**The Very Revd Dominic Barrington, Dean of York, reflects on Luke 3.7-18 for the Third Sunday of Advent, 15th December.**

A reading from the Gospel of Luke. ‘John said to the crowds that came out to be baptised by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves,” We have Abraham as our ancestor.” For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit, is cut down and thrown into the fire.” And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” In reply, he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptised, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages.” As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John whether he might be the Messiah,

John answered all of them by saying, “I baptise you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.’

We are over halfway through Advent now. Christmas is near enough around the corner. You might well have been asked, “What do you want for Christmas?” Or you may well have been asking your loved ones what they would like. I suspect the replies to those questions don’t in any way match what John appears to be offering the world in those exhortations, which we are reminded in the last verse of this powerful reading from Luke, we are reminded that they are good news, despite the talk of burning the chaff, despite the address to the people as being a brood of vipers, John is, extraordinarily perhaps, John is offering good news.

What do you want for Christmas? Well, perhaps once we get past our own indulgences and self comforts, perhaps we might begin to recognise that what we really want is a world which looks a little bit more like the world John is trying to describe; a world in which people who have no coats are given help by those who have two. A world in which extortion and greed and corruption do not have the last word. That would be quite something.

John recognises that in the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, the world will hear good news of the way it could be, the way God would like it to be, the way the world can be Christlike. That would be an amazing thing to share, along with the baubles and the tinsel and all the rest of it. Let's make that our Advent hope.

Let us pray. Gracious God, as we celebrate this Advent season and look for the coming of Christ in glory, help our lives to echo the glorious call of justice and liberation that he brings, and help us share that with all those around us. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.