

**December 8, 2024 – Revd Wim Kuiper (Advent 2)**  
**Anglican Church Arnhem & Nijmegen**

Readings: Malechi 3.1-4; Philippians 1.3-11; Luke 3.1-6

On this year's journey towards Christmas we take our Gospel readings from the Gospel of Luke. Today and next Sunday Luke tells us about the ministry of John the Baptist. Typical for Luke is sets the scene of John's surprising appearance out of nowhere, by listing up the names of seven very important persons. Secular and spiritual leaders that everyone would know in first century Palestine. So we hear the names of emperor Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, king Herod and his brother Philip, another ruler called Lysanias and the high priests Annas and Caiaphas. All of them bigwigs, who undoubtedly thought very highly of themselves. But it was not to them that the word of God came. But to a nobody. An unknown man who lived on his own, somewhere 'in the wilderness'. And what a contrast with those self-serving elites, to see how John humbly and also courageously accepts God's calling on him to raise a prophetic voice in the desert. To tell everyone to repent and ask for God's forgiveness. To prepare themselves for the coming of someone who is so much greater than he himself: the Messiah. That's why he is also rightly called John the Forerunner. Famously saying of this One that comes after him that he is not even worthy to untie the straps of his sandals. Imagine someone who out of the blue suddenly becomes a great celebrity. Having such an enormous charisma that the crowds want to see and hear him and are even willing to stand in long queues to undergo this strange ritual of a baptism by him in the Jordan. What would all this attention do to him. Well he remains very much his own natural self. This formidable prophet remains a humble and modest person, who is later on also ready to pay the ultimate price for serving God in this way. It is clear that he lives out the values of a completely different type of kingdom. A place in which not power, status or money counts, and we might add today the number of your followers. But God's reign of mercy, justice and peace and the Spirit that inspires to love and to have faith and hope. Entering that kingdom starts with not thinking too great of ourselves. With being aware of our frailty and constant need of repentance and God's forgiveness. Our need to look for the grace and the peace that the world cannot give us and that we can't find by just circling around ourselves. Because they can only be found with God. Therefore opening ourselves up for that relationship with our Lord and our Saviour, who wants to be born in us as well. Offering his Spirit to guide us towards a different kind of life that we would otherwise not naturally find. A life in line with his kingdom.

A life that is described by those beautiful words we have just heard from St Paul's letter to the Philippians, as he prays 'that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.'

So, this is the kind of conversion that John the Baptist is aiming at as he urges us to properly prepare for the coming of Christ, also at this season of Advent. A time that traditionally by the church is always seen as a penitential season, as well as a season filled with hope with Christ's light appearing and shining in our darkness. A perfect combination that is not only helpful to prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas, but also to be prepared for meeting Christ in a more direct way. Either at the end of our time here on earth, or at what we call the end of times, the day of our Lord's second coming. And so John stands in a line of those great Old Testament prophets that came before Jesus. A line which in our Bible ends with the final book of the Old Testament called Malachi, from which we had our first reading. As a prophet, John marks the start of a new era, the beginning of a new covenant which, by the way, is another word for testament. This time it is not about a covenant between the people of Israel and God, but it is about the relationship between God and all the peoples of the Earth. Announcing a different kind of world, a different kind of life not only as a calling, but also as a real possibility. Made possible by Jesus' coming into the world, that has changed everything already in a very profound way. Beyond all the mess that is still in and around us, we should focus on him and a change will slowly and deeply happen. A change not only affecting our deepest selves, but also in and through us having an impact on our own families, communities and societies. In

and through all God's people to be found in every nation and on every continent, changing the wider world for good.

May this knowledge and indeed depth of insight fill us once again with hope as we journey on at this time of Advent, towards Christmas. Keeping in mind those beautiful final words of the Benedictus, Zachariah's song after the birth of his son John the Baptist (Luke 1.78-79): 'In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.' Amen