

**2018-12-09 Sue Diggory  
Advent 2**

**Zephaniah 3 v 14 – end and Luke 3 v 7 – 18**

***What shall we do?***

The world, an apple, a rainbow, a myriad of stars and a manger – symbols that were hung on the Jesse Tree last week as we started to ask the question ‘When did God start to get ready for Christmas.’ We thought about creation and the beginning of the world, the first people Adam and Eve and the start of humanity, the great flood and the sign of the rainbow, a fresh start for world, and the promise God made to Abraham that one day his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky, and so we began our Advent Journey and entered the season of waiting, the season that would eventually end with our final symbol, the manger, the manger that would be home to a baby, the baby that we are once again waiting to greet, the baby that would change the world for the whole of eternity.

But between the myriad of stars and the manger many things happened to God’s people and many others were sent to help prepare the way. Great characters from the stories of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, characters that are well known and characters whose names are far less familiar to us today. During Advent we hear a lot from the prophets, especially Isaiah, but today we have before us some words from one of the minor prophets, someone who is little known and I suspect little read and if you are like me someone whose book can only be found by using the Bible index as he is tucked away between the pages of Habbakuk and Haggai, where we find the 3 chapters that make up the book of Zephaniah.

Zephaniah lived 600 years before the birth of Jesus and he was sent to bring a warning to God’s people that they needed to get their house in order because judgement was coming, yes there would be difficult times, sounds all too familiar doesn’t it, BUT there was also the promise that it would not be God’s last word, yes there would be bad times but there would also be hope, a time of restoration would come, there would be a time of joy, a time when God’s people would be remembered and restored, a time when *I will bring you home ... when I gather you ... when I restore your fortunes before your eyes says the Lord.*

And so the time of waiting continued for another 600 years until the last prophet, the final messenger, Christ’s forerunner and cousin John was sent by God to prepare the way, to tell the people what they needed to do during this final time of waiting, to tell them then and us how to get ready for the one who is still to come, the one whose sandals he was not worthy to untie.

*What then should we do* the people asked as they flocked to the banks of the Jordan to be Baptised by John.

*'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.'* <sup>12</sup>Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' <sup>13</sup>He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' <sup>14</sup>Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.'

Or to put it more succinctly;

- Share what you have
- Don't take what isn't yours
- Be content with what you have been given

In a world where the challenges are so huge, we must wonder how these seemingly small things could make any significant difference at all. And yet, one at a time, as one person after another seeks to live in these ways maybe in the end this could be the beginning of changing everything, changing habits, but more importantly changing hearts as we allow John's answers to the question *what then should we do* to shape and mould us into the people that God created us to be.

Now we don't know who John was speaking to that day, we don't know the lives they led or the status they had in society but it is unlikely that they were the rich and powerful of first century Palestine, they were I suspect just ordinary people, who were leading ordinary lives, BUT they were people who were seeking, seeking to make sense of life and the day to day situation they found themselves in; they were I suspect much like you and me, that is if we too are prepared to be seeking to make sense of life, and to acknowledge our need to have God at work in our lives. But we are also different from them, unlike them we have received more than a water baptism for repentance from John, rather we have received the baptism of Christ, the baptism of *the Holy Spirit and fire!* And unlike them we are being called to more than repentance, we are being called to total transformation, the transformation that begins when water is poured on us, and we are signed with Christ's cross in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The transformation that begins as we start to

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As we start to live out the words of the Baptist heard on the banks of the Jordan river over 2,000 years ago, as we start to live as the people that God calls us to be.

The people we are told were filled with expectation; they were questioning and wondering if John was the one to come, he knew and we know that Jesus was the one who was still to come, the one who would be God's good news, the one who would bring the joy that Zephaniah and others prophesied, but would bring the judgement that they foretold, the judgement that comes from a loving parent, the judgement that strengthens and disciplines, the judgement that protects, the judgement that is not to be feared but to be embraced as we seek Christ's transformation in our lives as we take seriously the need to

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So how do we hear these familiar words of John today as we travel once again our Advent Journey?

Do we hear a story of long ago, or do we hear a story that is for each one of us to respond to today?

Does the fire of the Spirit that we received at our baptism burn brightly within, or are there only smouldering embers that need re-igniting as we prepare to breathe in the life giving breath of God once again as we come to the manger and worship the babe of Bethlehem.

The question which John's preaching is asking of each one of us this Advent is simply *what then should we do?*

How will we respond to the Advent of the Messiah,

how will we show the fruits of repentance at work in our lives,

how will we be transformed by the fire of the Holy Spirit we received at Baptism,

how will we be different and changed people at the end of this Advent season?

I want to end with the reply John gave to the people -

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If we are prepared to be bold and dare to do as he says and we might find that we are amazed and surprised at the difference this Advent has made as we sit by the manger this year.

Let's pray ...

