

Mystery of the Messiah

Notes on the Gospel reading

● John the Baptist is repeatedly asked to explain who he is. Only after the fourth question does he offer an answer, and even here his response is cryptic. This reluctance to answer suggests that John is aware that he is the signpost to someone greater. He knows that the excitement his presence has caused is nothing compared to the man who will follow him, and he seeks to point towards Jesus rather than focus on himself. This in turn creates a sense of searching and expectation. He looks forward with hope.

● In this third week of Advent, we come close to discovering the nature of the coming Messiah, yet we still don't know exactly who he is. The final answer that John gives the priests and the Levites is to reveal that the one coming after him is in fact already among them. For John it would have been literally true, but for us, on the other side of the resurrection, we must ask whether we live as if the Messiah is always among us. How does this shape the way we live?

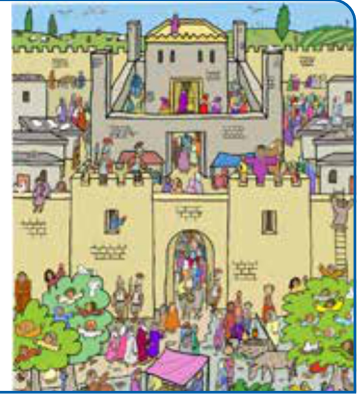
The invitation

Make an invitation acceptance using a postcard/A5 piece of blank card. Write on it: 'Lord, I receive your invitation to...' then pause. Read 1 Thessalonians 5.16-24 and then Isaiah 61.1. Think about whatever stood out for you from these readings – i.e. what might God be inviting you to do? Write this down to complete the sentence on the card – and use it as a reminder of this and a prompt for prayer.

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Questions for reflection

- ▶ Where would you look to find the Messiah?
- ▶ What would you ask the Messiah if you did find him?
- ▶ If the Messiah could be anyone among us, how should we respond?



A prayer of approach

*Some of us are weary or downhearted.
Still we say: let our hearts be glad, God is always here.
Let us approach God with confidence, because
God has always been with us; let our hearts be glad!
Amen.*

A prayer for others

Lord, we pray today for all who are downtrodden, all who are oppressed, all who know the heavy hand of marginalisation on them. God, we turn to you, remembering the words of Mary, praying that you will lift up the lowly, you will raise the voice of justice, and you will scatter oppression. May all who are oppressed be set free. We ask this in joy and gratitude – and in your name.

Lord, we pray that we might find rhythms of life that sustain us here. Rhythms for cultivating and renewing the earth; human community; justice; and creativity. We ask this, in joy and gratitude – and in your name. Amen.

A personal prayer

*In my moments of weariness, or meekness, or pressure,
I know God is here.*

In my moments of pride, I know God is here.

In my moments of demand, I know God is here.

God is here, always, already, at once.

*Holding, sustaining and creating a new creation,
in me, in us, in all. Amen.*

Live your faith

Every day, make a conscious effort to consider: Where do you see Jesus among us today (especially, in places or people where you might not expect to see him)? Recall the words of Isaiah 61.1 (have them written on a small card) – what is God calling you to do today?