

ADVENT 2

Yesterday's Messy Church certainly was! Stars of every kind, glittering, making and baking...and that's our overarching theme this Advent: "Follow the Star, Calm and Bright." There are just a few of these Advent Calendars in our Shop and a snip @ just £3 each. It is beautifully simple and focussed.

On the eve of St Nicholas, I opened the window – which revealed a happy cockerel as the sun rises and the message: "Keep Awake." Today's window – the brightest of stars and the message: "Explore" ...

Today's prophet and cousin of Jesus, John, took all these single Advent calendar words to his heart in such an exemplary way. From the barren wilderness, he extracted the fruits of God's love and purposes for the world in, we are told by Dr Luke, "the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar." John's prophetic vocation from the heart, from contemplation, and long silences, was to actively prepare for Christ's coming and to finally proclaim it from the rooftops: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

It is a demanding and uncompromising vocation: to pray for a different kind of focus and energy than that which inhabited the ruling principalities and powers. The cry of John the Baptist is for a different kind of kingdom. It is no different from our singing of the Advent Prose with its echo down the centuries: 'Rorate Caeli':

“Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness.”

The extraordinary irony often missed by ‘star-gazers’ like ourselves (I’m looking forward to hearing a new carol called ‘The Astronaut’s Carol’)...is that we are being led to a barn, an outhouse, out of town, a place of refuge with only straw to keep warm; that was how the fragile life of Jesus began.

Too much tinsel covers up the bare facts of how God chooses to come to us and sit beside us – a bundle of vulnerability if you will. Our gifts and presents which you have kindly given today will undoubtedly cheer those children living with cancer in our part of the world; or those children and teenagers who have become refugees and are far from home, missing their own friends and everyday language of their own, be it Ukrainian, or Sudanese. John the Baptist wants our prayers to lead us to the brightest stars of compassion and justice, mercy and forgiveness. We have different choices to make from the culture closest to us which promotes ‘blame’ at every turn. Our Advent journey and pilgrimage is the opposite of a “quick fix” and instead offers us the exploration of deep truths for the deepest of convictions and faith, like John the Baptist, who always pointed beyond himself to the Messiah, the Chosen one.

‘Wait, Be Calm, Fear Not, Hope, Trust’... these windows and qualities are our direction to help us to live each day well and pray each day well, and serve one another each day well. Yes, we can think of famous prophetic voices and lives who have

inspired us in the past. But let's not get too easily distracted when the Gospel Word today is speaking to us directly and challenging how we love, whether we have the right priorities, or right relationships which will lead us to signs of glory, calm and bright, signs of the incarnation and God-with-us. Malcolm Guite (rhymes with Kite) says of our distinctive Gospel writer, Luke:

“His Gospel is itself a living creature,
A ground and glory round the throne of God,
Where earth and heaven breathe through human nature
And One upon the throne sees it is good.
Luke is the living pillar of our healing,
A lowly ox, the servant of the four,
We turn his page to find his face revealing
The wonder and the welcome of the poor.
He breathes the good news to all who bear a burden,
Good news to all who turn and try again,
The meek rejoice and prodigals find pardon,
A lost thief reaches paradise through pain,
The voiceless find their voices in every word
And, with our Lady, magnify our Lord.”

Glory be...

Amen.

