

Knowing your place!

Isaiah 61^{1-4,8-end}; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5¹⁶⁻²⁴; John 1^{6-8,19-28}

*He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.
(John 1⁷)*

The Evangelists, in composing their Gospels, all tell the story of Jesus life and ministry. As we approach Christmas it is always interesting to note how these Gospels begin:

- ✦ Luke, the Gospel written as a deliberate history of Jesus, begins with the story of Jesus birth from the perspective of Mary.
- ✦ Matthew, the Gospel written principally for the Jews, focuses on the birth of Jesus from the perspective of Joseph.
- ✦ Mark doesn't have any record of Jesus' birth - where he came from simply isn't that important to him.
- ✦ John is different - he begins before the creation of world: the prologue to John (part of which we read today) picks up the themes that he builds his Gospel around - **witness, testify, light** and **belief**. From the very beginning of the Gospel he tells us that everything is working towards those who hear it or read it will believe in Jesus.

John (the Baptist) knows his place in all this

- ✦ He knows that he is **sent from God**. It is Luke that tells the story surrounding John's birth: Zechariah and Elizabeth were faithful people, but childless - a real stigma at that time; an angel appeared - **I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God and I have been sent to speak to you** - to him in the Temple and he was made mute as a sign that the birth was special; John was a Nazerite - so no alcohol, no hair cut (or social graces) - and had a unique diet of locusts and honey. What a story
- ✦ He knows who he isn't (not the **Messiah**, or **Elijah** or **Isaiah**). His job is to get things ready and then to step aside (Herod, with his will manipulated by Herodias and her daughter made sure of that!).

- ✦ He is faithful in his ministry - of getting people to be baptised in recognition of their need to repent: knowing how bad you are isn't enough to make you good, but it helps you to be open to the Good News when it comes. When he sees Jesus (the day after our reading ends) he knows that things have moved on positively: **here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**

All of us who know ourselves to be Christians, share in John (the Evangelists') stated aim: that people will come to believe in Jesus and in John (the Baptists') ministry of pointing to Jesus. What matters is knowing - and fully inhabiting - our place in this.