

God's hand draws us back through life-giving water to healing hope and wholeness.

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Advent 2 C – Malachi 3 1-4, Luke 1 68-79, 3 1-6

Advent is our season of getting ready for Jesus to come to us; Jesus the child of Bethlehem; Jesus universal judge and Saviour, coming at the day of reckoning; the day of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew prophets said it's a day we'd have to prepare for if there was going to be anything left of us afterwards; we'd be like metal in a refiner's crucible being purified; and as the planet heats up, we can't but suspect that Malachi was somewhat on the money. But did Malachi expect what did happen? There wasn't fire; there was water.

Malachi said God would send a messenger to prepare us for that fearful day. We believe John the Baptist was that messenger. He came to prepare people to meet Jesus. People went out to John to be purified; to receive his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of their sins. John exercised this ministry in a very significant place. He called people down into a most hostile wilderness – the region around the Jordan River; a searing desert where it seldom rains. Its desiccation and lifelessness was a picture of the spiritual state of their lives, and called them to do something about it.

John called people down to the Jordan. They couldn't miss the fact that they were going in the opposite direction to their ancestors who'd crossed the Jordan into a new life in the Promised Land. John called people back down to remember the vows sealed between God and their forbears – promises they'd betrayed time and again. In this special place, and filled with those associations, John recalled the people to their

truth and washed their lies away. Then he turned/repented them; or as his father Zechariah sang, he *gave God's people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.*

They discovered *the tender compassion of our God.* That's something I think of when I recall the choice of the Jordan as the place of John's ministry. Down there, the Jordan is the only source of life. Like the Jordan in the desert, God comes to us in the low, dry places of our lives. God flows down to be with us in these places. John's baptism was one of *repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* But the forgiveness was already there. The call was to turn around and bathe in it not fire, but water. It was and always is there and waiting.

God offers us healing of our depression and dryness – offers to drown it for us in a river that brings life and hope. God sends it to flow down into our desert. God's hand is already stretched out to rescue us from that deep dry place; God's hand is held out to draw everyone back through life-giving water to healing hope and wholeness. And in this season of Advent, the question is, Will we take this hand? Amen.

Love / joy/ peace is flowing like a river, flowing out through you and me, flowing out into the desert, setting all God's children free.