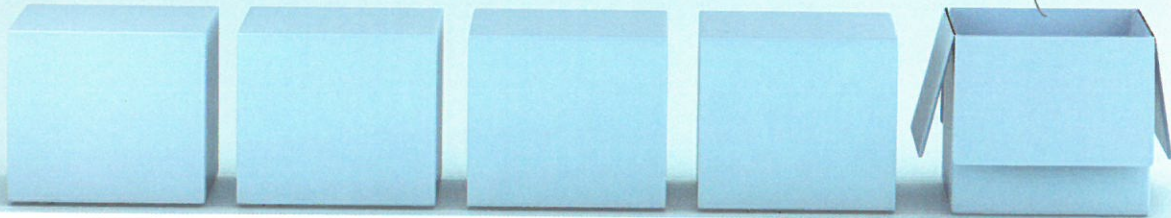


# SUNDAY PLUS

Strong and lovely

A Year of the Word

## Think outside the box



by Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

**T**oday's Gospel is about the expected and the unexpected. Jesus is telling us to "think outside the box".

Even John the Baptist and his followers felt confused because Jesus didn't fit into their preconceived ideas of prophets and the Messiah. Jesus sent the messengers back to John with a familiar quote from Isaiah, basically telling him that he, Jesus, was "the Lord's anointed", the expected one, but also challenging him to look deeper.

Jesus told his listeners that the Baptist both resembled and differed from the prophets of the Old Testament. In some ways, his sackcloth and meagre diet fit their expectations, but he was also different. He heralded a new beginning with such down-to-earth, practical advice as telling soldiers not to grumble about their pay. John baptised people. He talked about the coming Messiah, encouraging his listeners but also causing them to ask questions. If John truly was a herald, he was a pretty unlikely one, so what did his actions say about the One whose coming he prophesied?

Jesus didn't give his listeners straight answers to

their questions. He fulfilled Isaiah's well known prophecies of the Messiah and did so without the fanfare, pomp and ceremony of a monarch arriving to take back Israel from its Roman domination. If John was Jesus' herald, then it was unlikely that Jesus would oust Herod from his throne or Caesar from his praetorium.

Advent challenges us to see things differently, to "think outside the box" and find Jesus not just in church, but also in places where we might not have expected to find him.

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

## An unexpected mission

by Christine Clark

Clare was one of those people who didn't have a clear idea what she wanted to do when she left school. Loving reading, she opted for a career in publishing and found she loved it. She enjoyed working on other people's writing, editing and proofreading, as well as helping colleagues to become proficient.

In her private life she attended her local church and found that as

her faith matured and strengthened she was invited to lead study groups. Yet it was only when she joined a Christian publishing house that she realised that her work could become an extension of her personal ministry.

This took a new and unexpected turn when she was encouraged by a colleague to write reflections and short articles, as well as her usual tasks of editing other people's work. Her writing was well received and she found that she enjoyed this creative activity very much.

She encountered the joy of discovering a latent, God-given talent that could be used for his glory.

Christine Clark is a Christian mother and grandmother.

## Head above the parapet

by Max Mathews

John the Baptist – described by Jesus as the greatest human – questions whether Jesus is really the Messiah. This is shocking, but understandable. Isaiah prophesied someone coming to save God's people, "with vengeance, with terrible recompense"; but Jesus came to heal and forgive even the unrighteous and lowly, and cast a wider net of salvation.

Jesus' response calls John (and us) to challenge our doubts, to accept a wider, more inclusive understanding of God so we can live according to his true word. He calls us not to have unwavering, unquestioning faith but to embrace our doubts and turn to him nonetheless; not to be fickle, like a swaying reed, but strong and firm in belief.

Why did the hopeful crowds gather? Certainly not to see those in fine clothes (like Herod, whose coins were also marked with reed symbols), but to see a prophet's arrival. During Advent, Herod and the Magi show contrasting reactions to the coming of Jesus – how will you receive him?

Max Mathews is a young Catholic who is studying journalism.

**Gentle Lord, sometimes the strongest people are also the gentlest: they have learned that real strength is expressed in tenderness. As we approach Christmas, bless families with love, understanding, compassion and togetherness + Amen.**

**"Joy, prayer and gratitude are three attitudes that prepare us to experience Christmas in an authentic way. Joy, prayer and gratitude... In this last period of the Season of Advent, let us entrust ourselves to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary. She is a 'cause of our joy', not only because she begot Jesus, but because she keeps directing us to him."**

Pope Francis

Today: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10 James 5:7-10 Matthew 11:2-11  
 Monday: Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17 Matthew 21:23-27  
 Tuesday: Genesis 49:2, 8-10 Matthew 1:1-17  
 Wednesday: Jeremiah 23:5-8 Matthew 1:18-24  
 Thursday: Judges 13:2-7, 24-25 Luke 1:5-25  
 Friday: Isaiah 7:10-14 Luke 1:26-38  
 Saturday: Song of Songs 2:8-14 Luke 1:39-45  
 Next Sunday: Isaiah 7:10-14 Romans 1:1-7 Matthew 1:18-24