

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When you're preaching, there are some Sundays when you look at the readings and theme for the week comes to you straightaway. It seems obvious what God might be trying to say to us through the readings appointed for this week. It's clear what the message in the life of our church family and community might be.

And then there are Sundays like this Sunday when you look at the readings and ask yourself, as the one who puts the preaching rota together, why on earth didn't I put someone else down this week.

Our first reading concerns the nature of prophecy, reminding us that true prophecy is that which has its origin from God, that contains the message God is trying to impart to God's people, that holds the people of God to account in the way God is trying to hold God's people to account.

Our second reading, from the book of Revelation, is often understood to point to the Virgin Mary, echoing her role as the one through who God was born into the world. Here the plan of the serpent, an echo of the story of the fall of humankind, is defeated by the action of God.

Rather than the serpent snatching the new born child, God intervenes and brings the child to himself. Just as in these last days of our celebration of Christmas we celebrate that God did not leave us to be snatched away by the wiles and the distractions of the world, but intervened to save us and bring us safely to our true home in the very presence of God.

True prophecy is of God.

God doesn't abandon us, but brings us safely to God's throne.

Finally, our Gospel reading reminds us who Jesus is, very God of very God. Jesus teaches with authority not because of what he says, but because of who he is.

Even the unclean spirits recognise this, 'the holy one of God'. In Jesus we see the source of all prophecy, very God, living as one us. God's ultimate deliverance on God's promise never to abandon us. Jesus. The one in who God is bringing us safely to God's throne. The one who ensures we are never snatched away by the wiles and temptations of the world.

Prophecy is determined by who God is. Jesus saves us because of who he is. God doesn't abandon us because of who God is. God brings us safely to God's throne because of who Jesus is, very God of very God.

Our readings today are about who God is, and about who Jesus is. They are reminded that the centre of the Christian life is not so much a how or a what but a who. When Jesus' fame begins to spread it spreads because of what he's done - an impressive exorcism, but we know the importance of Jesus in our lives is not just what he did but who he is. God of God. Light of Light. True God of God.

If we are saved because of who God is, because of who Jesus is, we are invited this morning to ask ourselves, who are we? In a world and a society that holds up achievement: 'what have you done?' 'how much have you earned?' 'what can you still do?' 'how many mistakes have you made?', we are reminded that what matters is not so much how or what but who. Who are we? Whose are we?

If we are saved because of who God is, because of who Jesus is, we're invited to believe that what matters is 'who' we are,

we're invited to believe, shockingly, that *we* are

a 'who' worth saving,

a 'who' that God created,

a 'who' that God came to save in Jesus,

a 'who' that God is even now calling,

a 'who' that God loves, literally, to death,

a 'who' that God believes capable of loving and being loved just as much,

a 'who' that will soon meet Jesus in the bread and the wine of the altar and be brought into very presence of God's throne.