

SUNDAY PLUS

Prepare!

Prepare your heart

by Paul Higginson

My old teacher at school always told us before important exams: “Fail to prepare; prepare to fail!” During Advent we busy ourselves with preparations for Christmas: presents to buy, trees to decorate, food to prepare. But Advent is also an opportunity to stop and think about the bigger picture. In the Gospel today John the Baptist is asked “Who are you?” – and we can pause and ask ourselves the same question. Are we so concerned about the trimmings and materialism of Christmas that we fail to heed the “voice that cries in the wilderness”, the voice that urges us to see the Christ light? Is it possible to prepare for Christmas without giving Christ another thought?

Although there was to be no room at the inn for the Holy Family, we can begin to make

space for the child Jesus in our hearts. If Jesus is to enter in, then we must prepare: letting go of anger, resentment, bitterness, selfishness or anything else that prevents us from offering him a home in our hearts. Is there someone who needs to be forgiven this Christmas? Are there things in your life that need to change? Christmas is about presents, the ones we give each other, and more importantly, God’s present to us – the baby in the manger, who came so that we all might have the chance to live life to the full. Make this the best Advent ever, and start preparing your heart for the one who is to come!

Paul Higginson is the Assistant Principal at the Catholic Sixth Form College in Harrow and has been a parish catechist for thirty years.

Love unconditionally

by Eileen Cole

John teaches us to place ourselves at the service of God: “I’m not worthy to untie his sandals,” and teaches us to be his apostles. As Christmas draws nearer, this Gospel passage of John the Baptist urges us to “prepare the way of the Lord” in the first place in our own lives – to be confident in the coming of Christ and allow his grace to work in us through the sacraments; to substitute our logic for God’s logic; to make a little space in our hearts for the coming of God, so that he may increase and our pride decrease. John did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah”. We too must be precursors of his light by helping to bring other souls to Christ. How can we be a prophetic voice for the people of our time? We can’t go around baptising people as John did, but we can love unconditionally as Jesus does.

Eileen Cole is a Media Officer with the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales.



“Today we are called to rejoice for the imminent coming of our Redeemer; and we are called to share this joy with others, giving comfort and hope to the poor, the sick, and to people who are lonely and unhappy.

Pope Francis

The desert blooms

by Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

Wildfires raged throughout many woodland areas of Britain during the hot summer months and severe drought of 1976. Hosepipe bans and standpipes became a daily event for thousands of householders as fire brigades tried to extinguish flames and keep their use of water to a minimum. Farmers watched helplessly as huge cracks appeared in their dry fields and thirsty crops withered and died.

Yet all was not lost. Within days of the first rainfall, blackened woodland started to turn green. Tiny blades of grass began to emerge through the parched soil. Bit by bit, the world started to change.

A BBC television documentary covered the drought experience. Using outstanding film footage, the

film ended with an image of grass appearing around the base of a tree. “This year, nature was tried to its limits – and only man was found wanting,” commented the presenter.

John the Baptist offered an even greater hope. A voice crying in the wilderness, he heralded a new dawn.

Sr Janet Fearn is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

Lord, in these last few days before Christmas, many people feel pressurised as they prepare to celebrate your birth. Help them – and help me also – to keep a balance and a right perspective so that you might head the list of priorities. Amen.

Today:
Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Monday:
Jeremiah 23:5-8
Matthew 1:18-24

Tuesday:
Judges 13:2-7, 24-25
Luke 1:5-25

Wednesday:
Isaiah 7:10-14
Luke 1:26-38

Thursday:
Song of Songs 2:8-14
Luke 1:39-45

Friday:
1 Samuel 1:24-28
Luke 1:46-56

Saturday:
Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24
Luke 1:57-66

Next Sunday:
2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38