

Brrrrrr it's so cold!!

We've certainly been going through a cold snap this last week, and it reminds us that we are heading towards the darkest part of the year. The light and the warmth of the summer sun seem very distant now, and in a sense our mood can follow this seasonal descent into the wintry and icy gloom. How many times when the morning alarm goes off in what seems the middle of the night, do we wake up in the dark, just feeling like turning over and putting our head back under the blankets again? The prospect of having to get up and prepare for work, get the kids ready and off to school, is not so enticing when there's a sharp frost on the ground outside, and a breezy bus stop awaiting us. We just can't shake off the cold and damp!!

Thankfully the mood of the readings this Sunday seems to defy this feeling. The extract from Baruch has a definite uplifting and joyous mood, that evokes not a descent into gloom, but an ascent to a totally different and renewed experience of being alive; an elation that overcomes the cold and dark which currently surrounds and envelopes us. St Paul too in his letter to the Philippians, appeals to this feel good factor, as he encourages his newly formed Christian community by fondly recalling how full of energy and commitment they were, as they eagerly took to the task of proclaiming the Good News. The Gospel itself evokes a clear sense of expectancy, the stage is being set and the landscape redrawn and redefined. The whole effect is moving towards a mighty crescendo, which will burst open with the explosive cry of the Baptist: prepare the way of the Lord!

That's a big ask! Our economy remains in the doldrums and peoples' spirits are low. The usual Christmas shopping extravaganza no longer appeals as the country reflects on where it is going in terms of its sense of purpose, its values and standards. Where and how are our resources to be applied? The landscape we look out on is one which seems to fade into the distance of an everlasting decline. Yet it is in such moments that we Christians are called upon to make our preparation. How are we to carry out such a command? How are we to see in the dark the light that shines out brightly, such that it can not be overcome? Who are the new prophets proclaiming the coming of the Lord, preparing the way and galvanising us to take up the task? No it's not easy, but there seems something necessary and required about this seasonal juxtaposition of our faith with the winter solstice.

It seems totally compelling that, when the sun is at its furthest from us, and its warmth hardly penetrates, when we move around mostly in the dark, and life itself hunkers down, the Church turns to celebrate the coming of the one who brings both light and life to a cold, weary world. If we take the words of the gospel seriously, and understand them properly we will see that what they say will bring an end to the mood of uncertainty and fear, and in their place instil in us a feeling of joy and expectancy. One which declares for us that our problems can be shared, our hopelessness can be conquered and our fears overcome, because God has shown us how. Through the generosity of his love in sending us his Son, lives that were broken are made whole through the application of a boundless love that made pathways straight, and rough roads smooth; a love which laid low hills and mountains and filled in valleys. This love cleared a way through the dark and the cold of the winter into the summer light of the Godhead, calling on us to take off the dress of sorrow and distress, and put on the beauty of the glory of God for ever. May we prepare well in spite of the cold!