

Called to be generous

Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 3:7-18

We've heard John's call for repentance in preparation for the coming of the Lord. We've been excited by the prophetic words of Isaiah, promising justice, peace and freedom. We've been warned about wars, earthquakes and other natural disasters. These are all big ideas encompassing nations, governments and creation itself. So how do we relate them to our everyday life?

In today's Gospel reading John addresses smaller groups of people and individuals who ask what they should do, specifically, to prepare the way of the Lord. They speak for us, who also wait and wonder. John could just as well be talking directly to us, his voice fresh, clear and resounding across the centuries. He calls us to be

generous – to give from what we have to those who lack the basics. He calls us to be honest and to act with integrity in our employment and business affairs. We're not to take advantage of those weaker than ourselves and to accept with thanksgiving what we do have.

When his message gets personal like this, John is not a comforting and reassuring presence. He's challenging, speaking out against the values of too many of us in this world. If John demands so much of us, what will be required by the one who is more powerful than him?

John speaks with "many other exhortations", and in doing so proclaims the good news to the people. It seems you can't have the good news without the challenge. ☺

Lord Jesus, you call us to lives of loving generosity, honesty, integrity and humility. With the baptism of your Holy Spirit we pray that you will walk alongside us to protect and guide us, as we seek to obey that call and to live in fellowship with you. Amen.



Keeping Christ in Christmas

Part 6 – Christmas lights

by Heather Cooke

In our city streets and homes the lights have been switched on long ago. Indeed, in every town, it seems, there is at least one house that is a riot of flashing lights – Santas, reindeer, fir trees and snowmen.

For Christians, as well as for those celebrating a secular Christmas, lights are an integral part of the season – we have been lighting Advent candles in our churches,

the third one today, to remind us of the light of Christ. And today is Gaudete Sunday, when the penitential theme of the season is suspended, and in many churches the rose-coloured candle is lit, to symbolise the joy that is inherent in the story of salvation.

Through him we have been brought out of the darkness of sin and death. This week we can keep the Christ in Christmas if we see every Christmas light as a faint reflection of his glorious light. "Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us!" ☺

“I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.”

Zephaniah 3:19

Books of the Old Testament – Deuteronomy

by Gillian Cooper

Its name means "second law", a reference to Deuteronomy as a revision and expansion of the laws of Exodus. But in fact it is not a book not about law, but about grace.

The Israelites have nearly made it. They can see their new home across the Jordan. But before they move in, they need to be reminded who

they are and how they got there. Deuteronomy tells of the covenant between God and the people. God promises to guide and protect; the people promise to be loyal to the rules of the treaty that will make them the people God wants. Everyone wins. There are many rules, but they are sensible, creating a peaceful and prosperous society. Importantly, they are only there because God rescued people from slavery. Grace came first: unearned, undeserved salvation.

They are not saved and protected because they keep God's Law – they keep God's Law because they have been saved and protected. They are given a creed to recite in Deuteronomy 26 and they retell the story down the generations, so that they can never forget. ☺