

**Advent 3 Homily**  
**Given by Deacon Di Blackden**

Luke 3 7-18

Among all the tangled problems with the 'B' word our country is dealing with at the moment....fresh every morning, it seems! I wonder if any of you listen to Radio 4 just before 7am. There's usually a mathematical problem, set by some different, clever person each day; I must admit, half way through the problem I generally lose the 'will to live' but it's a good thing, it wakes you up in the morning!... I have one for you this morning, but don't worry, it's just a story; you don't have to solve anything. **It's called 'The 18<sup>th</sup> Camel'**

An old Arab died and left seventeen camels to his three sons. The terms of his will were explicit. One half of them were to be given to the eldest son, one third to the middle son and one ninth to the youngest son. The sons were greatly perplexed, since seventeen can't be divided by 2, 3 or 9. As they were pondering how they might appropriately divide up their inheritance without spilling either their own blood or that of the camels, a neighbour came to their aid. 'I will lend you my camel' he said.

**There were now eighteen camels.** The eldest son took half (9 camels) the middle son took one third (six camels) and the youngest son took one ninth (two camels)  $9 + 6 + 2 =$  **seventeen camels** and the neighbour took back his eighteenth camel.

OK, what's this got to do with John the Baptist, the Advent Saint? We were hearing about him this morning.

Well. I would suggest that he was an '18<sup>th</sup> Camel'...'.**a non-essential necessity**'...one who had a critical role to play in a drama of which he was not to be a central character.

He could have been, my word, he was a charismatic and popular preacher, crowds of people came out to be baptized by him (and he called them 'a brood of vipers!') Crowds of folk asking him

what they should do (and he ‘hitting the bull’s eye each time, answering their pricked consciences)

‘Share what you have, no cheating in your jobs, don’t be greedy’ ....Of course they started to think he might be the Messiah; there were lots of claimants around at that time. How he could have been caught up in it all! No, luckily his own rigorous self awareness kept him humble. He was just there to proclaim ‘**Christ is near**’ .....’**The 18<sup>th</sup> Camel**’ – a **non-essential necessity**,

All of us are called to be prophets – not so much to **FORETELL** the future as to **FORTHTELL** the things of God. The church always lives in the tradition of John the Baptist, forever pointing to Christ – ‘**Christ is Near**’ We are all ‘**non-essential necessities**’ (Necessary but not ‘centre stage) and .....

When our prayer lives are loyal and faithful....**Christ is near**  
When we are open and welcoming...**Christ is near**. When we listen to others and share their concerns...**Christ is near**. When we worship together with joy and hope...**Christ is near**. When we are a force for good in the world....**Christ is near**. When we are ‘in tune’ with all age groups...**Christ is near**, When we are willing to learn and grow, at whatever age....**Christ is near**.  
When we love and accept one another, without exception...**Christ is near**. When we really believe and trust that the Holy Spirit is at work here and now...**Christ is near**.  
I’m sure you could add more to the list.....

I said I wouldn’t mention the ‘B’ word and I won’t but with so many puzzles for us, so many divisions and serious questions throughout the world it’s worth using a prayer I chanced upon from the Millennium, 18 years ago.....

‘Let there be respect for the earth, peace for its’ people, love in our lives, delight in the good, forgiveness of past wrongs and from now on a new start’

**Let’s pray for us all..... 19 Camels..... ‘Non-essential necessities’ Amen.**