

# A rush of cold water



Lord Jesus, John's voice calls us to repent so our sins may be forgiven. Help us to respond to that calling and to prepare our hearts and minds for your coming at Christmas and when you return in glory. Amen.

Katharine Smith *reflects on* John 1:6-8. 19-28

I'm not sure I want to go back to Jerusalem now. We came with orders from the highest level to find out who this John the Baptist is. We believed he was just a trouble maker and he didn't exactly cooperate with us. All he said was, "I am not", and "no". Then when we pushed him he gave us a strange answer. "I am the voice", he said, "of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" I became genuinely curious then. The others asked why he was baptising. His answer felt to me like a rush of cold water from the river, like a baptism. There's someone coming who is greater than John and who in fact is among us.

My mind races. If John really is the prophet preparing the way of the Lord I think I want to stay and see just who this more powerful one is. I've got a feeling that one way or another the authorities haven't heard the last of John and the one who is still to come. My heart tells me that God is calling me to be part of this, so I am going to stay, be baptised by John and then wait to see if this is the year of the Lord's favour and the Messiah really is among us. Would you like to stay with me? 🍷

## Books of the Old Testament

### *Lamentations*

by Richard Greatrex

*Richard Greatrex continues our book-by-book series about the Old Testament.*

Lamentations is a collection of five individual poems, each crying out with the trauma of desolation. A shamed, humiliated captive speaks in poem three, as does the shattered nation in three, four and five. God's voice is silent throughout and, while chapter three places a note of hope at the centre of the book – "the steadfast

love of the Lord never ceases" – this is merely a whisper swallowed by surrounding despair, a catalogue of suffering that extends from A to Z.

Liturgically, Lamentations is used in synagogues on the day of commemoration for the fall of Jerusalem and in churches on Good Friday for the death of Christ, cementing their effectiveness as prayers of grief and protest that passionately appeal to God for deliverance and transcend the brutality of dehumanising suffering, still holding on, however precariously, to faith in the power and willingness of God to save. 🍷

## *The Advent calendar*

by Lisa Tulfer

With so many things in life, the anticipation is almost as good as the thing itself: the breathless excitement of looking forward to childhood Christmases and the associated presents, the countdown to holidays, the eagerly awaited publication of a new book by a favourite author.

Advent is the Church's season of anticipation, counting down to the great festival of the incarnation. With many Advent

calendars now containing chocolate, it is so tempting to open all the windows and eat all the chocolate by the end of the first week of December!

But this season is about more than hurtling towards the final destination – Christmas Day – in a flurry of activity and chocolate. Advent (the name is from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "coming") is about dwelling in the journey of anticipation.

Opening each window of the Advent calendar brings us a day nearer to celebrating the coming of Emmanuel, God with us. 🍷

“Advent means there is something on the horizon the likes of which we have never seen before... What is possible is to not see it, to miss it, to turn just as it brushes past you... So stay. Sit. Linger. Tarry. Ponder. Wait. Behold. Wonder... Something is on the horizon.”

Jan L. Richardson, artist, writer and minister in the United Methodist Church