

Which one do you want to go with? Which image speaks to you?

The Lord your God

The King of Israel

Victorious warrior

A lover and a dancer

The Holy One of Israel

The Christ

The Baptiser in Spirit and Fire

The great harvester – *gathering the wheat and burning the chaff in a fire that will never go out.*

All of them images of what we are looking forward to, what we are waiting for, what we are hoping for. Beyond all these images lies mystery and wonder, judgement and mercy.

Whichever image you go for, the message remains the same: *Rejoice in the Lord always, Sing and shout for joy, be happy, always happy in the Lord.* Prime ministers may come and go, the Church may seem to disappoint and let us down, day to day life might seem like a struggle.

But never stop rejoicing, never stop singing, never stop being happy in the Lord. *The Lord is very near.*

Anthony knew disappointment. Anthony knew poor health. Anthony didn't always see eye to eye with his superiors. But he was always full of hope. He was given the most difficult and challenging assignments but he always remained happy and rejoicing. Indeed, this was the very substance of his life as witness. That is why people flocked to him, why people were converted by him. This is why he carries the Christ Child in his arms. This is why we venerate him and ask for his prayers.

Linked to this hope and this joy is that peace which passes all understanding. The precise object of our hope may remain a mystery and difficult to square with the concrete circumstances of our daily lives, but we go on hoping and rejoicing. The future is in God's hands. He is working his purposes out.

And as we hope, and rejoice, we do **even now** begin to enter into the *Peace of God, the Peace that passes all understanding*, the Peace that is at the very heart of our God, Father, Son and Spirit.

Fr Michael

