

this event we are about to be told about happened, we are also given a flavour of the turbulence happening in this Roman occupied territory.

So, we are basically being told by Luke that, "At this specific time, the word of God came to John, Son of Zechariah (Luke wanted to make sure we knew which John he was talking about) in the wilderness. So we know what happened, when, and where. And this is so typically Luke's style of writing.

We are going to be looking more at John the Baptist himself next week, but the fact that John was in the wilderness tells us something I found interesting about John. We are told elsewhere that John existed on a diet of locusts and wild honey – so you would assume that John was something of a scrawny bloke, yet that is not the image I have of John the Baptist – in fact anything but. Anyway, let's leave that until next week, as we then come to the key part of our reading for this week – what John was doing, he was doing, 'as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah', and those words were these – and Luke quotes them:

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God'.

The book of Isaiah was written probably about 700 years before Jesus was born, and here Isaiah is prophesying that someone who was out in the wilderness will appear and tell the people to do all they can to be ready for the Lord, the coming Messiah, because he's about to arrive. That's quite amazing really isn't it. So when that happened, why did people doubt Jesus? Why did anyone question that Jesus was that promised Messiah?

Ah well, you see, they probably thought this is just one person from the scriptures saying what will happen – and perhaps John and Jesus – we know they were relatives after all so they probably just made it look like they were living out that prophesy. Perhaps you can see their point?

But actually, No. We here in the 4 Churches are probably just as guilty of this as the vast majority of other Christians today inasmuch as we, given the choice, will read, and learn from, and preach on, the New Testament – because the Old Testament is just too difficult to understand, and, to be frank, often too uncomfortable. And so two thousand years ago, I would imagine most God fearing jews would be very selective in which part of the scriptures, what we now call the Old Testament, they read, and if something doesn't feel right by them, then they would choose to ignore it. So this one prophesy by Isaiah could simply be ignored.

Does Genesis tell us anything about the Messiah – after all it was generally considered that Genesis was written by Moses, who was the greatest leader of the Israelites. Back in chapter 3 of Genesis we hear this: "And I will put enmity between you (that's the snake) and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

This might seem trivial. But Genesis speaks of many things that God created. It speaks of humans with souls, angels, and animals of every kind. It mentions physical beings and spiritual beings.

One might assume that the Messiah could take on any of these forms, just as Satan himself takes on the form of that snake. But here Moses, in introducing the role and function of the Messiah, that he would crush evil, also tells us that he would be a descendant of Eve, which means that he would be a human born of a woman. Later verses within the book of Genesis inform us that the Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham. And, later, Genesis tells us that the Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham through his son Isaac, and then later through Isaac's son, Jacob. Have you ever wondered why both Matthew and Luke gives us that long list of who was the father of whom, from God to Adam to Jesus? It

was to remind us of this prophesy from Moses. So a second source that we can't ignore – but Jesus was born of a woman – so what – so was everyone else?

What other prophesies were there. What about Jeremiah:

“I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the Lord. “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior.

So this was said when the Israelite nation had been thrown out of their country. They would be allowed back. And then a King from the line of David would come and save Isarel. Jesus was from the line of David. Another coincidence?

Anyone else then, Micah for example:

“Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

Jesus was born where? Oh Bethlehem.

Yes I'm getting the point.

And do you know the prophecies about Jesus' birth are nothing compared to the prophecies about his life. How he would ride triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey, how he would be killed, how the guards would cast lots for his clothes, the list is endless. These were all prophesied to happen by the Old Testament prophets – those prophets that we are giving thanks for today. Different scholars will come up with a different answer but it is generally accepted that somewhere between 300 and 570 prophecies in the Old Testament are fulfilled by Jesus. And yet he was rejected by his own people.

And he is still being rejected by the vast majority of people in our country today.

And the saddest thing about that is that he is being rejected not as a deliberate act, but because most people don't even think about Jesus. That is why Christmas is so important. That is why it was so great to have 60 or so children in this Church last weekend, with their parents or carers, giving us the opportunity to talk about Jesus to the children and what the church can offer to their parents. That is why carol services are important. Most people who come to Carol services come because they like singing carols, but by us making them feel welcome in church, feeling comfortable in church, and me having an opportunity to talk to them about Jesus in church, we are introducing them, or re-introducing them after maybe a year's break, to Jesus.

And that is part of what we are here to do . Yes we are here to learn more about Jesus ourselves. Yes we are here to worship God, to pray together, to support each other, but we must never forget that Jesus sent us out to tell everyone the Good News – from the prophets, through Jesus, to today and very much beyond.

So let's, very much with Luke's help, be ready to do just that. And can I just finish by encouraging you, when you go home take your noticesheet with you, and read that first reading that we heard today –

Readings: Luke 3: 1-6
Philippians 1: 3-11

Title- Believing the prophets

Fowlmere

from near the beginning of Paul's letter to the Philippians. This is Paul talking to a church he was very pleased with, that he was very close to. I wonder how we compare to that church in Philippi.

Amen