

Sunday November 27th 2022 – Advent Sunday

A service of worship for use at home

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Welcome

Here we are on Advent Sunday when we begin to think about preparations for Christmas. Some people may already have everything done; others may not have even thought about Christmas.

So as we enter into this season of advent we are going to be thinking about preparation and being prepared. Not necessarily about having everything prepared, but about preparing ourselves to make that journey once again to Bethlehem and to the manger. We are also going to be thinking about what we are preparing for, and I don't mean for Christmas Day but preparing ourselves for what is beyond, for what is for life and not just for Christmas.

So we begin by preparing ourselves for worship - Lets just be still for a moment....

Call to worship

Come, let us prepare to meet with our God.

Let us prepare ourselves to help bring in God's Kingdom.

Let us prepare to worship.

Roots 2022

We begin our worship with a favourite advent hymn

Hymn – StF 181 Of the Father's love begotten

Of the Father's love begotten
ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega,
he the source, the ending he,
of the things that are, that have been,
and that future years shall see
evermore and evermore.

This is he whom seers in 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 its Lord
evermore 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 moons soft radiance,
all that breathes beneath the sun,
evermore and evermore.

O you heights of heav'n adore him,
angel hosts his praises sing,
all dominions bow before him
and extol our God and King.
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
ev'ry voice in concert sing
evermore and evermore.

Prayers of Adoration and Thanksgiving

We praise you, living God, for these days of Advent,
for the opportunity they offer to reflect on Scripture,
and to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming
of your Son.

As we set out on our journey,
may we find a stillness that is your presence with us,
leading us on to Bethlehem
where our spirits can soar

towards the light of your eternal love,
revealed in the Christ Child.

We praise you, living God, for the words of Scripture
that breathe life into our prayers,
urgency into our complacency,
energy to our discipleship,
depth to our faith,
and warn, challenge and equip us
to prepare for Christmas more deeply,
more fully, more honestly and more purposefully.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.

Roots 2022

Reading Isaiah 2 v 1 – 5 (New International Version)

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

2 In the last days
the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

3 Many peoples will come and say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.'
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war any more.

5 Come, descendants of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the Lord.

The Word

When I read the set readings for today this one from Isaiah just spoke to me. It is of one of the familiar advent readings.
So let's have a look.

It starts off by saying – **“Isaiah son of Amos saw.”**

Isaiah was a prophet. So before we go any further, let's just remind ourselves of what a prophet was because it's one of those words which we use regularly without necessarily thinking about what it means.

According to the Collins Dictionary

A prophet is a person who is believed to be chosen by God to say the things that God wants to tell people.

Now I suppose that could be a good thing or a bad thing. Good if you are bringing good news and you would then be the best thing since sliced bread; not so good if what God wanted to tell the people wasn't what they wanted to hear. You wouldn't be so popular then.

So Isaiah was a prophet. He was called to be a prophet in 740 BC and lived through the reigns of several kings. It is thought that this passage was written around 700BC.

At the time of these words the people of Judah were living in situations of insecurity. Over a long period they had been living under the very real threat of invasion. They feared they were losing control over more and more of their land. It is in the midst of all this fear and anxiety that Isaiah brings a vision of hope, of total and utter peace. On this occasion the prophet would be in the good books for once.

So what was it that Isaiah saw?

His vision begins **“In the last days...”**

This thing which Isaiah is telling the people is something which has yet to come. It's not today, or yesterday. It's something in the future and in the last **days**, not **the last day**, so there is a sense this will be a period of living and not the end.

What is going to happen in the last days?

...the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains;

The temple was built on a mountain – Mount Moriah. As a result the temple stood high above Jerusalem, visible to everyone. So this mountain where the temple is, will become the highest mountain.

But is this in fact talking about a grand building high on a mountain. I was thinking back to a holiday in Italy a few years ago when we visited the Abbey of Monte Cassino. From all around the area, the vast abbey building could be seen high on a hill, looking down but also drawing you in. The coach wound its way up the narrow mountain road until we reached the top and we entered the sacred space. The experience of that visit wasn't about the buildings alone, magnificent and beautiful as they were. It was about the stories of the people who had lived there over the years, about its history in World War II, but most importantly about the presence of God, present through the centuries and still present today.

So in my mind Isaiah's vision isn't really about a building on the highest mountain. I think it's more about what is going inside, where it takes you. It's about where God is, God being above everything else, where his Kingdom is, about where he wants us to be, drawing us in if you like.

The vision takes this a step further...

“... it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it...”

God and His kingdom will be exalted, not just on the highest hill, but above it, and **all nations** will stream to it. Not just the nation of Judah, but all nations. I just have this wonderful picture of a long line of people making their way along a narrow path, zigzagging up a hillside to the temple, God's Kingdom on top. The Christmas campaign of the Methodist Church this year is entitled “There is room.” There is room for all differences, there is room for all ages and genders, there is room for all of nature, there is room for those in poverty and for the refugee, there is room for me and you, there is room for all nations.

But of course, it's not that simple is it? Even though Isaiah's vision was shared over 2500 years ago, we haven't really seen that long line of people streaming up the hillside. It sometimes seems as if we see a handful of bedraggled walkers trudging up the hill. Sometimes it seems as if we are the only ones on the path. If the temple, the Kingdom, is going to be on the highest

hill, why do people still miss it. Partly I suggest because they aren't looking, and partly because in some ways the world today is no different to the world in Isaiah's days. The exact circumstances may not be the same, but the world seems to be in a place of turmoil. I don't know about you, but I sometimes just can't watch the news. Poverty, climate change, famine, migration, poor scruples, crime, injustice – the world is a dark place.

And so the question could be asked – what has happened to Isaiah's vision in 2022. Far from standing proudly on the top of the highest mountain, God's kingdom sometimes seems to be in the deepest valley. Where is Isaiah's vision of hope and peace today? It's still there of course, just maybe not quite so visible, or maybe it's us that's not seeing it or recognising it.

Going back to that passage from Isaiah, the next verse says this

**“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.**

Today, advent Sunday is a great day for us set out on that journey, to seek out that hope once again.

Advent is a time of preparation isn't it? Cards, presents, hospitality, shopping etc. But do we prepare ourselves for that journey towards the stable and the beginning of God's Kingdom here on earth.

I think the first way we can prepare ourselves is to give ourselves time. Not just time to do all those things which are necessary, or which we think are necessary, but to give ourselves time slow down and breathe. Look at these words which Paul wrote in Romans Chapter 13 v 11 – 14, taken from the Message because it just says it as it is!

“But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God.”

So how might we prepare ourselves so that we don't get absorbed in the day-to-day preparations. Here are some ideas.

The first thing we could do is give ourselves time to pray. Each Friday at work I write my to do list for the following week. Some items have been on for months, never quite getting to the top. Others are on the list highlighted and underlined because they are the things which are most pressing. But do you what is never on the list – prayer. Maybe if that was top of the list, some of those tasks which feel neglected might actually get done because I have handed over the tasks in hand to God.

You could also use the advent reflections book prepared by the staff, and I would highly recommend this. It's called “Putting Christ Back into Christmas” and consists of short reflections using everyday things to do with Christmas. What might God be saying through a Christmas cracker or a chocolate orange? And there is the added challenge of trying to work out who wrote which reflection. I'm giving no clues away!!!

We could think about how we might achieve some balance in Christmas preparations, because there are things which are really special. I don't give our children advent calendars but instead make each of them an advent bag with some bits and pieces in – this year a decoration, a personalized glass, a Christmas cactus, a chocolate “pig in blanket.” Some people may think – why? Why not just buy an advent calendar. But it is a task which gives me such joy, in the making and the giving, and that makes it part of the balance of Christmas. Likewise with making the family Christmas Cake which is shared out as people leave on Christmas Day.

Paul wrote that we shouldn't doze off and become oblivious to God. We need to listen and look to see, not just what the baby in the manger may be saying to us, but what the man that baby became is saying to us.

Paul tells us to **“Be up and awake to what God is doing!” ... We can't afford to waste a minute, we must ... Get out of bed and get dressed! Not loiter or linger, we must dress ourselves in Christ, and be up and about!**

In the world of 2022, which still has its problems over 2000 years since Isaiah's vision of the temple on the highest hill, we have to prepare ourselves for our part in bringing the kingdom of God.

If we take ourselves back to Isaiah's vision, we are told that God will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his path. I just think that's a great picture. We set out on this journey towards the mountain of the Lord, so that God can teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his path to bring about his Kingdom.

And what does this Kingdom look like? And this is where the hope of Isaiah's vision is still there. A kingdom where disputes will be settled; where weapons of war will be turned into tools for caring and farming; where nations will not take up swords against nations and where people will not train for war any more. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Are we prepared for that? Most importantly are we prepared to play our part in establishing the mountain of the Lord? Where can we challenge injustice, bring relief to the suffering. Can we do more to recycle and reuse? Can we find ways to settle disputes or find ways to make room for all, not just at Christmas but beyond.

So as advent begins and Christmas preparations begin, are we prepared to go up the mountain of the Lord, to learn his ways, to walk in his path and to play our part in making Isaiah's vision a reality, not just at Christmas but in the rest of our lives.

Amen

Prayer of confession

So as we think about preparing once again for the coming of Jesus, we acknowledge that sometimes we get our priorities wrong and so let us confess our shortcomings to God, with an assurance of forgiveness, ready to look towards the Christ child once again.

Advent God, forgive us, we pray,
when our preparations for the coming of your Son
are superficial and we don't invest our whole selves into them
prayerfully, practically or purposefully.

May we not be left with regrets and 'if onlys',
but adapt to the challenges of our lives and our world
with the grace and agility of your Holy Spirit –
in whose power we pray.

Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

God of all creation,
though the nights are long, the sun still rises;
though the mornings are dark, the birds still sing;
though the world isn't ready, your Son still comes;
though we don't listen or prepare or deserve,
you still love and forgive and renew us –
in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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Prayers for others

Isaiah 2 v 2 - 4 are known as the Poem of Universal peace. In 1959 a sculpture entitled 'Let Us Beat Swords Into Ploughshares' was presented to the United Nations by Russia. It stands outside the United Nations Headquarters in New York. So in our time of prayers for others we will be thinking about peace.

I invite you to quietly reflect on the words of 'Make me a channel of your peace' for your prayers for others.

StF 707 Make me a channel of your peace

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there is hatred let me bring your love
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord
And where there is doubt true faith in You

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life let me bring
hope
Where there is darkness only light
And where there's sadness ever joy

Make me a channel of your peace
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
It is in giving to all men that we receive
And in dying that we are born to eternal life

Oh, Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul

Amen

Hymn – StF 185 Sing we the King

We finish our service with another wonderful advent hymns which reflects on that vision of Isaiah, of a time when all shall be well in His kingdom of peace and when Jesus will be King.

Sing we the King who is coming to reign,
Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain;
Righteousness, peace then His empire shall
bring,
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King.

*Come let us sing: Praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
This is our song, who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

All shall be well in His kingdom of peace,
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom
increase,
Justice His triumph we and truth from his
sceptre shall spring,
Sword shall be sickle when Jesus is King.
Come let us sing ...

Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin
Doubt shall not darken his witness within
Hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;
Love is victorious when Jesus is King:
Come let us sing...

Kingdom of Christ, for thy coming we pray,
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
When this new song Thy creation shall sing,
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King.
Come let us sing ...

Blessing

Lord, we commend all our to-do lists to you
We commend all our lives to you
May we include you in all our preparations this advent.
So that we are ready to see your Kingdom come.
Amen

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