

Reflection on the Gospel-Advent 2A

(Matthew 3:1-12) -Veronica Lawson RSM

The wilderness or desert features powerfully in today's gospel reading. The desert is the biblical place of encounter with God, the place of beginnings and of testing. The voice of John the Baptizer is heard in the Judean desert. His food and clothing are desert-derived. John is identified as the one of whom Isaiah spoke, the voice crying out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way...." Ecologically, the Isaian image is quite confronting: preparing the way involves major earthworks that reconfigure the landscape, levelling the mountains and filling the valleys to create straight paths. Yet the way is never straight and the metaphor must not be literalised. John knows this. The preparation he calls for is ongoing *metanoia*: keep on turning your lives around, keep on expanding your horizons, for the kin-dom of the heavens is "close at hand". The kin-dom is both present and yet still approaching: the verb used, *ēngiken*, allows for this ambiguity.

The first reading provides content to the notion of kin-dom or *basileia*: John is announcing the advent of God's long awaited empire of justice and right relationship. He offers a baptism of repentance (*metanoia*). In other words, John's baptism presupposes a commitment to a renewed way of life. His ministry is hugely effective. It attracts "people of Jerusalem, all Judea and all the region along the Jordan River." The arrival of two groups of religious authorities prompts a fierce response: "you brood of vipers". John has no patience with those who use their privileged positions to seek their own advantage. He challenges them with the striking image of the "more powerful one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire" and will sort out those who refuse to turn their lives around (the chaff) from those who listen to the call for *metanoia* (the wheat). The latter are "gathered in" while the former are burned "in a fire that never goes out".

Fire is a multi-faceted image in the biblical record. Here it is used metaphorically for the judgment on the wicked. Fire, as we well know in this dry land, is a challenging symbol: it is both friend and foe. In the first-century *Manual of Discipline* from the Qumran community by the Dead Sea, water, refining by fire, and "a holy Spirit" are listed together as the instruments of God's saving and purifying action. John, who may have been a member of the Qumran community, presents his own role as preparatory to that of Jesus, the Spirit-filled, powerful and enduring agent of God's refining and purifying work in the world. We recognise our own ongoing need for a "baptism" with the Holy Spirit and fire. We prepare the way by constantly expanding our vision and turning our lives around in the direction of God's reign.

BULLETIN FOR SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT, YEAR A



ST ALIPIUS PARISH, BALLARAT EAST

Including St Peter & Paul's, Buninyong

Parish Address: 84 Victoria Street, Ballarat East. 3350

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MASS TIMETABLE FOR THE WEEK BEGINNING MONDAY, 5th DECEMBER 2016

MONDAY:	No Mass
TUESDAY:	2.00 pm Anointing Mass
WEDNESDAY:	11.00 am in Mercy Centre
THURSDAY:	9.30 am in Parish Church
FRIDAY:	9.30 am in Parish Church
SATURDAY:	Sacrament of Reconciliation at 10.00 am

NEXT WEEKEND'S MASSES

ST. ALIPIUS	SAT	6.00 PM
	SUN	10.30 AM
BUNINYONG	SUN	9.00 AM

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT, YEAR A

READINGS -	First:	Isaiah 35:1-6, 10
	Second:	James 5:7-10
	Gospel:	Matthew 1:-2-11

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SICK: Nell McGettigan, Pamela Hayes, Nathan Cambell, Denise Learmonth, Cath Wheelahan, Barbara Keirl, Mick Kent, Terry McGarry, Kevin Walsh, Peter McDonald (Ocean Grove), Peter Clohesy, Kaye Tuddenham, Frank Nolan (Buninyong), Evie May Laffey, Christine Martin.

COUNTING TEAMS:

This Week: **Team 7:** K. Cummins ©, J. O’Meara, B. Hood, G. Duck
Next Week: **Team 8:** B. McKeegan ©, M. Ridsdale, K. McKeegan

COLLECTIONS LAST WEEKEND:

PARISH:	Envelopes:	\$ 4,372.40
	Loose money:	\$ 300.00
	Direct debits:	\$ <u>340.00</u>
		\$ 5,012.40
PRESBYTERY:		\$ 812.00



ANOINTING MASS

Will be held on Tuesday, 6th December at 2.00 pm in St Alipius Church. Following Mass afternoon tea will be served in the Hall. A plate would be appreciated. Anyone who needs transport is asked to contact any member of the Caring Group.

MAKING A SCENE AT CHRISTMAS

A display of Christmas Nativity scenes will be held in St Patrick’s Hall, from Wednesday, 14th December—Sunday 18th December. On display there will be in excess over 300 nativities from over 40 countries. Opening hours are Wednesday 6.00 pm—8.00 pm, Thursday and Friday 10.00 am—5.00 pm, Saturday 10.00 am—5.00 pm and Sunday 9.00 am—7.00 pm. The organising committee would like to hear from anyone who is willing to loan a nativity scene for display, in particular cribs from other cultures, previous eras or which “have a story”. Security is guaranteed. If you are able to assist please leave your name at the Cathedral Office on 5331 2933.

CAROLS IN THE CATHEDRAL

A Festival of Readings & Carols, Friday 23rd December at 7.30 pm at St Patrick’s Cathedral. See Notice Board for details.

PIETY STALL

Columban calendars and Christmas cards are available for purchase.

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Would the user of Env No 139 please contact Jim at the Parish Office on 5332 6611 (Tuesday, Thursday or Friday)

ADVENT REFLECTION GROUP

Weekly meetings will continue at 10.00 am on Thursdays in the Meeting Room of St Alipius Church.

MERCY CONNECT BALLARAT

Supporting refugee and asylum seeker students in local schools

Mercy Works is currently recruiting volunteers to support refugee and asylum seeker students in Ballarat schools through the Mercy Connect project. The volunteer commitment is for approximately three hours per week for four school terms. Experience working in an educational setting is preferred, but you will receive ongoing training and support. Initial training for new volunteers will be held in February 2017. Contact Paulene Barton—Mercy Connect Project Coordinator on 0417 624 330 or email mercyconnect@gmail.com for information and an application form. Applications close on 2nd February 2017.

INVITATION TO A FUNDRAISER

The Mercy Associates invites you to join them for **Catherine’s Christmas Cuppa** (Sr Catherine McAuley—founder of Sisters of Mercy)

When: Friday, 16th December at 5.00 pm
Where: Gathering Room 151 Victoria Street, Ballarat East

At the entrance to the Gathering Room there will be:

- A container and envelopes for donations to Mercy Wotks
- Lucky entrance prize tickets: \$2 each or 3 for \$5

If unable to attend but wish to make a donation—please do so at the Mercy Convent Office, 151 Victoria Street. Contact: Urusla on 0407 717 626.

CHRISTMAS GIVING TIME

Christmas is a joyous time when we celebrate the birth of Christ. Unfortunately, some people are living in very poor circumstances, so this is an opportunity to bring some joy at Christmas time. The tree is at the back of St Alipius Church. If you can help, please take a card from it and replace it with a star. Purchase a suitable gift, attach a card to it and return it to the church as soon as possible or by Sunday, 18th December.

OLHC CHRISTMAS DAY LUNCH

You are invited to join us on Christmas Day for lunch (no cost).

Time: 12.00 md - 2.00 pm
Where: OLHC Parish Hall
482 Gillies St Nth, Wendouree

Book early as numbers are limited.

Phone: 0419 975 914