

## **St Stephens' Canonbury N.1**

### **Holy Communion Service 11.am 13 December 2015**

#### **Preaching: Repentance and Rejoicing**

#### **Bible Reading: Philippians 4: 4-7; Luke 3: 7-18**

Luke's Gospel was carefully written, reflecting the outcome of a careful research. As a doctor he pays attention to details and facts of his story. An example of this is Mary's confinement. He records Jesus' family tree but through Mary's bloodline. Luke as the first Church historian records the political personalities of Rome and of Galilee – Emperor Tiberius of Rome; Pontius Pilate as the Governor of Judea and Herod the ruler of Galilee, so as to have no doubt of the authenticity of his story.

John received a call from God and started to preach repentance (see Joel 2:23), in the region of Jordan and to baptise those who answered his call. The rite of baptism was forecast by the prophets before him, Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 36: 25-27. His warning, to the people and especially to the Pharisees "You brood of vipers! Who warned you .....,," had a gripping effect on his audience that they asked what they should do as a response to his message. John demanded that they should produce fruits worthy of repentance (Gal 5:22) and not be complacent about being Abraham's children. What does this mean?

- i. That they are God's chosen people
- ii. No harm could come to them as a nation
- iii. That salvation was a certainty despite their sinfulness and callousness and disobedience to God.

Then John made a ground shattering statement that God is capable of raising children from the stones to Abraham who would obey and worship God. Such an act was impossible for man but with God everything is possible, Mathew 19:26. His words pierced the hearts of his hearers. He answered the different groups who came to him:-

- a. To the ordinary people he said "share whatever you have with the needy."
- b. To the corrupt and hated tax-collectors, he said learn to be straight and collect no more than was levied.
- c. The soldiers too came for guidance. He told them not to extort money by false accusation.

But everyone was full of expectation for the Messiah and they asked John if he was the one to come. In a direct reply John told them he was not and that the Messiah is such a celebrity whose servant he was unworthy to be, for two reasons:

- i. His baptism was with water

- ii. The Messiah would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The water as a symbol, is to wash the body and make them clean. The Holy Spirit is to make them right with God and reside in their heart. What about the fire? The people will be judged and those found wanting and unworthy will be burnt like chaff. So being ready for the Messiah was what John's message was all about.

So what are we to get ready this Christmas? What have we to offer as Christians during Christmas celebrations? Surely we cannot claim to belong to Christ without the characteristics of Christ in our lives and behaviour, to our neighbours, co-workers, friends, fellow Christians. For if we are Christ-like then we produce the fruits of the Spirit. If we belong to Christ and he lives in us, we have become sons and daughters of God and according to Paul in Romans 8: 17, we share equally the inheritance of the children of God as Christ himself, if that is the case, Paul told the Philippians in 2:5, to adopt the attitude of Christ. What a privilege that confers on each one of us; and for that we should rejoice.

The theme of Rejoicing is taken up in Philippians 4: 4-7. The letter is full of Joy because it is full of Jesus. Paul exhorted his audience to rejoice.

### **Why Should We Rejoice And How Do We Rejoice**

- i. We rejoice because the Messiah is Christ our Saviour. He died for our sins. In him, we died to sin and resurrected in him to eternal life by baptism.
- ii. Our sins have been washed away by his death. We are forgiven when we repent and we become new beings, and according to Paul in his letter to the Romans "now no condemnation" (Romans 8:1), for those who live in union with Christ.
- iii. Therefore we have hope for eternal life, for Christ had risen.
- iv. Our hope? Paul asked the Romans to let their hope keep them joyful (hope of salvation (Romans 12:13), be patient in your troubles and pray at all times. Share what you have with your needy fellow Christians, entertain strangers.
- v. That through him we can say "Abba" Father, making God own Father.
- vi. We can rejoice because we enjoy the grace of God, Ephesians 2: 8; in every respect of our lives? It is by God's grace you have been saved through faith.
- vii. Christmas is a time to rejoice with family and friends:
  - a. Celebrating with songs, eating, giving gifts, worshiping God for all his kindness and mercies.
  - b. By sharing our heritage in Christ with others.

In freedom we rejoice for Christ has set us free from the grip of sin, Satan and the fear of death. Above all I enjoin you to rejoice as Joel put it in 2:23, "at what the Lord your God has done for you."

This is one half of the Christmas story. We are between two ages. We are getting ready to see the historical Jesus as baby. But we are also preparing to meet him at resurrection at the end of time. Then our rejoicing will be full.

I am sure the presents are being wrapped. Christmas cards too are going through the post. Place and time of Christmas dinner are being finalized, and if at home who is coming to dinner is noted. The tempo of celebration rising. In the midst of all the hurries for the day let us not forget the object of our celebration – baby Jesus. He was born in Bethlehem. His postal address used to be “A manger in Bethlehem.” However, he grew up and left the manger a couple of thousand years ago.

He went about and healed the sick. The hungry were fed and the thirsty refreshed. He raised the dead but also changed the rules of worship and the attitude and belief of men to God his Father. Eventually he was crucified, died and was buried. But he was raised to life again. His current address is “Everywhere in Heaven and on Earth.” Let us meet him anywhere where we decide to celebrate and worship Him. Enjoy the season.

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