

Thought for the week  
Feast of the Birth of John the Baptist

*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel!  
He has visited his people and redeemed them.  
He has raised up for us a mighty saviour  
in the house of David his servant,  
as he promised by the lips of holy people,  
those who were his prophets from of old...  
As for you, little child, you will be called  
the prophet of God, the Most High:  
you shall go ahead of the Lord,  
to prepare his ways before him,  
to make known to his people their salvation,  
through forgiveness of all their sins,  
the loving-kindness of the heart of our God,  
who visits us like the dawn from on high.  
He will give light to those in darkness,  
those who dwell in the shadow of death;  
and guide us into the way of peace.*

This beautiful prayer is part of the Benedictus, prayed by the Church at Morning Prayer every day; it is the prophecy and prayer of joy made by Zechariah in response to the question at the end of this Sunday's Gospel: 'What will this child turn out to be?' Many new parents will have pondered this question, but few will have come up with such an answer. Zechariah grasped that his baby son John would be one to speak truth to power even at the risk (and, as it turned out, the cost) of his own life.

Most of us will agree that the prophetic voice has continued to speak divine truth down the centuries through the words and actions of people such as St Francis of Assisi, the Venerable Mary Ward, St Teresa of Kolkata, Jean Vanier, Pope Francis and many, many others – we will all have our own favourite prophets.

Who are 'those who live in darkness, and dwell in the shadow of death' mentioned in this prayer? One such group of people are surely refugees and asylum seekers, for whom Pope Francis is a prophetic advocate. He calls on us not merely to tolerate, but to welcome, protect, promote and integrate refugees in our society. The Pope puts before us a very serious challenge to read the signs of our times. At the end of Refugee Week let us ask ourselves how we can transform our sense of solidarity into meaningful action, giving light to those in darkness.

*You may like to visit Jesuit Refugee Service ([www.jrsuk.net](http://www.jrsuk.net)) and Reading Refugee Support Group ([www.rrsg.org.uk](http://www.rrsg.org.uk))*