

ADVENT 3 (Angeli)

Today is Gaudete Sunday. The liturgical colours are pink – a sign of rejoicing that the Lord is nigh!

Our First reading from Isaiah captures so much prophetic language and imagination, about what God seeks from His created world in the birth of a new Saviour – the gifts of reconciliation, healing and justice, that only He can offer us and ‘make flesh’. Out of the wilderness of the past a new Eden will be born so, rejoice!

“Say to those who are of a fearful heart, be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come and save you.”

Isaiah presses home so beautifully and powerfully about ‘what **shall** be’ and not ‘what might be’; there is a sureness about the message, an urgency about the message, and of course, it is the stuff of prophets and only prophets who can bring this gift of profound and truthful, transparent communication:

“The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.”

There’s nothing fluffy or evasive about Isaiah or John the Baptist; they each have their own scripts and strong story to tell and frankly, we need to stand up and listen to them.

In a wonderful Sky Arts programme the other day on the accomplished acting career of Dame Maggie Smith, time after time, commentators and critics said she stole nearly every

scene she was in, almost without knowing it. You don't mess with her; you listen, watch, and admire the role she is playing and literally living in at any given moment. There are exceptional people like her, one minute living a tramp's life in the back of a van on Alan Bennett's drive, another as a fierce aristocratic 'matriarch' of 'Downton Abbey', a dotty professor in Harry Potter or, a hilarious companion in the Marigold Hotel. Her brilliance is in taking us and drawing us in to a wholly different place from the outset. We are transfixed and transformed.

And that's what the prophets do, that's what the visitation of an Angel does. The messenger brings a script that changes the way we think, the way we live, and challenges the source and goal of our hoping and believing. That's why we return to Isaiah for Advent. We seek inspiration. We seek joy and gladness instead of sorrow and sighing. We seek a Christian flightpath and a prophetic journey!

Today then, we launch the Diocesan 'Inspiring Angel' campaign. You will already have seen the poster at the back of church suggesting different ways of looking out for the angels in our midst and the wings God gives us to be messengers. We really can speak of His love, compassion and care in this town, in your place of work, your schools and homes; we really can rejoice that our Saviour is coming and will lead us into the ways of justice and peace. When our large wings are up on display, get your picture taken, send it into the office, rejoice with all the angels and saints that Emmanuel comes to live alongside us.

Thank you to everyone who has already knitted angels for us, 'messy Church' for shaping and making their own, the primary children at St Mary's school who are making more for our huge Christmas tree, our church shop which has been awarded a prize for its angelic displays last week...watch out for Angels everywhere... and the message of joy they bring: of faithfulness, adoration, and that gift of binding awe, wonder, and purposefulness, all wrapped up together.

One of our finest New Testament scholars, Richard Bauckham, has taken to writing new poetry like a duck to water, and this poem 'Angels' couldn't be more timely:

.....(p.19 from 'Tumbling into Light')

AMEN.