

John 1:6-8, 19-28; Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-end

Today we continue our Advent readings of the prophets, Isaiah and John the Baptist.

v6-7 John the Baptist came as a witness to the light.

In these dull days of winter, we are more aware of light.

The sun shining brightly on a cold day, Christmas lights appearing on more houses each day, Advent candles flickering by the altar. The writer, evangelist John, loves to use images such as light and dark to convey spiritual meaning. '*The true light*' was about to burst upon the world, and John the Baptist's role was to point to that light, Jesus Christ. John the Baptist had spent years in the wilderness, studying the Scriptures, listening for the voice of God, learning, waiting for this moment, and now is the time for him to speak out, to point to Jesus, to let his light shine. *BBC 'Nativity' light of the world.*

Jesus is the true light because he illuminates all he touches.

We see this in a number of ways:

Jesus' light of truth and love shines upon us and **reveals us truly to ourselves.**

He lit up the world he entered and seeks to light up our lives. If we pay attention to his word and his Spirit, he will show us our own inner hearts and minds, the truth about ourselves, and he will send his Spirit to transform us.

In the Baptism service, the minister says to the newly baptized, '*You have received the light of Christ; walk in this light all the days of your life.*' And the congregation join in with: '*Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father*'. All of us who are baptised have received the light of Christ, and are called to let that light shine through us.

John the Baptist was able to witness to the true light because the light of God was in him.

Secondly, Jesus also **lights up our way**, guiding us through life, showing us where to go, but usually only revealing one step at a time. As the psalmist says, '*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*' (Ps 119:105) Advent is a good time to reflect on the direction of our lives and see where God might be leading us.

John the Baptist had a clear sense of the way God wanted to use him. He uses the words of the prophet Isaiah to express it, **v23**.

The heart of John's message was this call to '*make straight*'.

We heard in our reading from Isaiah what this might mean, he speaks of a world where God would: '*bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners; comfort all who mourn, give gladness instead of mourning, a mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit*'. This is making straight, what Jesus would fulfil, and we are called to be a light by seeking this ourselves in the way we live with one another.

Thirdly, Jesus also **shines a light on God** for us, revealing his nature of humility, power and grace. If we want to know what God is like, then we look at Jesus, God incarnate.

Advent is a season of preparation, not just shopping and cooking, putting up decorations and sending cards, but a deeper preparation of our hearts and minds.

So we reflect: Are our lives straight? Do we shine with the light of God? Are we ready to welcome our God? If we are so prepared, then we will find enormous joy in our Saviour, in celebrating his birth, in living with him and for him day by day.

But if we find our lives have become a little bent and there are dark corners where we have not allowed God's light to shine, then there is full and free forgiveness, and the wonderful gift of God's Spirit, to help us amend our lives, and to find the joy of new life.

The call of Advent is the call of the children's game, hide and seek, '*Coming, ready or not!*'

May we be found ready, living in the light of God, and have real joy and peace this Christmas time.