

St Peter's, Ealing

Sunday 9th December 2018

Second Sunday in Advent (family mass)

Malachi 3.1-4; Luke 1.68-79

Do you want to know a secret?

We all have secrets. And we often like to know someone else's secret. There is something naughty but nice about secrets. We sometimes talk about having a guilty secret. Not all secrets admittedly are nice. I expect we all have a secret we'd rather was not known by others. I have a secret...and if you're very good I might tell you what it is.

There were some Christians, many years ago who believed the true route to a faithful life was by knowing the secret of salvation. That such a secret was only obtainable through knowledge and only a special few could possibly know this secret. They were called Gnostics, from the Greek word gnosis meaning knowledge.

Today's readings tell of a very different understanding of salvation. The prophet Malachi writes in his book of a messenger, someone who comes from God to prepare the way. How does the messenger do this? Well, he is described as refiners fire, or fullers soap (a kind of detergent that makes everything white and clean). More than that he will come as the refiner of silver, something that took a lot of heat and skill to make the purest silver. Of course these are images to tell us what that messenger is going to do. The messenger is going to tell the truth, even if we find the truth difficult or it hurts. The truth will challenge secrets and make everything public. There will be no hiding place. No wonder everyone should be scared. Or should they?

The next image we have from Luke's Gospel is of John the Baptist. Ah...we all know him so that's ok. Or is it? John doesn't pull his punches; publicly and loudly telling the people as it is. Just after the passage we read today he even calls them a brood of vipers; that's not very nice. Like the messenger in Malachi John is telling it as it is. The people have heard the word of God but have not adhered to it, they are full of their own desires and their own wants and are not living the way of faithfulness that God wants. John is preparing the way for someone else, and of course we know that someone else is Jesus.

Later in Luke's Gospel Jesus comes to John for baptism and to begin his ministry. Jesus then takes over the message and preaches throughout Israel, calling together his disciples and preparing them for their ministry, carrying the message of salvation throughout the world.

We're getting ready for Christmas. In this time of Advent we are thinking about the coming of Jesus both as the child at Christmas as well as when Jesus comes again in glory. Between those two stories is where we find ourselves. Jesus commissioned his disciples, and that includes us, to proclaim the good news; to share the story of Jesus and what it means for the world. Jesus' story tells us that God loves us, each one of us. Once we have received that story Jesus asks us to become his messengers to share that story with others so they can know and be healed. Jesus doesn't want it to be a secret we keep to ourselves or only give to a select few. As we come closer to Christmas and after the holidays don't be scared to tell people you are a Christian and that God loves everyone; after all that is what Christmas is about.