

SUNDAY PLUS

Be prepared

Beyond the image

By Mary Bell

Nowadays image is of great importance, as it was also to John the Baptist's hearers. It was obvious that he was a prophet: he dressed like the prophets of old; he behaved like one. They had no doubt about it so they came miles out into the wilderness to listen to his words and, like their forebears, prepared to be chastised, because that's what prophets did. Nobody questioned his basic premise that everybody in the world is sinful and in need of repentance. Many of them submitted to being symbolically cleansed of their sins in the waters of the river Jordan.

What they hadn't expected was that his message didn't end there. He foretold the imminent coming of a powerful being who would cleanse their sins with the fire of the Holy Spirit. He, John, was only the messenger to prepare them for this coming of the one whom Paul calls "our Lord Jesus Christ", a saviour who would bring hope if they were to follow his teaching. John's task of preparation was to inform the people about this coming saviour so that they would be receptive to Jesus' message that everyone can be saved, even the most wicked, if they repent, a message for us too.

Our recent experience of the pandemic has taught us that global awareness and preparation



have helped us to contain a life-threatening virus. Preparing for the coming of Jesus at Christmas helps us deal with the virus of sin. In him is our hope of everlasting life.

Following many years in the classroom, retired teacher and school principal, Mary Bell now has time to enjoy the beauties of the natural world around her.

Lord, it's very busy just now and will become busier as Christmas approaches. Please help me to remember that you give the real meaning to this lovely time of year. 🙏 Amen.

The legend of the poinsettia

Pepita and her cousin Pablo, two Mexican children, were walking to Mass on Christmas Eve.

Pepita really wanted to put a present for the baby Jesus in front of the crib but both children were very poor and couldn't think of anything they could do. Pablo tried to console her, assuring her that Jesus would love even the humblest of gifts.

Encouraged, she picked a bunch of wayside flowers as they walked.

She would put these in the manger. However, when they reached the church, Pepita felt very embarrassed by the smallness of her offering.

Then, to everyone's amazement, as she walked down the aisle, her little bouquet changed. The green leaves became bright red with small clusters of golden flowers – and that, says the legend, is the origin of the poinsettia: an act of childhood kindness. It's also why, in Mexico, the poinsettia is called the "Flores de Noche Buena", the "Flowers of the Holy Night".

Feast of the week
Thursday 8 December

The Immaculate Conception of Our Lady

The angel Gabriel from heaven came
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame
"All hail" said he "thou lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favoured maiden," Gloria!

"For know, a blessed mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honour thee,
Thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold
Most highly favoured maiden," Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said,
"My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name."
Most highly favoured maiden, Gloria!

Sabine Baring-Gould, based on a traditional Basque hymn

The testimony of John the Baptist invites us to start out again and again on our journey of faith: to start afresh from Jesus Christ, the Lamb full of mercy that the Father gave for us. Let us be surprised once again by God's choice to be on our side, to show solidarity with us sinners and to save the world from evil by taking it on fully.

Pope Francis

Today
Isaiah 11:1-10
Romans 15:4-9
Matthew 3:1-12

Monday
Isaiah 35:1-10
Luke 5:17-26

Tuesday
Isaiah 40:1-11
Matthew 18:12-14

Wednesday
Isaiah 40:25-31
Matthew 11:28-30

Thursday
Genesis 3:9-15
Ephesians 1:3-6
Luke 1:26-38

Friday
Isaiah 48:17-19
Matthew 11:16-19

Saturday
Ecclesiasticus 48:1-4
Matthew 17:10-13

Next Sunday
Isaiah 35:1-6
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11