

By
Didymus

Evensong Readings

Isaiah ch.5, vv8-end OR

Acts ch.13, vv13-41

John ch.5, vv31-40

As we stand back and watch the third Advent candle flame grow into life, our thoughts should recall John, the Herald of Christ, traditionally remembered this weekend.

John seems to have been a powerful orator from the records of his early days in the Gospels. His certainty was blended with great humility. One of my favourite passages is from John's first chapter, verse 27, in the King James Version,

"He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

Backalong, years ago, I organised an Advent carol service, with the usual well-known readings and hymns. I asked for the readings to be from the KJV on this occasion – yes, an indulgence for which I thought our Lord would forgive for my labour. So I was less than impressed as a dear little lady from the Methodist church strode forward, the Good News Bible cover prominent under her arm! Ah well.....

John the Baptist, JTB, and his story are so well-known that I will not labour on. That doesn't mean that he is any less important. He was the last prophet – he knew what was to come and saw it. He baptised Jesus, with some reluctance at first, and he urged the first disciples to follow Jesus.

Should JTB baptise God made human? John was understandably baffled. Jesus urged him on, for as he was fully human, he needed to be baptised. The subsequent coming of God's Holy Spirit was the result and the reason for JTB's baptism.



Christmas is here, with its music and traditions, with such delights as Silent Night, While Shepherds Watched, and even those Twelve Damned Days of Christmas. *(It seems to go on till Lent!)* For many Christians, Advent is a time of preparation, for which carols are a little premature. Trying to stop the tidal wave of Christmas music is one of the more challenging tasks of the season, and I am sure that the fires of hell do not await those who give in gracefully, like your author.



All music is a matter of taste, it speaks to us in so many different ways at different times. Did my friends and I really jive to traditional jazz and even Sir William Haley and his Comets in the 1950s? (*Pause for laughter*).

I remember hearing for the first time Adolphe Adam's glorious carol "Cantique de Noël" (*O Holy Night*) sung by that wonderful soprano Leontyne Price. She was the first black American opera singer and arguably the best. I had never heard anything quite so beautiful, and it has remained with me ever since. With the help of the Blessed Gareth, it was sung, not as a solo, but by the congregation at St. Michael's in the alternative Carol Service last year and will be next week.

As the preparation grows for Christmas, notwithstanding the incredible theological excursion into the World Cup, followed by a blundering sermon, the dear old C of E continues, unabated, to amaze and delight. It gets better and better.

A brouhaha* has broken out in Silloth, near Carlisle. The parish had decided to replace the old pews by modern chairs with coloured seating. Knowing something about these things, only a metaphorical match was needed to start a major conflagration. The change was upheld by a judge supporting the lilies and lavender enthusiasts, but I suspect it will a fight to the death. Peace be with you? Not likely!

Any alteration to a church has to be approved by an archdeacon aided by the opinion of the Diocesan Advisory Committee. This device existed in order to obviate Government planning legislation being extended to include the CofE. I assumed that DAC stood for Dead Architects Club, such was my experience as churchwarden. These were the arbiters of good taste, and the needs and wishes of the congregation were neither here nor there. I have since met good folk, architects, priests and lay, all keen to preserve, indeed enhance our beautiful buildings, so perhaps I was being harsh. I am more interested in enhancing our beautiful congregations.



Whether they are poor or rich, of any race, sexuality, colour or creed,
Wherever they are, young, adult or old, disabled, suffering or in good health,
Whether they are migrants or neighbours, loved or not - not just for this season
Our Lord loved all humanity, and so should we. AMEN.

* Polite theological name for a Brawl