

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2015  
Advent 3 – Family Mass

John the Grumpy!

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In today's Gospel reading we continue to read about John the Baptist's ministry. In the Christian tradition John is either described as the last Old Testament prophet, because he came before Jesus, or the first Christian prophet as he proclaimed the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. His role seems to be to encourage people to get ready to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. We know this because John says so, both in what he does, calling people to repentance and baptising them in the river Jordan, and in what he says.

In Advent we are preparing too. Through our readings and worship we are reminded of Jesus' promise that he will come again and of course we are getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birth, through which the salvation of the world is proclaimed.

When we listen to John we are tempted to either focus on how grumpy he seems or his prophecy of one coming who was greater than him, who we will identify as Jesus of Nazareth.

We see John as grumpy because of what he says. He calls the people a brood of vipers. He shouts at the people, telling them how awful they are, what sinners they are. He tells them they have taken the wrong path and they are dishonouring God.

I wonder though if John was grumpy, or was he just a worried man. John wants the people to live as God's people. He wants them to be true to God, true to their neighbour and true to themselves. We know this because when they ask him what they should do he tells them to be honest in their dealings with each other, be just and caring for those around them and to be honest and true as an example to others. John wants the people to put God at the centre of their lives, living by God's commands and law. John wants the people to remember that God knows the secrets of their hearts, not so they can be scared of God but so that they can rejoice in the freedom that gives and the encouragement that gives to follow the way of God.

John is encouraging us, at this point in the Advent season, to live honestly and truthfully in the knowledge of God's love and knowledge of ourselves. John's words for us are not necessarily 'you brood of vipers' but 'repent and believe'. As we prepare for the coming of the Christmas festival John's words bring us back to the reason for the season in the first place. To celebrate the salvation of the world, to receive the love of God for ourselves and to walk in the way of Christ. Christmas is about us being like John, not being grumpy but proclaiming the good news that Jesus is amongst us, that God wants to know us, to love us and be part of our lives that we might love God too.