

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT – YEAR C



PEACE

In many Church traditions, the candle we light on the Second Sunday in Advent symbolises peace, reminding us of the peace that enters our lives when we experience the presence of Christ Jesus himself.

### Second Reading Philippians 1: 3–6, 8–11

This letter to the Philippians has been variously referred to as Paul's farewell discourse; an epistle of joy; his most human letter; and his most thankful letter. It is thought that the Philippians were probably Paul's most beloved converts, and St Luke describes the conversion of the first Christians in Philippi, Lydia and her household (Acts 16: 11–15). Philippi was a major city in Macedonia (present day Northern Greece) and a military centre very much under the influence of the Roman empire.

We cannot be exactly sure where Paul was when he wrote this letter, but he was certainly in a prison cell – quite possibly in Ephesus in c. 56 AD (or a little later, when he was imprisoned in Caesarea and then Rome). Paul is awaiting sentence which will almost certainly mean death. Only the Philippians have come to his aid, sending food.

Following the typical format of his letters (and together with Timothy his co-worker), Paul expresses his gratitude and love, and after a general greeting, prays for the welfare of his readers.

Paul sensed the Philippians shared his mission as they spread the Gospel, and we can imagine this gave him great consolation. His prayer for the Philippians reads like a mission statement.

Being a Christian convert is not only a matter of adhering to new rules and regulations; it is above all about entering into a new relationship with God, '*deepening [one's] perception*' to achieve '*the perfect goodness*'.

The Philippians should live in a way which will enable them to be fully prepared to meet Christ when he comes again on '*the Day of Christ*'.



## Gospel Luke 3: 1–6

### 'Prepare a way for the Lord!'

Luke is very conscious of being a historian as well as an evangelist. He is keen to situate the characters in his story within the historical and geographical framework of the Roman world which his audience would understand. For Luke, John the Baptist is the last and greatest prophet of Israel – and introducing prophets by putting them in their historical context is an Old Testament practice. Here he lists seven political and religious figures.

#### In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign

This is the most precise chronological reference of all the Gospels, placing the baptism of Jesus towards the end of 27 AD. However, even this date is imprecise since different calendars were in use at that time; not all had 365 days, so we cannot know exactly how long 15 years was.

- \* **Pontius Pilate** ruled 26–36 AD
- \* **Herod Antipas**, son of Herod the Great, ruled as tetrarch 4 BC – 39 AD. The literal meaning of **tetrarch** is someone who rules a quarter of a country, but here the term is used more loosely as leader of a small regional area.
- \* **Philip** [also known as the Tetrarch], half-brother of Herod Antipas; generally seen as the most sincere and upright of the rulers listed here.
- \* **Lysanias**: little is known about him. It was a common name for the kings of Abilene, a region 20 miles north west of Damascus.
- \* **Annas** and **Caiaphas** are high priests. Annas held office AD 6–15 and retained enough influence to make sure that his entire family should be appointed to high office, including his son-in-law Caiaphas (AD 18–36). All cruel and powerful, these men give an idea of the strength of the opposition which John the Baptist and Jesus will have to face.

#### The baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins

Ceremonial purification by water has its roots in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 7: 6), but it can also be linked with the Qumran community, an early Christian community living an ascetic life in the hills overlooking the Dead Sea near Jericho. They practised daily rites of purification with water, which they saw as symbolic of their interior cleansing.

#### A voice cries in the wilderness

In quoting Isaiah, Luke links his text with the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. The wilderness is often associated with a place where God speaks to his people. It evokes the Exodus, Mount Sinai, and the return of the Jewish people from exile.

#### All mankind shall see the salvation of God

Luke adds this line, which is not part of the original quotation from Isaiah, to stress the universal aspect of God's salvation.