THE NEW SHOFAR

When we sin and mess up our lives, we find that God doesn't go off and leave us- he enters into our trouble and saves us. Eugene H. Peterson

Advent 3

There are a million and one reasons for us to rejoice

Today used to be called "Gaudete Sunday" from the first word of the Entrance Song in Latin. *Gaudete* means 'Rejoice!' which is why the prayers and readings today are full of joy, especially the Entrance Song, the Opening Prayer and the First Reading from Isaiah. The cry of the Entrance Antiphon is: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.* (Phil 4:4) And why? Because: *The Lord is near!* (Phil 4:5)

At first glance it seems as though the prophet Isaiah goes overboard with excitement and enthusiasm. But all he is doing is celebrating, with the fullness of joy and hope, the realisation that God is fulfilling his promises. And doing it now. All around them. He has forgiven them their sins, the sins that had led them to Babylon in the first place. After seventy years in exile, as prisoners in a distant land, that realisation must have come as an all-embracing joy. And as if this is not enough, God is making an even greater concession - *…your God….He will come and save you.* God does not wait for them to arrive in Jerusalem. He comes to them in the mantle of a liberator, a saviour, as one who makes flowers grow in an inhospitable desert. He is the ultimate, the definitive Saviour.

God is Saviour

What then does God offer his people as their Saviour? **Salvation**. Salvation means a great deal more than some kind of otherworldly, spiritual as distinct from physical blessings. Yes, his gift is grace and with that grace comes healing, wholeness and holiness as we become closely united to him. This healing, wholeness and holiness is depicted graphically: *…the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.* That is salvation

These words will be applied explicitly to Jesus, who brought this healing and wholeness into so many people's lives. Salvation will also include healing on the emotional, social and spiritual levels. We are not made whole until harmony and well-being flows through our whole self. It is no wonder that Isaiah and his fellow Jews could celebrate with such enthusiasm and joy.

Jesus – Joshua – Yahweh saves

The English spelling of the Hebrew *Yeshua* is *Joshua*. But when translated from Hebrew into Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the name *Yeshua* becomes *Iēsous*. In English, *Iēsous* becomes *Jesus*. Thus, *Yeshua* and, *Joshua* and *Jesus* mean “Yahweh saves” or “the Lord is salvation.” His name is his commitment.

The name *Jesus* was quite popular in first-century Judea. For this reason, our Lord was often called “Jesus of Nazareth,” distinguishing Him by His childhood home, the town of Nazareth in Galilee (Matthew 21:11; Mark 1:24; Luke 18:37; John 1:45; John 19:19; Acts 2:22). Despite its commonness, the name *Jesus* is remarkably significant. Jesus was sent by God for a particular purpose, and His personal name bears witness to that mission. Just as the Yeshua/Joshua in the Old Testament led his people to victory over the Canaanites, the Yeshua/Jesus in the New Testament led His people to victory over sin and their spiritual enemies.

Water as a metaphor for God

Water was a precious commodity in the ancient world, especially in Judah, and still is today. Because the ancient audience relied primarily on an agriculturally based economy, the demand for fresh water loomed large. The creation story in Genesis 1 reflects this reality, when, in one of the first acts of creation, God separates salt water from fresh water so that plants, animals, and humans can survive. It is who God is. What God does. It is what the same God .continues to do for us today

Israel had few sources of fresh water outside of rainfall coming in off the Mediterranean Sea. While the northern kingdom did have some fresh water sources, such as the Sea of Galilee, Judah in the south was more arid. When people started settling in this relatively inhospitable environment, they spent most of their labour first building cisterns to catch as much rainfall as possible. The city of Jerusalem did have some springs around it, but the surrounding countryside, especially to the south, could not sustain the agricultural output needed for crops. What they could not do, God did for them, with them. As water revived the people, so too God is like a cool stream.

That vision from Isaiah is what Advent throws up for us today – the possibility of living a life that makes our every action, every word and deed an **Alleluia of thanks to God**. All that stands between that life and where we live now is the way we respond to the Gospel call to repent. As God spoke to Israel in terms of a transformation of the desert, so too Jesus brings us not just a promise of a magnificent life in eternity, but at the same time, an invitation to join with him in the transformation of this world, to collaborate with the ongoing works of God in human history, the restoration of the creation as it was in the mind of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.