



The Catholic Parish of Saint Gregory the Great Northampton



PART OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON, REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 234091

OUR
VISION

**“A truly thriving Catholic community
confidently and humbly proclaiming the
Good News of Jesus Christ.”**

OUR
VISION

He must increase but I must decrease

These are among the last recorded words of John the Baptist, (*John 3:29*) whom we meet in today's Gospel reading.

Last week we were reminded that the season of Advent is, first of all, a preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. Only after that do we get to think of preparation for the celebration of Christmas. And we haven't got there yet.

Advent divides into two parts, and the second part begins on 17th December, and is only the last week before the feast. During that week there is only one Sunday, when we turn our thoughts to Our Lady.

This week we hear the prophesy of Baruch (*referencing Isaiah 40:4*) of mountains being made low and valleys filled up to make level ground, and how John proclaims that this is fulfilled in Jesus is recorded in our Gospel passage.

John is not just proclaiming the arrival of the Messiah in person, he is proclaiming a new age in the history of the world; sometimes called the 'Messianic Age'; an age which begins with the earthly life of Jesus, and will continue until he comes again. While it is manifestly clear that the fullness of that age has not yet been accomplished, yet through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the establishment of the Church, the process has begun.

In next week's Gospel we shall hear in greater detail how some of this is to be accomplished, and there are certain things to notice.

The first is that the coming of Christ was not just through the work of God. It was a co-operative work between God and Mary. God did not make his Word flesh simply on his own. This is why Christian devotion to Our Lady is not an option; without the co-operation of Mary, God's plan could not have taken place, and those who do not recognise the place of Our Lady in the scheme of salvation cannot fully see that humanity still has an important part to play in God's continuing plan to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ.

The second is to realise that much of the scriptures need to be understood as allegory. The words about mountains being brought low and valleys filled in are echoed in Mary's Magnificat where she says that 'the mighty are brought down from their thrones' and that God 'exalts those of humble estate'. (*Luke 1:52*)

This is to recognise that God's plan is not for a 'flat earth' but rather for a society in which none are exploited or abused, that leadership is service, not privilege or the opportunity for corruption and that the rights and responsibilities of all people are respected and fulfilled. Our task is not one requiring earth-moving machines, but rather the harder task of moving the hearts and minds of people to have the same willingness to co-operate with God as Our Lady had. "Let it be to me according to your word". (*Luke 1:38*) These words and all that they imply should be our determination as we co-operate with God in the preparation for the second coming of Christ.

We do live in a mountainous world; not just in terms of our physical geography. Indeed, a totally flat landscape can be rather boring, and Jesus did not bring down the mount of Transfiguration, rather, he climbed it, and when he went to pray he went to the mountains. (*Luke 6:12*)

Mountaineering, hill walking and rock-climbing can be exciting and adventurous activities, but for many people, their hopes are set on climbing the 'greasy pole' of political ambition or career advancement; of increasing in status or wealth. It is these mountains that God wishes to bring down, and it is the people who live in the valley of poverty and degradation that he wishes to raise up.

We can only begin this process near home; that is to say, with ourselves. We must have the same attitude as John the Baptist; first that Jesus must increase, and I must decrease.

One visualisation of the Cross is that it is 'I crossed out'. I am not the important one. "I have done no more than my duty". (*see Luke 17:10*) Another image is that at the centre of the word 'sin' is the letter 'I'. So often our first thoughts are about ourself; our desires, our ambitions, our hopes, our likes and dislikes.

"Love is to will the good of another" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church §1766, quoting St Thomas Aquinas*) and our Christian command to 'love one another' (*John 13:34*) means that we have to learn to put others before ourselves. In this, most of us have some way to go!

We do not need to be too hard on ourselves. The magnificent generosity that has been shown through the "Giving Tree" to provide Christmas gifts to people being supported by Gregory Care; the regular giving to CAFOD and Missio; the donations to the Hope Centre which will be collected at the Christmas crib and through Advent and Christmastide in our donations for refreshments after Mass are all indications of a community with love at its heart.

These are all practical ways of not only showing our love for others but also showing our love for God. (*see Matthew 25:40*) We show our love for God by spending time in prayer, by attending Mass, by visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and especially to Holy Hour and other devotions such as the Rosary, Divine Mercy, novenas retreats or pilgrimages and through the Sacrament of reconciliation.

We are unable to escape the reality that the celebration of the anniversary of the birth of Christ is only 17 days away and there may be some present-buying still on the to-do list. These should be acts of love, not of duty.

St Paul prayed for the Philippians, and now prays for us that we may be:

Pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness at comes through Christ Jesus to the glory and praise of God. (*Philippians 1:10-11*) (Second reading for Mass today)

Scripture Readings Second Sunday of Advent, Year C, 8th December 2024

The Book of Baruch, was probably written during the second century BC and attributed to Jeremiah's secretary. It deals with problems of Jews permanently exiled in the diaspora. Today's reading offers consolation for refugees, seeing hope for Jerusalem as the mother of all exiles. Realistically it insists that we must come to terms with life where we are. In all ages, families living in exile must find salvation from the living word of God.

The Psalm is usually seen as Israel's rejoicing after their return from exile. But it may be more consistently read as an intense visualisation of the future restoration of Israel by the Lord.

Paul wrote the Letter to the Philippians from prison between 55 and 63 AD, addressing it to the "saints, bishops and ministers" of the community. He prays lovingly that their love and knowledge of

Christ may increase, so that they dare to proclaim the gospel fearlessly.

For these 3 weeks of Advent we hear from Luke's gospel about preparations for the coming Messiah. Today John the Baptist is positioned in history, proclaiming a baptism of repentance and, like Baruch, quoting from Isaiah. Just as with Elizabeth's greeting on the last Sunday of Advent, Luke firmly links the coming birth to the Old Testament, which it fulfils.

Psalm Response: **What great deeds the Lord worked for us!
Indeed we were glad.**

(Baruch 5: 1-9; Ps 125(126); Phil 1: 3-6. 8-11; Luke 3: 1-6)

Chris Oliver

Getting used to our new Bible translation

The Bishop's Conference of England and Wales has chosen the English Standard Version (Anglicised Text) (Catholic Edition) as the official translation of the Bible that is used in every Catholic church in England and Wales. It is generally known as ESVUK(CE).

It has been chosen as the best translation for proclamation, to be used for Mass. This means that it is considered best for public reading. It does not mean that other translations are not good, and many would say that the Jerusalem Bible (which we have been using for fifty years) is still better for private reading. But 'reading' and 'proclamation' are different things, and the use of the word 'reader' when we mean 'the one who proclaims' has led us to be confused, and to have paid insufficient attention to the skill of proclamation.

Some people wonder why we have a 'Catholic Edition' of the Bible. The chief reason is that we have seven books and more chapters in others in the Old Testament which are not included in other Bibles.

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, but after the exile in Babylon, many Jewish people did not go back to Judea but settled in towns and cities around the Mediterranean Sea, where Greek was the spoken language. A translation was made of the Jewish Bible into Greek in Alexandria, and it is this version that was known to the Christian communities such as those evangelised by St Paul.

The Catholic and Orthodox Churches have always accepted the complete Greek translation of the Old Testament, but because the

Jewish Faith only accepts those in Hebrew, the Church refers to the other books and chapters as 'Deuterocanonical' ('deutero' means 'second') to distinguish them from those that are also accepted in Judaism. Protestant churches generally do not accept them and do not include them in their Bibles.

The New Testament is has the same books in both Catholic and other Bibles.

A second reason why we have a Catholic Edition is that some versions, are not translations at all, rather a paraphrase, and in some cases altering the meaning of passages, and perhaps not reflecting the teaching of the Church. Therefore you can be sure that if you are reading a 'Catholic Edition' you are reading an accurate and approved text.

However, in recent years Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Biblical scholars have worked together, both on commentaries and on translations, so that there is much more agreement on texts.

Minor alterations have been made in the lectionary versions so that at the beginning of a passage the context can be established, but not in any way to change the meaning.

This week our first reading is from the book of Baruch, one of the seven deuterocanonical books. Baruch himself was the scribe for Jeremiah (*see Jeremiah 45:1*), although most scholars date the book that bears his name to several centuries later.

Warm Welcome

With the news that fuel bills are due to rise from 1st January and a marked drop in the temperature this week, this week we are re-starting the 'Warm Welcome' initiative that we ran last year.

The take-up last year was quite small, and it would be good to be able to welcome more people. However, we also need more helpers, and if anyone is able to offer time on Monday or Wednesday mornings from after Mass until midday, not necessarily every week; it would be good to have a rota of helpers. Ideally there should be at least two helpers for each session.

The refreshments on Mondays and Wednesdays have become increasingly popular, and grateful thanks must go to Bridget and Jehanne; however it is unfair and unrealistic to leave this all to them. If you are able, please support this initiative, and invite any friends, especially non-Catholics to join us for the refreshments, if not for Mass.

On some Mondays there is live piano music (thanks to Hugh Lazarus) and other entertainments would be welcome. Children are also welcome, and there are some toys available.

CARITAS
Northampton

P R E S E N T A T I O N

"Where are we in our pastoral care"

You are invited to join in for presentation and discussion on social outreach and social needs within our area

With Brian Emmanuel

ST GREGORY'S PARISH

Session one: 20th January 2025 @ 7:30 pm
Session two: 17th February 2025 @ 7:30 pm

22 Park Avenue North, Northampton, NN3 2HS
Email: rpwillnecker@gmail.com
(Parking at the back of the church)

ENTRY FREE

REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED

SEATS ARE LIMITED, SO PLEASE BOOK YOUR SEAT EARLY!