

Second Sunday of Advent Year A [2010]

This week our gospel reading takes us back to chapter 3 in Matthew's gospel. The passage we have come s right after the infancy narrative with a sudden shift of scene. We now move away from Jesus who is now safely settled in Nazareth and in another part of the country we have a very different main character in the story and when Jesus appears he is no longer a child. Matthew uses all his skill as an editor because he uses Mark's account of this event but he makes some changes to suit his own particular style and message. John the Baptist is presented as a very austere figure with rough clothing and an unusual diet to say the very least! But it is this strange figure who announces the Kingdom of Heaven. (You will notice that Matthew uses this term rather than Mark's Kingdom of God.) Clearly Matthew wants us to know the great impact of this teaching because he paints a powerful picture of "Jerusalem and the whole of Judea and the whole area around the Jordon coming out to hear what he has to say." The Isaiah quotation is from 40:3 and is used by all the Gospel writers.

We also meet the Pharisees and Sadducees for the first time in the gospel and they are always seen in a negative light throughout the gospel. We learn that Jesus goes beyond what John is teaching. John is not even fit to do a menial task for him; Jesus' baptism is "with the Holy Spirit and fire" which for Matthew is clearly way above John's "Baptism for repentance."

Questions for further thought or discussion

1. What do you think Jesus' "fire" means?
2. Does the fire within you feel more like a pilot light rather than a roaring fire?
3. What do you think would help to enkindle your fire during advent?
4. You received the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Baptism; how do they affect your life today?