

## Third Sunday of Advent Year A 2025

### Let the wasteland rejoice!

In today's Gospel Jesus says, 'I tell you solemnly, of all those born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen'.

This brings our attention to the woman who gave birth to John the Baptist – Elizabeth the wife of Zechariah. What is significant is that they were a barren couple, unable to have children. And yet, from this place of barrenness, a remarkable fruitfulness emerged. Not only did they have a child, but Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist, the one who would prepare Israel for the coming Messiah.

Elizabeth and Zachariah symbolise barren Israel that has failed to produce the fruits God asked of it. But they are also a sign that God can bring life out of barrenness. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord says, 'I will make rivers well up on barren heights and turn the wilderness into a lake.' (Isaiah 43:19)

Today's first reading takes up this theme, rejoicing in God who can make the barren places fertile: 'Let the wilderness and the dry lands exult, let the wasteland rejoice and bloom. Let it bring forth flowers like the jonquil; let it rejoice and sing for joy.' What a beautiful visual image that is, of the wasteland bursting into flower! We can think of some remote, desert places in Australia that are dry and barren for years, but then, after unexpected rains, burst into a sea of colourful flowers! The seeds of fruitfulness were there all along, just waiting for the rain to give them life.

These words encourage us, as does the fruitfulness of Elizabeth, as we humbly acknowledge the barren parts within ourselves and our communities. In a world characterized by so much conflict and destruction, we pray that our coming celebration of the birth of the Saviour may be a time of renewed fruitfulness – of peace and love, of joy and healing. The seeds are there – they just need a little water from many people, including you and me.

Of course, we usually cannot go from barrenness to fruitfulness in an instant. It is a process, as James points out in today's second reading: think of the farmer, he says, how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground to mature following the autumn and spring rains. We too must be patient and not lose heart as we seek to add our small portion to the fruitfulness of our world.

Let us always have hope in God who can turn 'the dry ground into a spring of water'.

*Fr Michael Goonan SSP*