
23 Tuesday

TUESDAY, 23rd DECEMBER

Malachi 3: 1-4, 23-24

Ps 24: 4,5,8-10,14

Luke 1: 57-66

“What will this child turn out to be ?” This could be a meditative question about the Christmas child in the manger. But it’s actually John the Baptist people were wondering about (St Luke ch.1), witnessing or having heard of what happened at his naming. John’s father had insisted on that name; and then his speech returned and he praised and blessed God in a glorious song. People were filled with awe, and all the neighbourhood heard about it. In expecting the coming Messiah, God’s people had also learnt that a great prophet would herald His arrival, maybe even a return of someone like Elijah. The prophecy of Malachi outlines some of that herald’s role, as a purifier and refiner preparing people’s souls, as one who would “turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the hearts of children towards their fathers”. John is that herald. His arrival and his voice point out Christ’s appearance among us. In our celebration of Christmas, maybe John doesn’t get much attention. Of course, it’s his message that’s important, rather than his person: he himself was to say that his role was to grow smaller so that Christ would grow larger in our hearts. But at least today, let me reflect on John and his role, and on what the gospel means by the curiously close parallel between St Luke’s descriptions of John’s and Jesus’ births, and of both their parents’ experiences of the announcements the angel made to them. May my celebration of Christmas be prepared with John’s voice in my ear, changing my heart, with wonder and awe at what this Child would turn out to be.