

Sunday December 4th 2022

A service of worship for use at home

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Charity number 1134226

2nd Sunday in Advent

Theme: Promise of the Messiah in the Old and New Testament (**I suggest you have a candle to light**)

Prayer for Advent and Light a Candle

When God's people had sinned, when they misused the poor, and had forgotten their promises; prophets spoke God's word of condemnation.

When God's people were led astray, when they worshipped foreign gods made by their own hands; prophets spoke God's word, warning of invasion and destruction.

When God's people turned their backs on the Lord they had promised to follow, when they forgot their covenant; prophets spoke God's word, warning of exile and slavery.

When exile came and God's people were led away in chains; prophets spoke God's words of longing for His people to return to Him.

When God's people repented and remembered their covenant; prophets spoke God's word promising a return to Jerusalem where He would be worshipped in a new Temple.

When the God's people cared more for religion and ceremony than caring for the poor and weak; prophets spoke God's word, promising a Messiah, a Redeemer who would suffer for His people and bring salvation to the whole world.

I suggest that you light a candle to recall God's promise to His people

We light a candle to remember God's prophets who have spoken God's word to every generation.

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

We await your coming Lord Jesus.

You came quietly as a babe in Bethlehem.

You will come in clouds of glory.

Come Lord Jesus come!

Come Lord Jesus come

Hymn: Long ago prophets knew

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?

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:

Chorus

Mary hail! Though afraid, she believed, she obeyed.

In her womb, God was laid; 'til the time expected,

Nurtured and protected:

Chorus

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

Prayers: Adoration and Confession and Lord's Prayer

We await your coming Lord Jesus.
You came quietly as a babe in Bethlehem.
You will come in clouds of glory.
Come Lord Jesus come! Come Lord Jesus come!

You Christ are the King of glory: The eternal son of the Father.
When you became man to set us free, You did not abhor the virgin's womb.

You overcame the sting of death and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.
You are seated at Gods right hand in glory,
We believe that you will come and be our judge.

Come then Lord and help your people, bought with the price of your own blood,
And bring us with your saints to glory everlasting....AMEN.

A Prayer 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 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.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (whichever version you are comfortable with)

Before the Reading:

The prophet Isaiah preached at a time of terrible uncertainty where the world that they knew was changing. Life was insecure and frightening. At times when life is insecure and people are filled with fear, not unlike our present world, a great yearning and longing is awakened in people's hearts. It is into this situation that Isaiah spoke his words of hope.

Reading: Isaiah 11: 1-9 (Good News Bible)

- 1 The royal line of David is like a tree that has been cut down; but, just as new branches sprout from a stump, so a new king will arise from among David's descendants.
- 2 The Spirit of the Lord will give him wisdom, and the knowledge and skill to rule his people. He will know the Lord's will and honour Him.
- 3 He will find pleasure in obeying Him. He will not judge by appearance or hearsay;
- 4 He will judge the poor fairly and defend the rights of the helpless. At his command the people will be punished and evil people will die.
- 5 He will rule his people with justice and integrity.
- 6 Wolves and sheep will live together in peace, and leopards will lie down with young goats. Calves and lion cubs will feed together and little children will take care of them.
- 7 Cows and bears will eat together and their calves and cubs will lie down in peace. Lions will eat straw and cattle do.
- 8 Even a baby will not be harmed if it plays near a poisonous snake.
- 9 On Zion, God's sacred hill there will be nothing harmful or evil. The land will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the seas are full of water.

Sermon Part one: In the years following Isaiah the people of Judah lived through tumultuous times. Defeated and taken to Babylon – captives for some 60 years – then they returned to Jerusalem under the Persians and rebuilt the Temple and the city. And all the time the prophets spoke of a time of peace and hope. Then suddenly about four hundred years before the birth of Jesus.....nothing! There was no more prophesying. It was as though God had gone silent. Then, quite suddenly there was a sense of anticipation....something was going to happen.....all over the Roman Empire writers were pointing to Judah and Jerusalem as a place where a saviour of the world would be born. And into this a new prophet appeared – dressing and sounding like the prophets of old, saying 'Get ready, now is the time'.

Reading John 1: 19-28 (Good News Bible)

- 19 The Jewish authorities in Jerusalem sent some priests and Levites to John (the Baptist) to ask him "Who are you?"
- 20 John did not refuse to answer, but spoke out openly and clearly, saying: "I am not the Messiah."
- 21 "Who are you then?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"
"No I am not" John replied.
- "Are you the Prophet?" They asked.
"No" he replied.
- 22 "Then tell us who you are," they said. "We have to take an answer back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"
- 23 John answered by quoting the prophet Isaiah
"I am 'the voice of someone shouting in the desert:
Make a straight path for the Lord to travel!"
- 24 The messengers, who had been sent by the Pharisees, 25 then asked John "If you are not the Messiah nor Elijah nor the Prophet, why do you baptise?"
- 26 John answered "I baptise with water, but among you stands the one you do not know. 27 He is coming after me but I am not good enough even to untie his sandals."
- 28 All this happened in Bethany on the east side of the River Jordan, where John was baptising.

I'm sure you have been in a car when you suddenly hear the wail of a siren and you desperately try to find out where it is coming from. Then all the cars move over to make a way through for the police, fire or ambulance. I always think of John the Baptist like a siren announcing the coming of Jesus, so the way is prepared. People were prepared.

The work of the prophet is never to preach him/or herself but always to point forward to someone else. All the prophets spoke the word of God, not their own words. Both Isaiah and John pointed to the Messiah. Their work was to prepare people for the coming of Jesus, the saviour. In some ways, we as preachers take on the role of prophet – we must always point to Jesus – never to ourselves – If the preacher is more important than the message something is wrong. There are many American evangelists who bask in the glory of adoring fans. This is not what they are there to do.

Story of Dr Sangster: When Dr Sangster left the pulpit on one occasion an enthusiastic fan praised him for a wonderful sermon. Dr Sangster replied 'Satan told me **that** as I was leaving the pulpit – and we know that he is the chief of liars. He knew the danger of pushing himself forward. If it is true for preachers, it is certainly true for Christians generally – we are there to represent our Lord not to push ourselves forward. Our role is to do the work He has called us to – whether it is to be the preacher or the minister who stands up in front of people, or to take the supporting role.

Story: I'm sure you have all seen 'The Praying Hands' but I wonder if you know the story behind them? Albrecht Durer was a gifted artist, as was his brother Hans but Albrecht was the better artist. Both could not afford to go to art school. Hans agreed that he would support his brother and when his course was finished they would swap places. However, during the time that Albrecht was in college Hans ruined his hands working to keep his brother at college but never mentioned it to his brother who didn't realise what had happened until he returned home. Hans was prepared to take on the supporting role so that his brother could shine.

As Christians, **we** take on the 'supporting role' so that God is glorified.

Hymn: 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 yeald.

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 your beloved name.

Sermon Part two: In the passage we read from Isaiah, I am sure you would have seen that he was painting a picture of Jesus, but the prophesy of Isaiah has not been completed – reread vss 6-9. It is obvious that this has not yet been fulfilled! This is yet to come. Advent is a time of Hope; a time of looking forward to all that God has promised when His Kingdom is complete. This is so important for us to grasp – on both a global and personal level – the best is yet to come! We live in insecure and fearful times, not unlike the time of Isaiah. We too long for peace, for security and freedom from fear just as those Israelites did so many years ago; and the message for us is as it was then. This is not the end. Evil has not got the final say in our world. God has plans for this world yet to be fulfilled. The peace promised then is still promised to us. And, how can we be sure? After all, it hasn't happened yet, and the world has been waiting such a long, long time. We have the 'down payment'. The Messiah has come. God, in Jesus has founded His Kingdom and we are a part of it. Isn't that something to be grateful for? Shouldn't this give us a spring in our step?

But we so often forget and we join in with all the wingers and whittlers. I know that I do! The whole world seems to be in a mess, with climate change, and so much violence in the world, not to mention the cost of living which has sky rocketed. As we begin to prepare for the Christmas celebration and think of the promise of the future – I challenge you not to join in with the 'Bah, Humbug!' Attitude of the world, but to look forward to all that God has promised in the future and in the meantime we have Jesus – the one who never leaves us – who offers us a relationship. As we celebrate His coming at Christmas, we look forward to His coming again

Prayers: Intercessions

Father God, you cared for the world and its people so much that you came as one of us; to bring light into our dark world.

We bring to you the weak and marginalized and all who need your loving care.

We pray for those caught up in wars and violence around the world;

Soldiers, refugees and those who hold fast to the reasons for the fighting.....

(Silence)

Grant them your peace, Lord.....

We pray for all homeless people – those in refugee camps and the homeless in our city - excluded from so much in life that we take for granted, cold, hungry, struggling to keep a hold of who they are ... We pray for all those who are unable to cope during this cost-of-living crisis

(Silence)

Grant them your peace, Lord.....

We pray for those we know who are ill, grieving or suffering from mental health problems

Coping with pain and suffering, fearing the worst.....

And for those in the NHS who worry for the future.....

(Silence)

Grant them your peace, Lord.....

We pray for those who are struggling in relationships, especially at this ‘family time,’ when the cracks in relationships are difficult to ignore

(Silence)

Grant them your peace, Lord.....

And for the deepest hopes of our hearts, we pray now...

Grant us your peace, Lord.....

Hymn: O come O come Immanuel

O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
until the son of God appear:
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel*

O come, O come, Thou Lord of might
who to your tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe:
Chorus

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse,
free your own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell your people save,

and give them victory o'er the grave:
Chorus

O come, Thou Key of David come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery:
Chorus

O come, Thou Day-spring, come
and cheer our spirits by thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight:
Chorus

Final Prayer

Into the mess of this world a fragile child has come - yelling in the night for his mother,
Like other babies, needing milk and clean linen and security.

We pin our hopes on you, fragile child, our God - pushed out into the world, through pain
and into poverty.

Our God is with us and hope is reborn.