

## HOME SERVICE FOR SUNDAY 17<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2023

*Welcome to this act of worship on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent for you to use at home on your own or with others. I would recommend that you say the words of the service aloud, rather than read them silently to yourself – this really does help. Whatever you decide to do, spend this time with God, knowing that other people are sharing this service with you, but in different places.*

*Rev. Alan Boyd*



### WELCOME TO THE 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY IN ADVENT

*As we worship on this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent, our fellow Christians in our various churches will be lighting the 3<sup>rd</sup> candle in their Advent ring. This candle can often have 2 meanings. It usually symbolises JOHN THE BAPTIST, a prophet and a voice in the desert crying out 'Prepare the way'. The candle can also be taken to symbolise JOY and today is often called 'Gaudete Sunday' or 'Rejoice Sunday', taken from the words of Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always."*

### LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE

*Ideally, you will need a candle that you can light, or you could look on the black and white picture of an Advent candle above. As you light your candle or focus on the picture, let's share in the words below that are being used today in the churches in our Nottingham North East Circuit:*

Our Advent candles flicker, casting shadows spreading light, giving witness in the everyday, telling stories old and new. Advent God,

***shine from us today.***

When we've encountered God, we have a truth to tell. When we have seen God's light, we have a light to share. Advent God,

***shine from us today.***

When our lives seem ordinary and full of faltering steps, God's light still shines and bids us go and tell. Advent God,

***shine from us today.***

We share our very ordinary, our sorrows, joys and faith, and trust that those we share with will glimpse the light of God. Advent God,

***shine from us today.***

Advent God, we may feel we are not worthy to share your extraordinary message. We may feel we'll get it wrong; we don't know all the answers. We may feel we do not have the words; not erudite enough. As we light this third candle - shine upon us, light our path that it may speak, and show, and tell what you have done for us. ***Amen.***

### A TIME OF QUIET PREPARATION

Advent time. A voice cries out in the wilderness 'Make straight the way of the lord'. I too prepare for the coming of the Lord, the birth of Jesus, and make straight my life to meet my God.

*(Let's be quiet for a while)*

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ....

**O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free  
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
From depths of hell thy people save,  
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave :  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Immanuel shall come to you,  
O Israel.**

## OUR CALL TO WORSHIP

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Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; (Romans 13:11-12)

## A GREAT ADVENT CAROL OF PRAISE AND HOPE (StF 228 "Hail to the Lord's anointed")

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*This hymn is based on the words of Psalm 72, which is entitled - a prayer for support and guidance – by (or for) King Solomon.*

*Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ....*

- 1 **Hail to the Lord's Anointed,  
Great David's greater Son!  
Hail, in the time appointed,  
His reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression,  
To set the captive free,  
To take away transgression,  
And rule in equity.**
- 2 **He comes, with succour speedy,  
To those who suffer wrong;  
To help the poor and needy,  
And bid the weak be strong;  
To give them songs for sighing,  
Their darkness turn to light,  
Whose souls, condemned and dying,  
Were precious in his sight.**
- 3 **He shall come down like showers  
Upon the fruitful earth;  
Love, joy, and hope, like flowers,  
Spring in his path to birth;  
Before him, on the mountains,  
Shall peace the herald go;  
And righteousness, in fountains,  
From hill to valley flow.**
- 4 **Kings shall fall down before him,  
And gold and incense bring;  
All nations shall adore him,  
His praise all people sing;  
To him shall prayer unceasing  
And daily vows ascend,  
His kingdom still increasing,  
A kingdom without end.**

- 5 **O'er every foe victorious,  
He on his throne shall rest;  
From age to age more glorious,  
All-blessing and all-blest.  
The tide of time shall never  
His covenant remove;  
His name shall stand for ever,  
His changeless name of Love.**

*(James Montgomery)*

## A PRAYER OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION

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God our creator, if we keep on looking, we will see that you do amazing things. If we listen to your Word, we will hear that you do amazing things. If we notice the good in others, we will know that you do amazing things. If we keep in touch with you, we will never forget that you do amazing things.

For creating us in your image and for showing us the right way to live, **O God: we give you our praise.**

For the gift of Jesus your Son, who taught us about the kingdom and how to enter it, **O God: we give you our praise.**

For your Holy Spirit, who enables us to love without reserve, and to serve without expecting any reward, **O God: we give you our praise.**

For inviting us to live in your kingdom, **O God: we give you our praise.**

But Lord, often we behave as if we choose not to live in your kingdom or by its values. We see it in what we say, think, do and in what's left unsaid or undone. We're truly sorry for this and so much more.

*(A TIME OF SILENT CONFESSION)*

Gracious God, forgive us when we will not let go of all that diminishes your love in our lives: greed, intolerance, selfishness. Forgive us and set us free from our self-made prisons so that we rejoice at your saving power and sing out our lives to your glory. We ask this in Jesus' name.

## WORDS OF FORGIVENESS

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God loves and God forgives. Let us go on in peace, safe in that love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## **INTRODUCING OUR OLD TESTAMENT READING**

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*In Advent we prepare, not only for Christmas, but also for the second coming of Jesus. It is a time of hope and longing. In this reading from Isaiah, Jewish prisoners of war, returning from exile in Babylon, hear a promise from the Prophet. God will enable them to establish a just society and rebuild what has been ruined. You might recognise these words from Luke 4 where Jesus reads this scroll in the Synagogue, looking the coming kingdom of God.*

### **OUR OLD TESTAMENT READING:**

#### **ISAIAH 61:1-4, 8-11**

#### **The good news of deliverance**

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<sup>1</sup>The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; <sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion - to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. <sup>4</sup>They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

<sup>8</sup>For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. <sup>9</sup>Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. <sup>10</sup>I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. <sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

## **AN ADVENT CAROL OF A PROPHECY FULFILLED (StF 171 "Hark the glad sound")**

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*Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ....*

- 1. Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,  
the Saviour promised long;  
let every heart prepare a throne,  
and every voice a song.**
- 2. He comes the prisoners to release,  
in Satan's bondage held,  
the gates of brass before him burst,  
the iron fetters yield.**
- 3. He comes the broken heart to bind,  
the bleeding soul to cure,  
and with the treasures of his grace  
to enrich the humble poor.**
- 4. Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,  
your welcome shall proclaim;  
and heaven's eternal arches ring  
with your beloved name.**

*(Philip Doddridge)*

## **INTRODUCING OUR NEW TESTAMENT READING**

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*John's gospel begins with the famous prologue; "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". This is more than the story of a carpenter from Nazareth. And the story goes on with another John - this time John the Baptist. He's portrayed more as a witness than a baptiser, a witness to the light. His gift is using his personal testimony to point people to Jesus and help them to recognise him. In his own way asks the Advent question - who or what are you waiting for?*

### **OUR NEW TESTAMENT READING:**

#### **JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28**

#### **The testimony of John the Baptist**

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<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>19</sup>This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' <sup>20</sup>He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' <sup>21</sup>And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.'

<sup>22</sup>Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' <sup>23</sup>He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said. <sup>24</sup>Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup>They asked him, 'Why then are you baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' <sup>26</sup>John answered them, 'I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup>the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' <sup>28</sup>This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptising.

### A SUNG ADVENT RESPONSE

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Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ....

**The Lord is my light,  
My light and salvation;  
In him I trust,  
In him I trust.**

**The Lord is my light,  
My light and salvation;  
In him I trust,  
In him I trust.**

(Taizé)

### A SHORT THOUGHT FOR ADVENT

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Matthew 11:10: Talking of the prophet John the Baptist, another prophet - Malachi - said: "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

As you'll all know, if you walk up the street where you and I live, the flashing lights on the front of the houses tell you something's afoot! If you talk a dander - or a drive - around, you'll all have seen the same. It began weeks ago, but with 8 days to go to Christmas there are icicle lights on windows, snowflake lights in windows, flashing stars on gable ends, Santas flying up walls, reindeers between bedroom windows, inflatable lit-up snow men in gardens, twinkling lights on trees, flashing lights on everything. Praise the Lord for paracetamol and sunglasses! Maybe your house is one of them. It's great fun.

And if you haven't had enough already, I'm sure that you and I soon will have had enough of the razzmatazz of shopping's version and TV's version of Christmas already. What's going on?

In September a fair few years ago, even I stopped and stared in disbelief. There in someone's front window stood a fully decorated, flashing-lights-and-all Christmas tree. I shook my head, muttered, and walked on. Still 4 months to go. Then I began to think of the reasons for such an early start.

OK, we're used to it in the supermarkets - good-bye barbecues, hello Christmas, and let's have the Easter eggs on standby. But why this, why so early? Why so keen to bring Christmas so far forward (whatever version of Christmas it is that you have)?

When I chatted it over with a friend, he said something very deep - "It's because people are desperate for something to celebrate". Bull's eye, I thought. Many of us are desperate for something to celebrate. Let's face it, 2023 has been quite some year, with not much good news in it. Yep, many of us are desperate for something to celebrate. Now that could be something as limited as an excuse for few more choccies, a new gadget or two, and more bottles than usual of something nice. It could be as simple as a cheery time, the love of having the house decorated, having family and other folk around, and a fondness for the jolly chap with the white beard.

Or perhaps it could be genuine need - even a desperation - to celebrate, because sometimes there seems to be so little worth celebrating in the daily to-and-fro of and ups-and-downs of life. What sort of year have you had?

Or maybe it's because life is marked by a happiness that, when you look at it, rests on the trivial, celebrity, and a sort of happiness that you have to 'buy in'. What's your bank balance or credit card bill at the minute?

And there are plenty more reasons to want to (or need to) celebrate beyond these few. Some reasons are good, some not-so-good.

Matthew 11:10: "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

Now don't get me wrong, you could put my name against most of the short list we've just worked through. But I am wondering - is there something more worthwhile, more substantial, something deeper-reaching, that we should be celebrating Christmas?

In the story set out in the Bible, and especially in Luke's gospel in the New Testament, we quickly reach the part where the Angel Gabriel (a messenger from God) comes to Mary to tell her that she will become pregnant with Jesus.

In Luke chapter 1 and verse 28 the angel says these words "Greetings favoured one, the Lord is with you." Mary, the Lord is with you in this moment as he is for us. In the world as it is today with all its needs and good and bad and goings-on. Mary, the Lord is with you in the pregnancy and birth to come. As he is in life as it is for us, not as it ought to be.

Mary, the Lord is with you in the life to be led and the difference it'll make to all lives. The Lord is with you in all that you and future generations will face. The Lord is with you, and with us – as the people we are, not the people we should be.

Matthew 11:4 – and Jesus answered them: 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.'

The Lord is with you. Whether it's a truth you've discovered in the year that is past, or a hope for the year to come, God really IS with us. Now that IS worth celebrating. So, God Bless you and yours this Christmas and always. AMEN.

#### A PERSONAL PRAYER

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*In silence, take some time to think about what this Advent thought sparks off in you. Is it a need of yours to be met? A burden to be lifted? Someone for you to reach out to? A hope? A cause to be part of? A meeting with God that you've experienced recently? Has it changed things? Is there something that you wish would change or that you need to change? Then pray:*

Loving God, I thank you for your faithfulness,  
In you I put my hope.  
I thank you for your tender care,  
In you I put my hope.  
I thank you for your unfailing love,  
In you I put my hope.  
I thank you for your goodness,  
In you I put my hope.  
Teach me your ways,  
In you I put my hope. Amen.

#### A CAROL LOOKING TO THE COMING CHRIST (StF 178 "Long ago, prophet's knew")

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Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ...

1. Long ago, prophets knew,  
Christ would come, born a Jew,  
come to make all things new;  
bear his people's burden,  
freely love and pardon :

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!  
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!  
When he comes, when he comes,  
Who will make him welcome?*

2. God in time, God in man,  
this is God's timeless plan :  
he will come, as a man,  
born himself of woman,  
God divinely human:

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring ...*

3. Mary, hail! Though afraid,  
she believed, she obeyed.  
in her womb, God is laid;  
till the time expected,  
nurtured and protected :

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring ...*

4. Journey ends! Where afar,  
Bethlehem shines, like a star,  
stable door stands ajar.  
Unborn son of Mary,  
Saviour do not tarry!

*Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!  
Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!  
Jesus comes! Jesus comes!  
We will make him welcome!*

*(F. Pratt Green)*

#### PRAYERS FOR THE WORLD

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*Now we pray together for our world, each other, and ourselves. Between each prompting to pray, we'll speak and sing words from the Taizé chant that we sang earlier "The Lord is my light".*

Christ, born in a stable, give courage to all who are homeless: *(Pause to recall people, places and situations that are on your mind).*

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation;  
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

Christ, for whom the angels sang, give the song of the kingdom to all who weep: *(Pause to recall people, places and situations that are on your mind).*

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation;  
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

Christ, worshipped by the shepherds, give peace on earth to all who are oppressed: *(Pause to recall people, places and situations that are on your mind).*

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation;  
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

Christ, before whom the wise men knelt, give humility and wisdom to all who govern: *(Pause to recall people, places and situations that are on your mind).*

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation;  
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

Christ, whose radiance filled a lowly manger, give the glory of your resurrection to all who rest in you: *(Pause to recall people, places and situations that are on your mind).*

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation;  
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

Christ, hear our prayers for those known to us and for our own needs: *(Pause to recall people and situations that are on your mind and to bring your own needs to God).*

**The Lord is my light, my light and salvation;  
In him I trust, in him I trust.**

And we bring our prayers together saying: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name ...**

#### **PARTING WORDS AS ADVENT-TIME CONTINUES**

The journey continues; the third candle has been lit. Let light and hope go with you; be light and hope for a waiting world, for the Word of God became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

#### **OUR FINAL CAROL - THE HOPE ADVENT GIVES (StF 207 "Jesus is the heart of Christmas")**

*The version below includes an extra verse that isn't in the version in 'Singing the Faith' and takes us beyond Advent and Christmas. The hymn can be sung to the tune "Christ is made the sure foundation".*

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words ...

**1 Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
give the Lord his rightful place!  
Garlands, gleam with his charisma,  
tinsel, glisten with his grace!  
Jesus is the heart of Christmas  
welcome him with love and praise!**

**2 Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
light your candles from his flame!  
Hang your holly in his honour,  
trim each fir tree in his name!  
Jesus is the heart of Christmas  
celebrate the day he came!**

**3 Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
share him in each card you send.  
Give each gift in love and friendship,  
share his gifts which have no end.  
Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
Lord and Saviour, Guide and Friend.**

**4 Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
find his peace on busy days.  
May the messages of Advent  
guide us through the Christmas maze.  
Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
sing each carol in his praise!**

**5 Jesus is the heart of Christmas,  
New Year, Easter, Whitsun, too.  
He's the God for every season,  
ever loving, ever true.  
Jesus is the heart of Christmas  
Lord of Lords the whole year through!**

*(Marguerite Kendrick)*

#### **A BLESSING**

At this Advent time, may Christ's peace surround you. May Christ's light shine upon you. At this Advent time, may Christ's hope fill you, and may Christ's blessing always go with you. Amen.

*Some words and prayers are taken from, based on, or inspired by, those in 'Companion to the Lectionary', 'Companion to the Revised Common Lectionary', 'Out of the Ordinary – Worship Resource', 'Roots', Royal School of Church Music Christmas Resources. Hymns used by permission under CCL.*