

I love all that historical detail:

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee....., the word of God came to John. It makes it all so real. The Word of God comes to a particular man, John, son of Zechariah, in a particular place, in the Judaeian wilderness, at a particular moment of human history. The Word of God came to this one man and changed history for ever.

It may seem extraordinary, even miraculous. Indeed, extraordinary and miraculous it was, but what it wasn't, was out of the blue. This wasn't just a one-off thunderbolt kind of moment. The Word of God came to John in a context. The Word of God came to John on the context of his reading of the Holy Scripture, his reading of the Hebrew Bible, his reading, in particular, of the prophets.

His preaching of *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins* is inspired very specifically by the *sayings of the prophet Isaiah.... A voice cries in the wilderness: "Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight"*. He would have been familiar with the prophecies of Baruch *the flattening of each high mountain and the filling of the valleys....so that Israel can walk in safety under the glory of God.* Today's psalm with its contrast of weeping and singing I'm sure he would have known by heart.

The Word of God comes to us as well in the same way. *Lectio divina* has become very fashionable in recent years. At its heart, *Lectio divina* is a slow ruminating, a slow pondering over the words of Holy Scripture. Take a short passage. Read it over and over and wait for the Word of God to come to you.

St Anthony of Padua was said to be a great scholar of Holy Scripture but not in some clever clever intellectual sense. St Anthony put himself at the service of Holy Scripture. He entered into it. He became part of it. He allowed it to form him and transform him.

Many representations of St Anthony have him holding in his arms the Christ Child. If we become holy people of the Book, if we immerse ourselves in the Law and the Prophets, Psalms and Gospels, we will show forth the Christ Child.

This is why the Word of God came to John – to get people ready for the Christ Child, the enfleshment of the Word, God's Word of Love in human form.

This is what is extraordinary and miraculous, that God can come alive in us, that we can become bearers of Christ, that in the pondering of Holy Scripture, we can enter Heaven itself.

"Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight and all mankind shall see the salvation of God."