten metres using his frame, something his family described as “a personal marathon”. Deeply touched by the child's efforts, people donated more than £300,000 to his charity.

Captain Tom, Tony and Frank showed the world the immense joy of their achievements without a shred of boastfulness. They were genuinely surprised to see that other people thought that they had gone above and beyond the call of duty. It can be difficult to see how the extraordinary emerges from the ordinary.

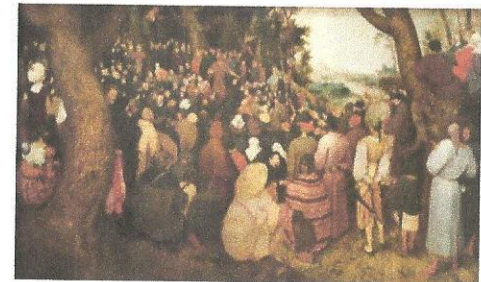
John the Baptist found mixed reactions to his preaching. Some people lapped up every word, asked for baptism and changed their lives. Others could not see John as the herald welcoming the era of the longed-for Messiah: he was too “ordinary”, telling the “haves” to share their possessions with the “have-nots” and soldiers to stop grumbling about their pay. He baptised them with water, which St Francis of Assisi would later describe as “so useful, precious and pure” but, again, extraordinarily ordinary. John told them not to look at him but beyond – to the greater one who was to come.

John's audience, like many others, had the wrong idea about the Messiah, expecting an earthly king who would drive the Romans out of Israel. They thought that he would come in great splendour, generating maximum attention, total service and obedience from

Hope in the darkness



We continue this series of reflections for Advent with Sister Janet Fearn FMDM.



12 DECEMBER 2021

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

YEAR C

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK III