

Written Service Sunday December 10th

A service of worship for use at home

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Second Sunday in Advent

Theme: John the Baptist – Be Prepared

I suggest that you have four candles – one for each week of Advent. Light one for each week of Advent. This is week two – so light two candles.

Call to Worship:

A day is coming when people will sing;
“I praise you Lord! You were angry with me,
But now you comfort me and are angry with me no longer.
God is my saviour; I will trust Him and not be afraid.”

Hymn: StF 171 Hark the glad sound

Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes, the Saviour promised long:
Let every heart prepare a throne, and every voice a song.

He comes, the prisoners to release, in Satan’s bondage held;
The gates of brass before Him burst, the iron fetters yield.

He comes, the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure,
And with the treasures of His grace, to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace, your welcome shall proclaim,
And heaven’s eternal arches ring with the beloved’s name.

Prayer of adoration and Praise:

We await your coming Lord Jesus.
You came quietly as a babe in Bethlehem.
You will come again in clouds of Glory.

Come Lord Jesus, come.

Lord our God, keep your servants alert and watchful, as we await the return of Christ, your Son, so that when He comes and knocks at the door, He may find us vigilant in Prayer.

Come Lord Jesus, come.

You are God and we praise you: You are lord and we acclaim you.

You are eternal Father and all creation worships you.

To you all angels, all the powers of heaven, cherubim and seraphim sing in endless praise,

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might:

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

To you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever **Amen**

Prayers of Confession:

Lord, we heard that you were hungry: But we did not give you food:

Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, we heard that you were thirsty: And we kept our drink for ourselves:

Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, we saw you as a stranger: And we closed the doors of our hearts:

Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, we saw you go naked: And we fussed about our own clothes:

Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, we discovered that you were sick: and we avoided contact with you:

Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, we heard that you were in prison: And we pretended that we did not know you:

Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, you came to us again and again: But we ignored you:

Forgive us Lord, forgive.

“I am making all things new” says the Lord. This is Christ’s gracious word to us: “Your sins are forgiven”.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Reading: Isaiah 40: 1-5 and 9-11

“Comfort my people” says our God. “Comfort them!

Encourage the people of Jerusalem.

Tell them they have suffered long enough and their sins are now forgiven.

I have punished in full for all their sins.”

A voice cries out, “Prepare in the wilderness a road for the Lord!

Clear the way in the desert for our God!

Fill every valley; level every mountain.

The hills will become a plain,

And the rough country will be made smooth.

Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,

And the whole human race will see it.

The Lord Himself has promised this.”

Jerusalem, go up on a high mountain and proclaim the good news!

Call out with a loud voice, Zion; announce the good news!

Speak out and do not be afraid.

Tell the towns of Judah that their God is coming!

The Sovereign Lord is coming to rule in power,

And bringing with Him the people that He has rescued.

He will take care of His flock like a shepherd;

He will gather the lambs together and carry them in His arms;

He will gently lead their mothers.

Reading: Mark 1:1-8

This is the Good News about Jesus Christ the Son of God. It began as the prophet Isaiah had written:

“God said, ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you

To clear a way for you.’

Someone is shouting in the desert,

‘Get the road ready for the Lord;

Make a straight path for Him to travel!’”

So, John appeared in the desert, baptising and preaching. “Turn away from your sins and be baptised,” he told them, “and God will forgive your sins.” Many people from the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins and he baptised them in the River Jordan.

John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist and his food was locusts and wild honey. He announced to the people, “The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. I will baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”

Sermon:

I wonder what preparations you are making for Christmas. If you are anything like me then, part of the preparation is writing cards and, very importantly, is the letters that I write to go in them. And the older I get, the more letters I need to send!

God made **His** preparations for Christmas. Part of His preparation for the coming of Jesus was the work and message of John the Baptist. Now John was a bit of a wild man – not the kind of man we would expect God to use – but his preaching prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. Again I ask, what preparations are you making for the coming of Jesus into the world? And what exactly are you preparing for?

In the shops, preparations began in September! Just after the “Back to School” notices come down – or even in the January sales. Last year, in the sales I found a notice which said, ‘shop early for Christmas – buy now and save a packet!’

At this time of year we definitely know that we are part of a consumer society. Consumerism and greed have taken over from faith and religion. The television adverts tempt us with messages like ‘what do you really want?’ You should have it; you deserve it!

Some time ago I happened to record a late night programme. When I watched it, I was staggered to learn that it’s no holds barred for adverts late at night. According to one advert, the best way to prepare for Christmas is by buying a sex toy for you partner “for the best Christmas ever!” And, did you know that all the bingo and poker computer sites are open for 24 hours on Christmas Day? You have probably seen the adverts for ‘Park Catalogues’ telling us to save up now for the best ever Christmas **next** year! Shopping Malls and computer or television have become the churches and cathedrals for our culture and society.

Please don’t misunderstand me; I am not a killjoy; having a party, giving gifts to those we love, having fun and celebrating with a feast – absolutely! But, the way we celebrate depends on what we are preparing for. Is it simply a family get together? Is it so that the children can have a good time? After all “Christmas is for the children” – is it really?

Or, are we getting ready to celebrate the coming of the Son of God into the world? If it is, then there are other things to be done as well as the writing of the cards and the endless buying of presents and food.

God’s preparation for the ministry of Jesus was summed up in the preaching of John the Baptist. So, what did he say? ‘Repent – turn away from selfishness and greed of this generation.’ This is an uncomfortable message at this time of year but we can’t get away from the fact that this is the preparation we are expected to make. John says in Matthew’s Gospel, that we should prove our repentance by the fruit we bear – show it by the life we lead. Look around at those in our society who have no way of celebrating – the homeless, the hungry, the refugee, the poor – if we want to be prepared for His coming we need to do something for them.

And, how do we prepare ourselves? Having fun can be exhausting! I suggest that we take a little extra time to pray or read something to help us to develop spiritually like an Advent book, or is Jesus being squeezed out by Father Christmas?

We are told in John’s Gospel that John the Baptist was ‘The voice of one, crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord. Clear a straight path for Him.”’

For centuries, God has been preparing the way for the coming into the world of Emmanuel – God with us. Read again Isaiah 40 also Isaiah chapter 11. In the preaching of the prophets, particularly Isaiah we have hints of the coming of God's Son, coming into a dark and wicked world. In chapter 11 of Isaiah we hear just the kind of Saviour He would be – ruling the whole world with Justice and Peace, feeding the poor and hungry, wiping away all tears and pain. There would be no more violence and war.

In the whole of the Roman world there was a sense of expectation, not just among the Jews but all over the known world people were expecting God to act. Into this world came the preaching of John the Baptist, who seemed to speak into people's deepest needs.

Do we still need the Son of God in these days?

This is a most frightening world. There is more fear now that at any time since the 1930s. There is a rise of right wing extremist and belligerent nationalists in America and Europe where anyone who is different is treated without compassion. On the other hand we have tension between Palestinian's and Israeli's and a rise of Islamist extremists. We have thousands of refugees on our roads and seas, desperate to escape the violence they have experienced. Everywhere there is a surge of violence and war – Sudan, Ukraine, China and Afghanistan – and so the list grows. The world has become a frightening and unstable place.

But we have a message of love, peace, compassion and justice coming into a dark and violent world: as followers of Jesus, let us be sure that this Christmas we make that message known; a message of love and hope; not only in words but with peace and joy in our hearts, in actions as well as words.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!

Hymn: StF181 Of the Father's love begotten
Of the Father's love begotten, ere the world began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega, He the source, the ending He,
Of the that are, that have been, and the future years shall see,
Eve more and evermore.

By His word was all created; He commanded, it was done;
Earth and sky and boundless ocean, universe of three in one;
All that sees the moon's soft radiance, all that breathes beneath the sun,
Evermore and evermore.

This is He whom seers old time chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets promised in their faithful word;
Now He shines, the long expected; let creation praise the Lord,
Evermore and evermore.

O you heights of heaven adore Him; angel host His praises sing;
All dominions, bow before Him, and extol our God and King;
Let no tongue on earth be silent, every voice in concert sing,
Evermore and evermore.

Prayers of Intercession:

In joyful expectation of His coming to reign, we pray to you Lord, saying,

Come Lord Jesus, come.

Come to the world as King of the nations.

We pray for all those countries where there is violence and war, especially Israel/Palestine, Ukraine, Russia, Sudan, Yemen and Afghanistan

Before you rulers will stand in silence.

Come Lord Jesus, come.

Come to your Church as Lord and Judge

We pray for Christians throughout the world, especially those who are persecuted. We also pray for the churches in this country. May we have compassion when confronted with those who are different.

We pray for food banks, and all who work to alleviate the poor, homeless, people with mental health problems and refugees

Help us to live in the light of your coming

Come Lord Jesus, come.

Come to your people and barer of pain

We pray for all who are known to us who are in pain, fear, loneliness and grief

Enfold all in your love and mercy, wipe away tears of failure, fear and distress, and set us free.

Come Lord Jesus, come.

Come to us from heaven with great power and glory.

Lift us to meet you, where with all your saints and angels,

We will live forever.

Come Lord Jesus, come. Amen

The Lord's Prayer (which ever version you are familiar with)

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn: StF 228 - verses 1, 2 and 5

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 captives free,

To take away transgression and rule in equity.

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 are precious in His sight.

O'er every foe victorious, He on His throne shall rest;

From age to age more glorious, all-blessing and all-blessed.

The time shall never His covenant remove;

His name shall stand forever, His changeless name of Love.

Final Prayer:

Lord and Father, your people still need to hear your word
Among the clamour and noise, the greed and selfishness of our generation.
Speak to us through the prophets and help us to recognise your authentic word. **Amen**