

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 5th December 2021

Second Sunday in Advent with Holy Communion

Hello, I hope you are well. In our service of worship today there will be an opportunity for us all to share Holy Communion together. If you are worshipping at home and would like to participate, may I encourage you to prepare some bread and wine (or something similar) ready for this part of our worship. Our focus this morning will be on our Gospel Reading, Luke 3:1-6, which tells us about the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry. Let us worship God together:

Call to worship

Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the crooked will be made straight,
and the rough ways be made smooth.
All people shall see the salvation of God,
and we come now to worship.

A gathering prayer

We pray as we light our second candle this week.

As we light this Advent candle,
may its flame be a light that shines for all to see –
a sign that Jesus is for all.
May we know God's presence and power as we gather in the name of Jesus,
who is the light of the world. **Amen.**

Our children and young people now go to Café Church and re-join us for Holy Communion

A prayer of approach

We come to praise you, Lord, God of Israel and all the nations.
We come to you who set your people free.
We come to you who guides us into the way of peace.
We come to you as we journey through Advent
and prepare to welcome, once again, the Christ child. **Amen.**

R&S 134 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry

1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
come then and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings from the King of kings.

2 Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
make straight the way for God within;
and in each heart prepare a home
where such a mighty guest may come.

3 For thou art our salvation, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward;
without thy grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.

4 To heal the sick stretch out thy hand,
and bid the fallen sinner stand;
shine forth, and let thy light restore
earth's own true loveliness once more.

5 All praise, eternal Son, to thee
whose advent sets thy people free,
whom, with the Father, we adore,
and Spirit blest, for evermore.

Charles Coffin (1676-1749)
tr. John Chandler (1806-76) altd.*

A prayer of adoration

Advent God,
 you prepared your people for your coming,
 you gave your Word to us through prophets and priests,
 through stories told and retold,
 through the history of time,
 through the written word,
 through the spoken word,
 but always your word.
 As Christmas lights begin to dazzle us,
 we know that your glory is way beyond their transfixing power.
 Advent God, we adore you,
 and we bring ourselves before you just as we are. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession

There are signs of God and we are blind to them,
 there are voices that cry out and we close our ears to them.
 There are signs of people's need and we do not see them,
 and cries of those in pain and we pass them by.
 There are signs of God's kingdom to be seen,
 and the voice of the Holy Spirit to be heard:
 O God, forgive us when we ignore you
 and ignore our neighbours, near and far. **Amen.**

Assurance of forgiveness

God spoke through Zechariah, saying, 'Tell the people:
 they will be saved by the forgiveness of their sins.'
 God's promises endure for ever and ever;
 so, let us be assured, our sins are forgiven. **Amen.**

A prayer of thanksgiving

We thank you, God, for your richness.
 We thank you for the way your light lets us see the world and its people.
 We thank you for diversity and difference in people and places.
 We thank you for signs and symbols and glimpses of your kingdom.
 We thank you for bolts out of the blue that reveal you to us
 and for the tiny flame that offers us assurance.
 We thank you for your care through the hands of others,
 hands of family, hands of friends and hands of strangers.
 We thank you that in others we see you
 and that through seeing you we see them in different ways.
 We thank you that in wilderness experiences you come to us,
 that you come in word or deed, that you come in touch or gift,
 that you come in cacophony or whisper, but come you do.
 We are all your people, all your children, all your flock,
 and for us all you care – to you we give our thanks and praise. **Amen.**

BPW 311 Hills of the north, rejoice

1 Hills of the North, rejoice,
river and mountain-spring,
hark to the advent voice;
valley and lowland, sing.
Christ comes in righteousness and love,
he brings salvation from above.

2 Isles of the southern seas,
sing to the listening earth,
carry on every breeze
hope of a world's new birth:
in Christ shall all be made anew,
his word is sure, his promise true.

3 Lands of the East, arise!
He is your brightest morn;
greet him with joyous eyes,
praise shall his path adorn:
your seers have longed to know their Lord;
to you he comes, the final word.

4 Shores of the utmost west,
lands of the setting sun,
welcome the heavenly guest
in whom the dawn has come:
he brings a never-ending light
who triumphed o'er our darkest night.

5 Shout, as you journey home;
songs be in every mouth!
Lo, from the north they come,
from east and west and south:
in Jesus all shall find their rest,
in him the universe be blest.

Charles E. Oakley (1832-65)
Editors of *English Praise*, 1975 altd.

OT Reading Malachi 3:1-4*The Coming Messenger*

3 See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; ³ he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

Epistle Reading Philippians 1:3-11*Paul's Prayer for the Philippians*

³ I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴ constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵ because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Gospel Reading Luke 3:1-6*The Proclamation of John the Baptist*

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'

⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
 and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
 and the crooked shall be made straight,
 and the rough ways made smooth;
⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Reflection

On this second Sunday in Advent, we read that John the Baptist hears God’s word and begins his ministry, baptizing people as a sign of repentance and telling those he meets that Jesus will be for all people. His work echoes the prophecy in Isaiah 40, that there will be a voice crying out to prepare the way of the Lord. Isaiah’s message of restoration for God’s people is employed to point to how the message that Jesus will bring will be one of equality, and not just for the rich and powerful and not just for the Jews. If we think ahead for just a second, we’ll recall that traditionally, we explore in Epiphany how Jesus was born as a sign and a gift for all people, not just the Jewish people. Today, we notice that this very same perspective is clearly present in the way Luke uses ‘all’, as he often will, in verse 6: *‘all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’* Here is a preparing of the way for an understanding that God’s salvation, through Jesus, is for all people and, arguably, all creation. Here is a sign pointing to the way of God. And as we know, signs are very important to us! They can tell us how to behave, where to go, and where not to go! A sign might tell us that the road ahead is bumpy, but probably not that it is smooth! But this week, we are going to see how Jesus is a sign for all, for absolutely everyone that, regardless of who we are or what we do, we are all equal in God eyes.

We note that Luke’s inclusion of what one writer refers to as ‘the rogues gallery’ in verses 1-2, raises questions about the nature and scope of salvation. Had we also read the Canticle set for today, the words of Zechariah following the birth of his son, John, (Luke 1:68-79), these characters could easily be seen as types of the hateful enemies that he speaks of:

⁶⁸ *‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
 for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them.*

⁶⁹ *He has raised up a mighty saviour for us
 in the house of his servant David,*

⁷⁰ *as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,*

⁷¹ *that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.* (Luke 1:68-71)

In his commentary on Luke 3, New Testament theologian, Joel B. Green writes that, for Luke ‘the reconciliation of God’s people and deliverance from enemies are both part of one movement. For him, visions of salvation cannot be categorised as social or religious or political, for the epoch of peace is characterized by all of these’. So, salvation is in part a liberation from those who oppress and abuse. There is, of course, a paradox here. This salvation is also the gift offered to *all* people and so that includes the unpleasant characters mentioned by Luke. We recognise and accept that there are challenges here for us as we grapple with how we are to understand salvation, and how we pray for those who might be the modern day versions of Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas and so on.

If we were to look through Luke’s Gospel, we would find that there is a recurring theme of the levelling of social status with the humble being exalted and the exalted being humbled. As we read John the Baptist quoting Isaiah, we see a picture is painted of the creation of a level playing field:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
 make his paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
 and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
 and the crooked shall be made straight,
 and the rough ways made smooth” (Luke 3:4-5)

While yes, of course, the language is here metaphorical and so we should avoid any literal interpretation, still, for people weighed down with worry and oppressed by injustice, this message is profoundly hopeful. It is especially fascinating to note that John was preaching in physically the lowest place on earth! It is from the lowest place that John cried out in the wilderness with his message of hope and salvation for all. As we know, modern day politicians speak often about ‘levelling up’. Well here we have the forerunner of Jesus preparing the way for the one who will truly provide the means of transformation for all.

As we began to think about today's passage, I mentioned the highly significant use of the word 'all' in Luke 3.6: '*and all flesh shall see the salvation of God*'. 'All' means 'every part of' or 'every kind of'. So, when we read the phrase '*all flesh*', this could be referring to the whole of the created order, and this opens before us an understanding that all of creation needs an experience of salvation. We see creation in need of salvation in many ways today, don't we? As we work and pray for salvation as liberation for the many in our world who are oppressed today, we must remember, and then act as those who understand that caring and protecting our environment is, among other things, very much a work of justice and liberation. It is the poorest in our world who are disproportionately affected by climate change. And as we reflect more broadly on this text and our own discipleship, we embrace anew our calling to share the love of God with all and to work and pray to see all who are weighed down and oppressed liberated and justly treated. In this our time, how might we be signs that point to the loving and liberating God? How will we embody God's message of hope and salvation to all? With God's help, let us show, by the way we live and love and care for all, without any favouritism or discrimination, that God's salvation truly is for all. Amen.

A moment for reflection as we listen to some music

Our prayers of intercession

As we have lit candles to celebrate Advent and as we have reflected on your words so, Lord God, our thoughts turn now beyond our needs, beyond our pains to those of your children's, whose cries and anguish trouble and disturb us.

Merciful, caring God

Hear our prayers.

News seems to surround us piling one tragedy on top of another, the world seems a hard place and our tears are for those whose pain is etched deeply within their being, for those cast out of their own lands, cast adrift from family and friends, thrown into the arms of strangers, some of whom are caring and some who are not.

Merciful, caring God

Hear our prayers.

For those who trudge through strange lands looking for guidance with hope for a better future, straddling borders, hoping;
for those who have nothing but what they stand in and walk with;
for those who risk life and limb in fragile boats seeking escape from poverty and tragedy but so often finding both and left seeking safety, welcome, warmth and security.

Merciful, caring God

Hear our prayers.

For the homeless nearer to home who have no walls to shelter them, no place to cocoon them, no safety to protect them, no warmth from the winter weather, no family to support them and little hope for a settled future.

Merciful, caring God

Hear our prayers.

For those who live with hunger, not just of the spirit, but of the body;
for those families who can't manage proper meals and nutrition, who eek out the pennies the best they can;
for those who have the courage to seek foodbank help and for those who greet and meet them when they stretch out for the food that is given;
for those who are cold and hungry, not just of body because they can't afford heating and food, but cold of friendship and the warmth of love.

Merciful, caring God

Hear our prayers.

For families impacted by Covid and all its ramifications;
 for those for whom the illness itself has deprived them of health and well-being, short and long term;
 for those who have seen family and friends lose their battles for life and who have not been near at the
 time of death and those who will have an empty seat at the Christmas table;
 for those who are separated by the miles, by country and continent, who have missed so much growing up
 and growing old;
 for those who are fearful of vaccines, those unable to have vaccines, those deprived of vaccines, those who
 develop and deliver vaccines.

Merciful, caring God

Hear our prayers.

For countries at war with others and with themselves, where peace is a distant memory and a very distant
 prospect;
 for those who keep the candle of hope burning believing that in the end peace will prevail.

Merciful, caring God

Hear our prayers.

For those striving earnestly for Climate change to be tackled with care and justice, acknowledging the inter-
 dependency of nature, of plants and animals, microbes and humans;
 for all who seek to quell the needless destruction of our fragile world and who strive for the best that
 humanity can be;
 for those nearer to home feeling the impact of climate change, snow and storms and gales beyond what is
 expected.

Merciful, caring God

Hear our prayers.

For those who have never heard the message of Advent hope, who have never encountered the presence
 of the Christ child, who have never felt their hearts moved by the Christmas story of Emmanuel, God with
 us.

May their lives be touched by those of us who meet them, whose lives touch ours and ours theirs.

Merciful, caring God

Hear our prayers.

And let our cries come unto you. Amen.

R&S 200 The kingdom of God is justice and joy

1 The kingdom of God
 is justice and joy,
 for Jesus restores
 what sin would destroy;
 God's power and glory
 in Jesus we know,
 and here and hereafter
 the kingdom shall grow.

2 The kingdom of God
 is mercy and grace,
 the prisoners are freed,
 the sinners find place,
 the outcast are welcomed
 God's banquet to share,
 and hope is awakened
 in place of despair.

3 The kingdom of God
 is challenge and choice,
 believe the good news,
 repent and rejoice!
 His love for us sinners
 brought Christ to his cross,
 our crisis of judgement
 for gain or for loss.

4 God's kingdom is come,
 the gift and the goal,
 in Jesus begun,
 in heaven made whole;
 the heirs of the kingdom
 shall answer his call,
 and all things cry 'Glory!'
 to God all in all.

Bryn A. Rees (1911-83)* Copyright © Mrs M. Rees

Our children and young people will return from Café Church and join us for Holy Communion

Holy Communion

Gospel Words

Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. John 6:35

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking;
if you hear my voice and open the door,
I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. Revelation 3:20

God proves his love for us in
that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

Invitation to the Table

Come to this table, not because you must but because you may,
not because you are strong, but because you are weak.
Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you a right to come,
but because you need mercy and help.
Come, because you love the Lord a little and would like to love him more.
Come, because he loved you and gave himself for you.
Come and meet the risen Christ, for we are his Body.

We pray together:

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

The Institution

The apostle Paul tells us of the institution of the Lord's Supper:
For I received from the Lord
what I also handed on to you,
that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed
took a loaf of bread,
and when he had given thanks,
he broke it and said,
'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'
In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,
'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11.23–26

Thanksgiving

Loving God,
we praise and thank you
for your love shown to us in Jesus Christ.

We thank you for his life and ministry,
announcing the good news of your kingdom
and demonstrating its power
in the lifting of the downtrodden,
and the healing of the sick,
and the loving of the loveless.
We thank you for his sacrificial death upon the cross
for the redemption of the world,
and for your raising him to life again,
as a foretaste of the glory we shall share.

We give you thanks for this bread and wine,
symbols of our world
and signs of your transforming love.
Send your Holy Spirit, we pray,
that we may be renewed
into the likeness of Jesus Christ
and formed into his Body.
This we pray in his name and for his sake. Amen.

The Breaking of Bread

Jesus said, 'This is my body which is for you;
do this in memory of me'.

Sharing the Bread

Take this in remembrance that Christ died for you
and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

The Lifting of the Cup

In the same way,
he took the cup after supper, and said:
'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood.
Whenever you drink it,
do this in memory of me.' 1 Corinthians 11.25

Sharing the Wine

Drink this and remember that Christ's blood was shed for you
and be thankful.

Words of Acclamation and Prayer

Your death, O Lord, we commemorate.
Your resurrection we confess.
Your final coming we await.
Glory be to you, O Christ.
Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

Father of all,
 we give you thanks and praise,
 that when we were still far off
 you met us in your Son and brought us home.
 Dying and living, he declared your love,
 gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.
 May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;
 we who drink his cup bring life to others;
 we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.
 Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,
 so we and all your children shall be free,
 and the whole earth live to praise your name;
 through Christ our Lord. Amen

And we pray for those close to us....

As we are here, gathered around this table as God's people sat in the presence of our loving God, we remember before God all those within our church family, and those close to us, who are in need. We keep those who have lost loved ones recently and those who are feeling the pain of loss at this time very much in our prayers. God of comfort, draw close to them with your loving, healing presence. We pray for those who are facing difficulties with their health at the moment. We pray also for your rich blessing upon all our dear church friends in residential care and all those unable to join us here at the moment.

We bring other friends and loved ones before God in a moment of quiet.

God of love, hear all these our prayers, in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

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.
 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.**

R&S 663 Love divine, all loves excelling

1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
 joy of heaven to earth come down!
 fix in us thy humble dwelling,
 all thy faithful mercies crown.
 Jesus, thou art all compassion,
 pure unbounded love thou art;
 visit us with thy salvation,
 enter every trembling heart.

2 Come, almighty to deliver,
 let us all thy grace receive;
 suddenly return, and never,
 never more thy temples leave.
 Thee we would be always blessing,
 serve thee as thy hosts above,
 pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
 glory in thy perfect love.

3 Finish then thy new creation,
 pure and spotless let us be;
 let us see thy great salvation
 perfectly restored in thee!
 changed from glory into glory,
 till in heaven we take our place;
 till we cast our crowns before thee,
 lost in wonder, love and praise.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

A sending out prayer

May the road we travel be smooth and straight,
every rut filled in, every bump smoothed out,
any diversions easy to navigate,
any obstacles easy to manoeuvre round.
May good companions share our journey,
and may we be voices for good in the world,
a sign of Jesus' love for all.
We pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

The Blessing

And may the blessing of God Almighty,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
be upon us and those we love,
this day and always. **Amen.**

The Grace

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. Amen.**