



The people among whom John lived and worked did not discuss atheism or agnosticism. They took God's existence for granted. God was so much part and parcel of everything they did and said that recognising God in the depths of their hearts could become just as perfunctory and shallow as we so often see today. That is why, although he didn't use the term, John the Baptist was calling for a climate change in people's lives. He wanted to see a global warming of hearts reawakened to the presence of God.

WARMING THROUGH LOVE

Today, as then, the climate change of the heart removes the mountains and the valleys of daily difficulties, tortuous paths, tough decisions and sense of isolation. Global warming through love happens independently of multinational companies and profit margins. It allows for a completely new focus as the spiritual world replaces its materialistic counterpart.

"Put Christ back into Christmas!" What could I do to help the process? If I were to start small, perhaps in my home or workplace, could I make a difference? When writing Christmas cards, for example, do I choose those with religious themes, or do I go for the robins, snowmen, reindeer and Santa cards which are easier to find and often slightly cheaper? Do I buy books of ordinary postage stamps or choose the Christmas variety? For some people, that Christmas card or stamp might be the only bit of religion in the home. Could our hearts and lives become the soft rain falling on the thirsty wilderness of human hearts? Could Advent 2021 offer a new beginning?

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

O people of Sion, behold, the Lord will come to save the nations, and the Lord will make the glory of his voice heard in the joy of your heart.

FIRST READING **Baruch 5:1-9**

PSALM **Psalms 125**

RESPONSE **What marvels the Lord worked for us! Indeed we were glad.**

1. When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage, it seemed like a dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, on our lips there were songs. **R.**
2. The heathens themselves said: "What marvels the Lord worked for them!" What marvels the Lord worked for us! Indeed we were glad. **R.**
3. Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage as streams in dry land. Those who are sowing in tears will sing when they reap. **R.**

4. They go out, they go out, full of tears, carrying seed for the sowing; they come back, they come back, full of song, carrying their sheaves. **R.**

SECOND READING **Philippians 1:3-6. 8-11**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia! Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight, and all mankind shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia!

GOSPEL **Luke 3:1-6**

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Jerusalem, arise and stand upon the heights, and behold the joy which comes to you from God.

Next Sunday's Readings:
Zephaniah 3:14-18
Philippians 4:4-7
Luke 3:10-18



www.rpbooks.co.uk rp@rpbooks.co.uk @redemptorist

THE CLIMATE CHANGE OF THE HEART

People made enormous efforts to celebrate Christmas 2020 – but often forgot about God. We heard discussions about shop opening hours and the possibilities of eating and drinking in pubs and restaurants during the pandemic. Santa, pantomimes, Christmas fairs, sporting events and venues with or without masks – all received even more attention than usual. Tired of the limitations and frustrations of the coronavirus, from late October onwards, people festooned almost every nook and cranny with Christmas decorations.

Everyone urgently needed a "feel-good factor" in their lives. We talked about sharing and caring, getting together and new beginnings – but few mentioned the Christmas story and the reason why Christmas exists in the first place. Churches strove to offer Christmas hope amidst a clamour which often missed the point. But in the end, many of our celebrations had to be limited by the restrictions to lessen the spread of Covid-19.

Sometimes, as a result of our personal, contemporary experience, it's easy to understand John the Baptist's frustration: to be a voice crying in the wilderness can be a lonely exercise. We want to see Christ put back into Christmas, but our voices are often drowned by the carols and jingles of shopping malls and supermarkets, which tell us to celebrate but without explaining why. Preaching in the wilderness, John the Baptist promised a climate change of the heart, one that produces a global warming through love. His words were heeded by some and ignored by others. Sound familiar?

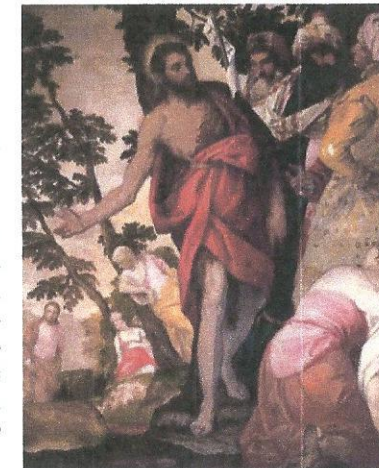
John didn't invent baptism as such: it pre-existed his ministry and he never claimed that his actions had more than a symbolic, non-sacramental value. Over the centuries, the people of Israel had used water to symbolise the cleansing and purification of the heart and mind. After the Babylonian captivity, converts to Judaism also immersed themselves in water in a rite of initiation which changed their status and qualified them for full participation in the life of the community.

John's innovation was to offer his baptism of repentance and forgiveness as a preparation for one who was coming and would bring salvation. In a real, tangible and down-to-earth manner, he promised the Messiah for whom he prepared the way. When John spoke, therefore, of levelling mountains, filling in valleys and making paths straight, he was not talking of geographical or civil engineering projects. Rather, he was encouraging his listeners to remove the obstacles which prevented them from being ready to encounter the Messiah for whom they longed.

Hope in the darkness



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



5 DECEMBER 2021

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

YEAR C

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II