

**Worship for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent (complete text. A video version is also online)**  
**Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

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Welcome to our Circuit Service on the third Sunday of Advent. Traditionally we would be lighting 3 candles today – the third for John the Baptist.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this service : Rev Andy Laird for the sermon, Rev David Greenwood and Rev Jeongsook Kim for the readings. I'm Margaret Weir and I will be sharing prayers.

We very much appreciate the technical skills of those who put this service together.

If you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on [swc.katetennyson@gmail.com](mailto:swc.katetennyson@gmail.com)

THE PREPARATION

*Call to worship*

Living God, as we light our candles in the name of Jesus, the light of the world: make straight our paths, enlighten our hearts and our minds, bless us on our Advent journey; and may your kingdom come.  
**Amen.**

Hymn: StF 176 – Like a candle flame

**1. Like a candle flame,  
flickering small in our darkness.  
Uncreated light  
shines through infant eyes.**

***God is with us, Alleluia.  
God is with us, Alleluia.  
Come to save us, alleluia,  
Come to save us.  
Alleluia!***

**2. Stars and angels sing,  
yet the earth sleeps in shadows;  
can this tiny spark  
set a world on fire?**

***God is with us, Alleluia.  
God is with us, Alleluia.  
Come to save us, alleluia,  
Come to save us.  
Alleluia!***

**3. Yet his light shall shine  
from our lives, Spirit blazing,  
as we touch the flame  
of his holy fire.**

***God is with us, Alleluia.  
God is with us, Alleluia.  
Come to save us, alleluia,  
Come to save us.  
Alleluia!***

*Graham Kendrick (b1950)*  
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*Prayer of approach*

As we continue on our Advent journey – in the strength of hope, celebrating the glimpses of glory in our midst, and preparing for the glories to come, following that strange voice crying in the wilderness, and acknowledging our own voice crying in our hearts; so, Lord of our journeying, Lord of our crying, meet us in Bethlehem, that we may worship you, individually, as a community, as a church,

as the world you came to save.

**Amen.**

*Prayer of adoration*

We praise and adore you, O God,  
for your urgency and passion.  
We thank you for choosing John the Baptist to be  
your  
prophet,  
and for blessing him with words that stir our  
hearts,  
and humility that transforms our lives.  
May we look deep within ourselves,  
and not be afraid to name the good,  
and persevere at the frustrating.  
For Jesus' sake.

**Amen.**

*Prayer of confession*

Forgive us, Lord, when we do not look for your  
coming  
and do not notice the ways in which you reach  
out to us.  
Forgive us, and give us eyes to see that you come  
to us  
through the desert, and through the fields of  
corn;  
through the crowds, and through the empty  
places;  
through temple courts, and through refugee  
camps;  
through the busyness of our lives,  
and the emptiness of our hearts;  
when we are weak, and when we are strong.  
You come to us at Advent and at Christmas.  
Forgive us, Lord, when we do not see that you  
have come to us.

*Declaration of forgiveness*

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners  
This is His gracious word. Your sins are forgiven

Hymn: StF 178 – Long ago prophets knew

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 come,*  
*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!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
*When he come,*  
*when he comes,*  
*who will make him welcome?*

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!*  
*Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!*  
*When he come,*  
*when he comes,*  
*who will make him welcome?*

4. Journey ends! Where afar  
Bethlem 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!**

*Fred Pratt Green (1903 – 2000)*

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#### THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

*1<sup>st</sup> Reading*                      *Isaiah 61:1-4; 8-11 (NRSVA)*

*The Good News of Deliverance*

<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.

*Gospel*                      *John 1:6-8; 19-28 (NIVUK)*

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name  
was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify  
concerning that light, so that through him all  
might believe. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light; he  
came only as a witness to the light.

*John the Baptist denies being the Messiah*

<sup>19</sup>Now this was John's testimony when the  
Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and  
Levites to ask him who he was. <sup>20</sup>He did not fail  
to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the  
Messiah.'  
<sup>21</sup>They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you  
Elijah?'  
He said, 'I am not.'  
'Are you the Prophet?'  
He answered, 'No.'  
<sup>22</sup>Finally they said, 'Who are you? Give us an  
answer to take back to those who sent us. What  
do you say about yourself?'  
<sup>23</sup>John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet,  
'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness,

“Make straight the way for the Lord.”

<sup>24</sup>Now the Pharisees who had been sent

<sup>25</sup>questioned him, ‘Why then do you baptise if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’

<sup>26</sup>‘I baptise with water,’ John replied, ‘but among you stands one you do not know. <sup>27</sup>He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’

<sup>28</sup>This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

### *Sermon*

The precise timing of our reading from Isaiah is the source of some controversy amongst Bible commentators. The traditionalists believe Isaiah was written by one person alone whereas the more modern analysts believe that three people, living at different times, are responsible for writing what appeared to them to be 3 clearly distinct passages in Isaiah. But to simplify things I'm not going to argue one way or another but simply say that our text from this morning is addressed to exiles when they are in Babylon. They are there because in 587 BC the Babylonian army invaded Israel, plundered Jerusalem, destroyed Solomon's temple and took many Israelites back to exile in Babylon. There they have become the poor, broken-hearted captives described by Isaiah. If you were to ask them whose fault it was that they were exiled they would say, “Babylon's”; ask God and he would say, “it's your own fault!” And the early part of Isaiah catalogues the many sins of the Israelites.

But now God isn't delivering punishment he is offering redemption, for this will be the year of the Lord's favour, the day of vengeance. Isaiah tells the exiles there is to be healing, righteousness, justice and release. This is God giving hope to the exiles, he is showing that he is compassionate and merciful. And we know from

our history books that in 530 BC they did start to go back to Israel. Isaiah's prophecy became real.

But if we turn the clock forward 600 years we find that people are again broken-hearted, oppressed and feeling captive. We find John the Baptist quoting from Isaiah as he tells the people he is preparing the way for Jesus who would show that he, being God, is also compassionate and merciful. The people have lost their way in their relationship with God; they are oppressed by the Romans and the Temple priests, the priests and Pharisees having made them prisoners of the law; they have woven such a tight 'net' around the people urging them to blind obedience to God's rules without knowing or understanding their real meaning. The Pharisees have turned God's law into a stick with which to beat the people.

Jesus has come to change all of that but before he can begin his work the way needs to be prepared. In the same way that we have seen roadworks holding up traffic as resurfacing and redesigned junctions are necessary to smooth out roads and make our journeys easier. The new roads need a solid base with no holes or bumps so that the wearing course can go down efficiently and remain in place when the top tarmac is laid. And the people who do such work have some amazing big equipment don't they? But John didn't have a shovel or a digger: his tool was river water. Yet his work was the same, to make a straight road for the Lord to come. His work was to point out to the people the imperfections in their lives, like potholes and boulders, which prevented their road to redemption from being smooth and straight. John told the people of a God who loves them and who would forgive them if only they would repent.

The priests and the Levites were concerned about his identity yet the people only saw in John his authority and they believed it was God-given; so the people came in their hundreds to be baptised, they believed that the river's holy waters would wash away their sins as John prayed over them. You can imagine a long line of people snaking from John waist-high in the water stretching back up the shore perhaps even into the town. People who were fed up of being oppressed and bullied wanting to make a new start to begin again with God.

John preaches the same message to us today. He says we need to prepare the way for the one who is to come, the one who will bring righteousness and peace and freedom from sin into our lives if only we will let him - and where better to begin that process than here in worship on this third Sunday in Advent with Christmas just around the corner. We have time to prepare for the coming of Christ.

We have time to examine ourselves, our lives, to see where the potholes and the boulders representing sins and evils are in our lives; the things that make the road to Jesus bumpy and difficult. Jesus makes the same promise to us as John made to the people that we can be redeemed and saved if only we repent and believe.

We have to be sure that we understand what 'repent' means though. It is different to just saying sorry. To repent means that you accept that the direction you are taking in your life, or one aspect of it, is wrong; you stop going in that direction and then you turn back or turn in the right direction, being clear that you won't go down the wrong path again. Only when we have repented can we tell God we are sorry, confident that God will forgive us and that once forgiven we never have to confess that thing again

because God forgives our sins then remembers them no more. That is the deal with God, it is called the new covenant and it comes into place with the birth of Christ. That is why it is so important that we make the way straight so that there is nothing to obstruct Christ from coming to us and us going to Christ at Christmas or at any time.

We have become very good at preparing for Christmas, now it is time for us to prepare for the coming of Christ into our hearts, our lives, our world. So will you prepare the way for him to come in? Will you remove all the obstacles and level the ground of past disagreements? Will you let him remove the hills and mountains that represent sins and prepare a smooth road, let him help you repair broken relationships that have been diversions and distractions and so make the road straight?

You might be tempted to shrug your shoulders and convince yourself and those around you that these words don't apply to you. But each one of us is a sinner, we all know there are things that we do that we shouldn't, things we don't do that we should. Some of these affect other people, some affect only us. God knows the size of the sin, and that it is there; but he loves you anyway in spite of it and longs to forgive it, if only you will repent, confess it to him, and ask to be forgiven. And God will do that. You don't have to wade out into deep water for the sin to be washed away, you can just do it where you are, any time anywhere, silently but deliberately. Make the way straight for the Lord.

Well I don't know if you are ready for Christmas yet but in a way we shouldn't be because advent is a season of four weeks, a time for reflection upon our Christian life and our relationship with God. We shouldn't rush our way through Advent in order to focus purely upon Christmas. So this

being the third Sunday in Advent we still have time to do this, to make the way straight and smooth for Christ to come to us, for us to go to him.

I don't know how you will spend the next week and a half but I pray some of it will be spent in prayer and reflection, but make sure that you leave enough time to finish your preparations for Christmas. We know that Jesus loved a party, a celebration, just as we do. So even though we can't party like we used to, we can still do it in a small way, we just need to make sure that we don't crowd out Jesus in the process. Make the way straight for the Lord.

Hymn: StF 180 – O come O come Immanuel

1. **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.***

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

***Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.***

3. **O come, O Rod of Jesse, free  
your won from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell your people save,  
and give them victory o'er the grave:**

***Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.***

4. **O come, O key of David, come,  
and open wide our heavenly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high,  
and close the path to misery:**

***Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.***

5. **O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer  
our spirits by your advent here;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight:**

***Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.***

Latin, 18<sup>th</sup> Century, based on the ancient *Advent Antiphons*  
translated by John Mason Neale (1811 – 1866)

THE RESPONSE

*Prayers of thanksgiving*

Creator God,

we thank You, for Your Son – the Light of the world.

We thank You too, for those in every generation who have faithfully pointed to Him and who have spread His light in even the darkest times.

May we find the courage to point to the hope and comfort and peace You offer, especially in times of difficulty and sorrow.

May we witness to Your love and Your goodness Your presence and Your compassion.

And thank You –

thank You for the family of Your people meeting throughout the world this day –

all of us gathered only too aware of our faults and our limitations,

but knowing too, that You, Lord Jesus, can take the tiniest spark and fan it into a raging fire.

Give us the courage and the desire

to seek to serve You as best we can – and in that service may we reflect the life You lived.

**Amen**

Hymn: StF 615 – Let love be real in giving and receiving

- 1. Let love be real, in giving and receiving,  
without the need to manage and to own;  
a haven free from posing and pretending,  
where every weakness may be safely  
known.  
Give me your hand, along the desert  
pathway,  
give me your love wherever we may go.  
*As God loves us, so let us love each other:  
With no demands, just open hands and  
space to grow***
- 2. Let love be real, not grasping or confining,  
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us  
free;  
that helps us face the risk of truly living,  
and makes us brave to be what we might  
be.  
Give me your strength when all my worlds  
are weakness;  
give me your love in spite of all you know  
*As God loves us, so let us love each other:  
With no demands, just open hands and  
space to grow***
- 3. Let love be real, with no manipulation,  
no secret wish to harness or control;  
let us accept each other's incompleteness,  
and share the joy of learning to be whole.  
Give me your hope through dreams and  
disappointments;  
give me your trust when all my failings  
show.  
*As God loves us, so let us love each other:  
With no demands, just open hands and  
space to grow***

*Michael Forster (b 1946)*

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*Prayers of intercession*

We offer You our prayers for those who struggle  
with this season.

We think of the bereaved,  
of those who cannot afford to celebrate as they  
might want,  
of those with no one to share a table,  
and of those for whom childlessness is  
accentuated at this time.

Lord God,  
You understand  
and share  
tears and silences,  
disappointments and regrets.  
Bring Your comfort,  
fill with Your strength,  
and grant all Your peace...

We pray too, for places in the world  
where conflict and violence are rife...  
For places where nature has been harsh –  
and we have been thoughtless in caring for Your  
creation:

Give us greater concern for one another  
and an even greater willingness to do whatever  
we can for each other  
and for the world itself.

So may we work with You, Lord God,  
to make this world, the world You intended it to  
be –

a world where people care and love and laugh  
a world where justice reigns and peace is evident  
and where all know they belong.

These prayers, along with our gratitude for the  
birth of Your Son,  
we offer You in His name and for His sake.

**Amen**

*The Lord's Prayer*

As we join in the prayer which our saviour taught us

**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**

*The Offering & prayer*

We offer our gifts to you  
Our money, our energy, and our time  
Help us to use them wisely and for your kingdom  
In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord.  
**Amen**

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 185 – Sing we the King who is coming to reign

- 1. Sing we the King who is coming to reign;  
glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!  
Life and salvation 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.*
- 2. All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;  
freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;**

**justice and truth from his sceptre shall  
spring;  
wrong shall be ended 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.*

- 3. 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: 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.*

- 4. Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;  
hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day  
when this new song your creation shall sing;  
Satan is vanquished and 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.*

*Charles Silvester Home (1865 – 1914)*

*Prayer & blessing*

Comfort, joy and peace be Yours.  
Know how blessed You are  
and go to be that blessing to all around You.

May God Almighty hold you and all whom you  
love  
in the palm of His hand  
this day and always.

**Amen**



## Copyright Notices

### *Hymn Words:*

StF 176 – Like a candle flame

*Graham Kendrick (b1950)*

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StF 178 – Long ago prophets knew

*Fred Pratt Green (1903 – 2000)*

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StF 180 – O come O come Immanuel

Latin, 18<sup>th</sup> Century, based on the ancient *Advent Antiphons*

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StF 615 – Let love be real in giving and receiving

*Michael Forster (b 1946)*

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StF 185 – Sing we the King who is coming to reign

*Charles Silvester Home (1865 – 1914)*

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