**Talk for 8th December**: Based on Isaiah 11 v 1-10 and Matt 3 v 1-12

Todays readings speak of a promise that took a long time to be fulfilled and of the immanent arrival of that same promise. The promise of The Peaceful Kingdom and John the Baptists fervent plea to make the path straight for Him – also made by Isaiah in chapter 40 v 3.

The people of Israel heard the promise and were excited for it – just like we can get about the presents under the tree!

How many of us can’t resist picking up presents with our name on them and gently feel them, squeezing them and even sniffing them – just to try to work out what we are getting…. Please don’t let it only be me that does that! It makes me excited and I imagine what I will be getting – and it makes me feel special to think that someone has gone to the trouble of getting me something. It’s the promise of something for you.

This is a natural thing to do and its OK to anticipate, and that is what the people of Israel did too as they waited for the Messiah to come – and they had a long time to think about it as it took – anyone remember from Soul Café? 700 years or there about!

When we are expecting new things, it’s a good time to go through the old and get rid of things that we no longer need or use – to make room for the new and to find space for our new gifts. This is what John the Baptist (and Isaiah) were talking about when they wrote ‘Prepare the way for the Lord’. Advent is a time for us to look into our hearts and lives and to prayerfully do a bit of a ‘clear out’: to rid ourselves of the clutter and distractions that keep us from drawing near to God. Christmas is about the Joy of thanksgiving for the Birth of Jesus BUT also for us to give thanks for the presence of Jesus in our lives and to be sure, that unlike the inn keeper – there IS room in our lives for Him.

It is important that while we do the ‘clear out’ that we have a clear expectation of what to expect. If we are promised something to keep us warm – we may start clearing out our blankets and bed linen expecting rugs and things to warm us, but we should have been clearing out the hats and coats as when we were actually being promised new outdoor wear. It is helpful to know who is behind the promise and what is really being said. That way we can be totally ready. The people of Israel had built an image of a Messiah who would put all their problems right, and make their troubles disappear – a physical thing that would give them first place amongst the nations. By Jesus’ time, it was a Messiah who would rid them of the Roman Rule and who was theirs by birth right. BUT John is saying something very different – they had it all wrong. Jesus was coming to rule, but in people’s hearts. The path to be cleared was there, not to ready themselves for war but to ready themselves for peace. The second Advent candle is the candle of Peace and our reading in Isaiah illustrates how peace will bring us together.

The infant will play near the cobra’s den,  
    and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest.  
**9**They will neither harm nor destroy  
    on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord  
    as the waters cover the sea.

We should heed this and remember to ready ourselves for invasion by Jesus – all of us open to Him who brings peace and offers us eternal rest.

One other thing about presents is that they can make a difference to our lives – we can finally be warm when we go out or find it easier to do something as we have had a labour-saving device – it creates a change in the way we do things just by having them/their use. The presence of Jesus should have a similar affect on us. Jesus in our lives should profoundly change the way that we think, act and generally behave. As we are covered by His grace and mercy and the recipients of Gods forgiveness, our attitude changes from one of ‘self’ to one of Gods love… and part of that is allowing God to work in our hearts to fill us with peacefulness. Perhaps we can join each other throughout this Advent and Christmas time by allowing God to work in us to clear out the clutter, to fill us with the presence of Jesus and to allow his love and peace to flow out.

When we do this, Christmas Day will become even more special as we will really be able to give thanks to God for the presence of Jesus in our lives so that we may live our lives for Him through the grace and presence of Jesus in our hearts.