

## Preparing for Christ (2)

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent - Canon Neil Patterson

Micah 5.2-5a, Hebrews 10.5-10, Luke 1.39-55

Those who were here last week will recall that I explained that the coincidences of the rota place me in the pulpit on two successive Sundays, and so I am taking the opportunity to preach two connected sermons. Last week we heard about John the Baptist, whose preaching (in Luke's version) includes, alongside the fiery rhetoric, some very basic ethical teaching – those who have enough must share with the poor, and soldiers and tax-collectors ought to do their duty without looking for personal profit.

But, I concluded, such teaching, even if apparently simple, is in reality quite hard to live by, because human nature is not like that. We have evolved in a world of competition, and the instincts are deep, deeper than we like to admit. And so we turn to today's gospel to hear how the mighty are put down and the hungry filled, not by virtuous human endeavour, but by the work of God. The natural is not enough; we need the supernatural. If you want to reread that in full, it should be on the Cathedral website where most of our sermons are posted.

There is, however, a challenge to our faith in the Gospel reading today. Mary announces, in the o-so-familiar words of the Magnificat, that God has done great things. Not that she looks forward to them in a future kingdom come, but that they have happened. And that was 2000 years ago. But we look around us. As far as I can judge, the proud seem to still be enjoying the thoughts of their hearts very much, the powerful are still enthroned, in boardrooms and cabinet tables if not palaces these days, the rich are still rich, and the hungry still wait for good things. And little Bethlehem of so many songs is walled around in the midst of a seemingly endless conflict with little space for the Prince of Peace.

Change of values ancient/modern?

Limitations of human sin?

Fulfilment in God's time

Reality is in God's eye view

But what is it to prepare?

Not ability, means, capacity  
Readiness to receive

Finish with RS Thomas 'The Kingdom'