

Lectionary readings: Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24; John 1: 6-8, 19-28 (Third in Advent)

For reflection and prayer

- **Isaiah 61:** This is what Jesus and we are called to do: to bring freedom to those who are imprisoned by drugs, alcohol, fears, anxieties, guilt; to bring good news to those who are physically, emotionally and spiritually poor; to heal those who are broken-hearted. *'This is the year of your grace.'* In fact, every day, every moment is a day, a moment of grace. God wants each one of us to assist Him in setting people free from their burdens and to bring healing. He wants us to display His glory. *'As a garden cascades with blossoms'*, so God wants the church to be.
- **Psalm 126:** Here is Psalm 126 in 'Psalms for Praying' for us to reflect on. *'When the Divine Lover enters the human heart, all yearnings are fulfilled! Then will our mouths ring forth with laughter, and our tongues with shouts of joy; then will we sing our songs of praise, to You, O Beloved of all hearts. For gladness will radiate out for all to see; so great is Your Presence among us. Restore us to wholeness, O Healer, like newborn babes who have never strayed from You! May all who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy! May all who go forth weeping tears of repentance, bearing seed for sowing, come home to You with shouts of joy, leaving sorrow behind.'* How we long that others would see in us a people of joy, gladness radiating out from us to all we

meet, we ourselves experiencing the healing and wholeness that God wants to give us.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:** Joy is the hallmark of Christians, joy that is independent of circumstances because it is the gift of the Spirit of God who dwells within us. Paul urges us to pray constantly. I would rephrase that as living prayerfully, taking God into everything we are and do. An attitude of gratitude is important for Christians, thanking God for all the blessings we have. He urges us to discern how God wants us to live. And he prays that God will make us holy and whole and fit for His coming to us. May this Advent and Christmas find us rejoicing in who God is and what He has done and is doing for us.
- **John 1:** John came *'to show the way to the Light'* (The Message). John is part of God's plan and he is happy with the role he has been given in pointing the way to Jesus who will bring life and light. The Jews questioning John sound just like the modern-day media. John refuses to be diverted from his role; he refuses to be the centre of attention - that place belongs to Jesus. We are so easily side-tracked today and can so easily lose sight of what Christmas is all about. May we focus, not on those things that have no real significance, but on God and His coming to us in Jesus. And let's reflect on the difference that makes to our life.

A prayer

Lord, as we move through Advent nearer and nearer to Christmas, may we know Your presence with us, and open our lives to You. May You be at the centre of all we are and do, and may our lives bring You glory as we live prayerfully and lovingly, shedding light wherever we go. Amen.