**The Revd Dr Jenny Wright, Chaplain to the Archbishop of York, reflects on Luke 3.1-6 for the Second Sunday of Advent, 8th December.**

On the second Sunday of Advent, we encounter John the Baptist coming out of the wilderness, the wild man crying and calling - quite a frightening figure, I imagine, the sort of figure that would make us cross over to the other side of the street if we saw him coming towards us. But before he quotes the passages of scripture, we are given a list of all those who have great authority in that day, the emperors that need to be challenged.

Two of the people on the list are going to be the ones who are responsible for the death of John the Baptist himself, and later for Jesus’s crucifixion. But Luke sets the scene with us by saying, already right at the beginning of his telling of the gospel story that salvation is not only about the cosmos, not only about the physical world, but it is about the oikumene as well.

It is about the entire political and social and religious world too. Jesus comes to challenge and turn upside down all those structures that people cling to; those structures that allow for poverty to exist, those structures that marginalise some, those structures that give wealth to some and poverty to many.

I wonder what this prophet would cry out today were we to encounter him. What cultural norms, what objects of devotion would he challenge us about? Overconsumption might be one. We know that for many of us, the reality is that we have far too much. What about our materialistic accumulation? More and more and more. And perhaps that is one of the things we can really challenge ourselves on this Christmas - to not gather more, but to share what we have.

Indifference to inequities, ungenerosity, seeing those who are so often unseen, seeing the marginalised, seeing the beggars sitting at the door, seeing those people forgotten by much of society. Arrogant judgmentalism, how quick we are to judge others. How quick we are to apply our standards to the rest of the world. But what if we challenge ourselves to actually see the world differently? To see the world from the perspective of Jesus, the one who came to eat with sinners, the one who came to socialise with those who were outcasts, the one who healed the lepers.

What if we challenge ourselves in our own superficial spirituality? What does it really mean to be a disciple? What does it mean to sit at the feet of the teacher? What does it mean to try to be more like Christ? What does it mean to love God and to love our neighbour? What does it mean to live as one who follows the good news? Do you wait in joyful expectation? Do you live with hope that the Christ child is coming to make all things new? Do you believe that you are part of God's plan?

It is bleak in the world at the moment. We hear news of wars and famines, floods and other natural disasters. People are fleeing their homes to avoid losing absolutely everything in the hope that they might settle somewhere else. How often they have less than a hospitable welcome. How can we open our tables and our doors to welcome them into our communities and our lives? Where can we make perhaps even a difference to just one person?

Because we cannot lose sight of the hope that we have in Christ Jesus, the hope that John the Baptist came to proclaim. We cannot lose sight of the hope that the paths will be made straight, that there will be a path through the wilderness. But God is calling on each one of us to participate in his generous love.

Let us pray. Loving God, we thank you for the light that you have given to those who walk in darkness. We pray that you will guide our feet in your way. Give us the courage to be a prophetic voice. Give us the courage to love others as you love us. Give us the courage to accept the message of repentance and come to you assured of your forgiveness. Help us in these Advent days to consider the coming of the Christ child with hope, to not give up on that life to which you have called us, knowing that in the end, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and that every knee shall bow to proclaim your glory. We ask this in Jesus’s name. Amen.