

## **ADVENT IV**

### **The Jesse Tree – week IV**

Through Advent we've been tracing the stories of God's people: Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses. We heard about King David, and the promise that one of David's descendants would sit eternally on David's throne. We heard about Isaiah and the prophets who prophesied both about the destruction wickedness brings, as well as the hope of restoration and blessing for God's people. We heard about Daniel, and his bravery and faith in the face of adverse circumstances. This week, the story draws the strands of hope and prophecy together.

### **Zechariah and Elizabeth**

Zechariah was an elderly priest, who finally after years of waiting got his turn to minister in the sanctuary of the temple. He and his wife had been unable to have children. As he took the censor in his hand, with the incense billowing from it, the angel Gabriel appeared and declared that they would conceive and have a son, who would be "filled with the Holy Spirit". This child would be the Forerunner, the prophet Elijah returned to those who had waited for him through the years. Zechariah couldn't believe this news, and so was struck mute until the time that the child should be born. Sure enough, Elizabeth conceived, and the child was born. Mary, a relative of Elizabeth, came to visit while both women were pregnant, and Elizabeth's child leapt in the womb, a sign of recognition of his cousin, Jesus. When the child was born and the time came to name the child, friends and relatives gathered, and tossed names around. Zechariah wrote emphatically on a tablet, "His name is John", and so began to speak, praising God for God's goodness. Elizabeth, too, joined in praise for what God had done for her.

### **Annunciation (Mary)**

Mary, who was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter in Nazareth, also had a visit from Gabriel with a message: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Mary remains for us an example of great faith.

## **John the Baptist**

As foretold by Gabriel to John's father Zechariah, John became a prophet with a singular message: Repent! He baptised people as a sign of their repentance from their sins, and preached and exhorted people with fiery words to live true to the calling of God, to live generously, sharing resources; to be honest in all dealings and not cheat or defraud anyone. When Jesus appeared and came down to the water to be baptised, John offered the testimony: "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world; I am not worthy to untie his sandals." And when Jesus insisted on being baptised, John told the story of how, when Jesus rose from the deep waters, heaven parted, the dove descended, and the voice from heaven said, "Behold my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." John is significant to us because he points the way to Jesus—which is nothing less than the vocation of all those who claim to follow him, that in all we do and say, our actions and words, our very lives, speak of Christ.