

Worship for 2nd Sunday of Advent (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to all of you joining us for our service on the second Sunday in Advent.

As we start a new Plan we have a slightly different format, with fewer contributors. I am Anne Oliver, your worship leader for today; our Bible readings will be provided by the Rev. Audrey Simpson and Tim Pearson, and the Rev. David Greenwood will be sharing his reflections on God's Word. We hope that you will feel that God has spoken to you through this worship, and I thank those whose technical expertise has made it possible.

If we were worshipping in a church building we would be lighting an Advent candle to remember the prophets who prepared the way for the Messiah's coming; let's come together in fellowship as I light this candle here today.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

People went to deserted places to hear what was most important.

Gathered here today, we light a candle as a symbol of our pilgrimage towards the things that will last for ever:

righteousness, loving-kindness, peace and an eternal home in you, O God,
who calls all things towards the fullness of life.
Amen.

Hymn: StF 166 – Christmas is Coming

'Christmas is coming!'
The Church is glad to sing,
and let the advent candles
brightly burn in a ring.

- 1. The first is for God's promise
to put the wrong things right,**

and bring to earth's darkness
the hope of love and light

'Christmas is coming!'
The Church is glad to sing,
and let the advent candles
brightly burn in a ring.

- 2. The second is for the prophets,
who said that Christ would come
with good news for many
and angry words for some.**

'Christmas is coming!'
The Church is glad to sing,
and let the advent candles
brightly burn in a ring.

- 3. The third is for the Baptist,
who cried, 'Prepare the way.
Be ready for Jesus,
today and every day'.**

'Christmas is coming!'
The Church is glad to sing,
and let the advent candles
brightly burn in a ring.

- 4. The fourth is for the Virgin,
who mothered God's own son
and sang how God's justice
was meant for everyone.**

'Christmas is coming!'
The Church is glad to sing,
and let the advent candles
brightly burn in a ring.

John L Bell (b1949)

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G2 3DH Scotland

Prayer of approach

We have heard your call, coming from strange places.

We have received your gift, calling us into unexpected connections.

We have been nurtured by your invitation, making friendships along the way.

We approach you now with humble hearts and expectation,

knowing you welcome all –stranger and friend.

Amen.

Prayer of adoration

Blessèd are you, Lord our God:
in your love you create all things out of nothing
Through your eternal Word.

We glorify and adore you.

Blessèd are you, Lord our God:
In your love you redeemed the world
Through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We glorify you and adore you.

Blessèd are you, Lord our God:
In your love you empower your people
Through the gift of the holy Spirit.

We glorify you and adore you. Amen.

Prayer of confession

We have looked at the rough,
and judged it for not being smooth.

We have looked at the valley,
and thought it could not be raised.

We have observed the mountain,
believing it would be unscalable,
and in so doing, we have become complacent.

Forgive us, God,
for our complacency and our judgements.
Make us see with the eyes of a pilgrim,
knowing that you who have called us on this way,

will make a pathway before us.

Amen.

Declaration of forgiveness

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This is his gracious word:

“Your sins are forgiven”

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: StF 173 – Into the darkness of this world

- 1. Into the darkness of this world,
into the shadows of the night;
into this loveless place you came,
lightened our burdens, eased our pain,
and made these hearts your home.
Into the darkness once again –
O come, Lord Jesus, come.**

*Come with your love
to make us whole,
come with your light to lead us on,
driving the darkness far from our souls:
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

- 2. Into the longing of our souls,
into these heavy hearts of stone,
shine on us now your piercing light,
order our lives and souls aright,
by grace and love unknown,
until in you our hearts unite –
O come, Lord Jesus, come.**

*Come with your love
to make us whole,
come with your light to lead us on,
driving the darkness far from our souls:
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

- 3. O Holy Child, Emmanuel,
hope of the ages, God with us,
visit again this broken place,
till all the earth declares your praise
and your great mercies own.**

**Now let your love be born in us,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.**

***Come in your glory,
take your place,
Jesus the Name above all names,
we long to see you face to face,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.***

Maggi Dawn (b 1959)

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THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading Isaiah 40:1-11 (NRSVA)

¹Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

that she has served her term,

that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

³A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our
God.

⁴Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

⁶A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;

surely the people are grass.

⁸The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.

⁹Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,

"Here is your God!"

¹⁰See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;

his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Psalm 85:1-2; 8-13 (NRSVA)

*Prayer for the Restoration of God's Favour
To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.*

¹Lord, you were favourable to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

²You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you pardoned all their sin.

⁸Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in
their hearts.

⁹Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear
him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

¹¹Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.

¹²The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.

¹³Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.

Epistle *2 Peter 3:8-15a (NRSVA)*

⁸But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

¹¹Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹²waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Final Exhortation and Doxology

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

Gospel *Mark 1:1-8 (NRSVA)*

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

¹The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight",

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

Sermon

One of the things I miss, living here in Warwickshire, is the hills. Growing up in Lancashire on the south side of Rochdale, we could look out across a bowling green and then beyond across the whole of the town. We could see the spire of the town hall; we could see the sixties blocks of flats – the Seven Sisters – and beyond that, looking north-west we could see the hills of the Rossendale upland and above them all, Knowle Hill rising. If I'd been able to look the other way, but the house would be in the way, I'd have seen the bigger hills and the moors of the Pennines, surrounded by countryside. And by countryside, I don't mean the lovely stone of the Cotswolds, I don't mean the thatched cottages, I don't mean the lovely fields. Instead I mean the bleak, bare, open moorland where paths could lead you into the middle of a peat bog and disappear; where the mist could drop with no notice. Countryside that was wild and dangerous and had to be treated with respect.

A bit like the Judaeian wilderness – even more dangerous, even more to be treated with respect. And a voice was heard in that wilderness, crying ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’. Saying that every valley shall be raised and the mountains and the hills brought low. And as I was growing up in Rochdale, they decided to build a motorway through those hills and on a Sunday every few months in the early seventies, we’d have a trip out – up the narrow roads into the Pennines and there we would see this huge gash in the mountainside as millions of tonnes of rock were moved out to carve a passage for the road, and then dropped in the next valley to block it up – to raise it up to be the same level. And I remember in the early seventies just before the M62 opened, we took a trip from school in a coach onto a motorway that wasn’t open. And we got out on one of those new bridges with steep-sided slopes of a valley and looked across to Hollingworth Lake. And then we drove a little further and there was the new dam at Scammonden, and we could see the reservoir beginning to fill and beyond it was this huge gap where the mountain had been, and above it, this great concrete arch carrying a little road that used to travel on the ground, but the ground was no longer there. And the mountain was brought low, and the valley was raised to prepare the way.

And now you can drive, as you have done for the last forty-odd years from Leeds to Manchester. And in the blink of an eye you will pass under that concrete arch, you will pass through that gap in the mountains that’s no longer there, you will pass over that dam at Scammonden; and you’ll take it for granted and you will forget the years of preparation, of planning, of carving out, of building. Just like we take for granted the preparation of John the Baptist, preparing for Jesus who would follow.

We forget the preparation of the prophets – we wheel them out from time to time – it’s nice to have a bit of Isaiah at the beginning of a carol service, ‘For unto us a Son is born, unto us a Son is given. And his name will be Wonderful-Counsellor, Mighty God’. But it’s taken for granted, we go straight for the main course.

We don’t think that we might be called to be John the Baptist too. Here we are, in the wilderness of 2020, confined to our own homes, not seeing family, getting used to the joys and otherwise of Zoom and Skype, not seeing our sisters and brothers in Christ but watching me here on YouTube. And maybe, in the wilderness of 2020, it’s us who are called to be the voice, crying ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’. To bring hope and peace into people’s lives; even though we can’t see them and meet them; in a phone call, in a Christmas card, in a letter, in a smile to the people who are dropping things off at the door, the way we greet our neighbours and our friends when we accidentally meet them on the street; to say this is the season of hope. That we prepare the way for the coming of the Prince of Peace. The prophet’s voice still calls to us down the centuries: ‘Wild and lone the prophet’s voice echoes through the desert still, calling us to make a choice, bidding us to do God’s will’.

Hymn: StF 189 – Wild and lone the prophet’s voice

- 1. Wild and lone the prophet’s voice
echoes through the desert still,
calling us to make a choice,
bidding us to do God’s will:
‘Turn from sin and be baptised;
cleanse your heart and mind and soul.
Quitting all the sin you prized,
yield your life to God’s control.’**

2. **'Bear the fruit repentance sows:
lives of justice, truth, and love.
Trust no other claim than those;
set you heart on things above.
Soon the Lord will come in power,
burning clean the threshing floor:
then will flames the chaff devour;
wheat alone shall fill God's store.'**
3. **With such preaching stark and bold
John proclaimed salvation near,
and his timeless warnings hold
words of hope to all who hear.
So we dare to journey on,
led by faith through ways untrod,
till we come at last like John
to behold the Lamb of God.**

Carl P Daw, Jr (b1944)

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THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

God, you have comforted your people,
making paths where there seemed no path.
You have lifted up valleys,
relieved droughts,
and made high places low.
You have gathered your people
in the eternal place of love.
You speak to our hearts,
and you forgive us for our wandering ways.
Your light and love and faithfulness and work
are true, ever true, always lasting.
We thank you, for the goodness you are,
and the pathways you make before us.
Amen.

Hymn: StF 188 – There's a light upon the mountains

1. **There's a light upon the mountains,
and the day is at the spring,
when our eyes shall see the beauty
and the glory of the King;
weary was the heart with waiting,
and the night-watch seemed so long;
but his triumph-day is breaking,
and we hail it with a song.**
2. **There's a hush of expectation,
and a quiet in the air;
and the breath of God is moving
in the fervent breath of prayer:
for the suffering, dying Jesus
is Christ upon the throne,
and the travail of our spirit
is the travail of his own.**
3. **He is breaking down the barriers,
he is casting up the way;
he is calling for his angels
to build up the gates of day:
but his angels here are human,
not the shining host above;
for the drum-beats of his army
are the heart-beats of our love.**
4. **Hark! We here a distant music,
and it comes with fuller swell;
'tis the triumph -song of Jesus,
of our King, Immanuel:
Zion, go now forth to meet him;
and, my soul, be swift to bring
all your finest and your noblest
for the triumph of our King!**

Henry Burton (1840 – 1930)

Prayers of intercession

We join together in our prayers of intercession:

A voice cries out in the wilderness "Prepare the way of the Lord."

Lord, we pray for the church
as we seek to proclaim our faith in you.
Help us to make new inroads
into parts of our community which have become
a wilderness to your word.....

Lord in your mercy;

hear our prayer.

'Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and
all people shall see it together.'

Lord, we long for the day
when the human family will stand shoulder to
shoulder,
sharing a common vision
revealed through your glory.

We pray for those working for peace and
reconciliation in our world
and think particularly of refugees and asylum
seekers
struggling to survive whilst escaping war torn
areas.

Lord in your mercy;

hear our prayer.

"'Comfort, O comfort my people,'" says your
God.'

Lord, we pray for those in need of comfort:
for the hungry and homeless who need the
physical comfort of food and shelter;
for the lonely and rejected who need the
comfort of love;
for the sick and suffering who need the comfort
of healing;
for troubled souls who need the comfort of
faith.....

Lord in your mercy;

hear our prayer.

'The grass withers, the flower fades, but the
word of our God will stand forever.'

We remember those who have died
and pray for those struggling with bereavement,
particularly now when people are unable to
meet to grieve together.

In the face of the fragility of human life,
remind us that our life in Christ will stand
forever.

Lord in your mercy;

hear our prayer.

'See, the Lord God comes with might and his arm
rules for him.'

We offer our prayers in the name of Jesus, and in
anticipation of the day when the only prayers
needed will be those of adoration and praise.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray together:

**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.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin 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.**

The Offering & prayer

Our offerings may be made in different ways at
this time, but we still offer them up to God today
in a communal way:

Everything in heaven and earth comes from you,

O Lord,
and of your own do we give you.
May you be praised for ever. Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 167 – Colours of day dawn into the mind

- 1. Colours of day dawn into the mind,
the sun has come up, the night is behind.
Go down in the city, into the street,
and let's give the message to the people we meet.**

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.*

*Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.*

- 2. Go through the park, on into the town;
the sun still shines on; it never goes down.
The light of the world is risen again;
the people of darkness are needing a friend.**

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.*

*Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.*

- 3. Open your eyes, look into the sky,
the darkness has come, the sun came to die.
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,
but Jesus is living, his Spirit is near.**

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.*

*Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.*

Sue McClellan (b 1951), John Paculabo (b1946) & Keith Rycroft (b 1949)

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Prayer & blessing

We have gathered around stories of strange people in wild places. For you, O Lord, no desert is a desert only. It is a place where wild things grow and nurture us, in all the places of our lives.

Nurture us, as we go, so that we can be more nurturing in all abandoned places. Because you see life and light where we do not. And so we follow your light into all places.

And the blessing of God,
the Father, Son & Holy Spirit
be among us and remain with us always.
Amen.

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Hymn Words:

Hymn: StF 166 – Christmas is Coming

John L Bell (b1949)

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