

Dean's Letter, 9 December 2018

Dear Cathedral family, brothers and sisters in Christ

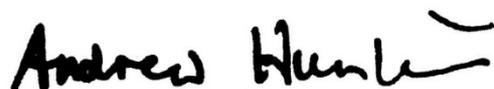
The readings for the four Sundays of Advent follow a clear theme, that of the Christian hope of the coming of Christ, and the call to prepare for that coming. The first two Sundays of Advent focus our attention on the prophecies of the Old Covenant. You will notice that instead a reading from one of the Psalms, we are saying or singing the Song of Zechariah (Zechariah was the father of John the Baptist). He had been struck dumb at the time when he was told by an angel that he and his wife would have a son in their old age (most of us would be struck dumb at such news, I think!) But this son was to be different. John the Baptist was to have a particular ministry, to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He was to bring people to repentance by "turning the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Our Gospel reading for today (Luke 3:1-6) tells of the beginning of his ministry, "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Lk 3:3).

John the Baptist is seen as the bridge between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets and the first of the New, as he, like the prophets before him, points the way to Jesus Christ. In the words of our first reading, "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple" (Malachi 3:1). But the day of the Lord's coming, we are warned repeatedly, will be no happy rejoicing, but a sobering time of purification and judgement. It is a day when people will flee from the presence of God.

Our preacher last Sunday, Dr Mary-Ellen Ashcroft, spoke of how Christmas has been commercialized, and the Second Coming of Christ has been trivialized. Hard words and true. We are so familiar with the "Jingle bells, dashing through the snow" in our local supermarkets, with the in-your-face encouragement to 'buy, buy, buy'. I think that with our worship during Advent and over Christmas, we do hold our ground and are constantly reminded of the bigger picture, the deeper meaning, of the Christian celebration of Christmas. The birth of our Lord and Saviour. God becoming flesh amongst us – God incarnate. The 'mind-blowing' reality of the presence of God in our world and in our lives. The power to be transformed and renewed. The gift of hope. But the Second Coming is something that we blink over in the Creed, and don't really know what to make of. Advent is a time of focused waiting for the good purposes of God to unfold, for God's plan and will to be revealed, for His coming amongst us to be discerned.

On a personal note: I have handed in my PhD, with immense gratitude for the privilege of these past 3 years. I am so grateful to my darling Claire, and to you all as the Cathedral, for your encouragement and interest. I could not have asked for a more supportive community! Thank you!

My love to you all

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.