



# Sunday Reflection

## Season of Advent

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 6 December 2020

# Advent 2

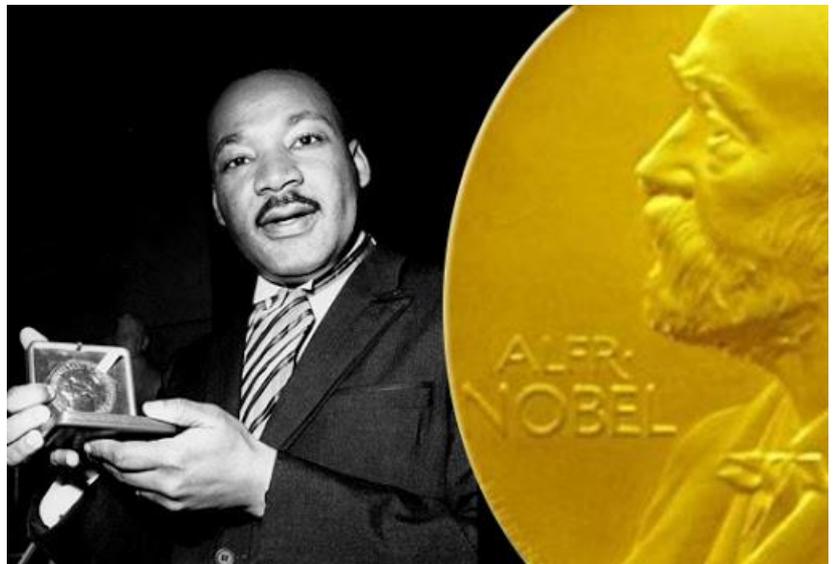
The world and each of us as individuals face many difficulties, pain and distractions. As we enter the season of Advent we are called afresh to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man into our world to gather his chosen people.

## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."** *Mark 1.8*

### An Illustration to set the scene

Martin Luther King's famous "I have a dream" speech of 1963 came at a time when not only America but many other countries throughout the world practised apartheid in various forms. The speech might have been greeted by anger and



denial, but in fact it thrilled a huge crowd of a quarter of a million people at the march on Washington. It has since reached millions worldwide through the media of television and the internet. The speech, appealing for fairness and racial tolerance,

helped to change the world. In 1964 King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent stand on civil rights and social justice, but not everyone was inspired by him. Four years later he was assassinated.

## **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

In the first century, John the Baptist preached to huge crowds beside the River Jordan. He preached the need for repentance – turning back to God – and might have been greeted by anger and denial, since his audience considered themselves especially close to God as God's chosen people. But in fact the crowds were inspired by his message and demonstrated their intention to repent by being baptised in the Jordan. But not everyone was thrilled by John's words and some years later he was executed. Who was this man who appeared from the wilderness and inspired many but enraged others?

John the Baptist was loosely related to Jesus, since his mother, Elizabeth, was a distant relative of Mary, but there is no indication that John and Jesus knew each other. John may have been a member of the Essene community, who lived in the wilderness and were the first sect known to practise some sort of symbolic baptism, although not total immersion as John practised, since water was scarce in the desert.

John's message is both challenging and sombre, convicting his listeners of their sin and exhorting them to repentance. Yet Mark opens his Gospel by announcing that this is not bad news, but the beginning of good news. Mark describes John the Baptist's work by aligning it very closely with the Old Testament prophecy from Isaiah, which his listeners would have known. The Isaiah passage is thought to have been written towards the end of a period of Jewish exile in Babylon. The people would soon be

allowed out of their captivity to return home to Israel, so Isaiah's message is one of hope. God's punishment for their sins is over, and good things are around the corner.

In John's time the people had been under Roman rule for over sixty years. The quote from Isaiah is an indication that God's punishment is over and their suffering will end. However, the word "Gospel" in first-century Palestine tended to mean "good news from the battlefield", so already Mark is hinting at difficult times ahead.

Mark identifies John the Baptist as the messenger who is to prepare a way for God, so that the glory of the Lord can be revealed, and John himself reinforces this by clearly stating that he is not the expected messiah. He himself baptises with water, but the promised one will baptise with the Holy Spirit. By using Isaiah's quote, Mark is also giving an early indication that Jesus is God in humanity.

### **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

The Holy Spirit is God within each of us. As we are baptised with water – a symbol of our intentions – our baptism confirms the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. John demanded that the people turn their backs on sin and turn to God before he would baptise them, and in infant baptism today parents and godparents promise exactly the same on behalf of the child. Those baptised as adults make the promises for themselves, and at a suitable age those promises can be renewed and reinforced at confirmation.

But, as Mark makes clear in his Gospel, the Christian life is not an easy one. It is demanding and full of challenges. We have God within us as well as outside us, so that we may face those difficulties and overcome them. When we make space for God through prayer and meditation, we too can become like John the Baptist and prepare the way of the Lord for other people.

**“I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”** *Mark 1.8*

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**