

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Kathleen Richardson. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church - pray for them as they pray for you.



Call to Worship

Using part of the suggested reading from the Hebrew Scriptures – Isaiah 40: 1-5

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

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain shall be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Hymn: Sing we the King who is coming to reign (Singing the Faith 185)

This advent hymn reminds us that we are not waiting for Jesus to come into this world but looking for the time when the world will recognise his reign.

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlqcBEcWpQw>

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.*

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...

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....

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....

Charles Silvester Horne (1865-1914)

Prayer

Gracious God, we praise you for your love and truth made
known in the words of prophets,
for your word made flesh in Jesus,
for your Spirit at home in our lives
and for the promise of your eternal kingdom.

You, O God, are the God of deliverance and freedom and hope.
In your presence we know fullness of joy, we are recognised
and valued,

you see us as we are and still give yourself to us.

Your love and goodness is the light in which we travel in this
dark world;

your victory over sin and death is the power in which we stand.

We come to you with our sorrows, our weaknesses, and our
fears

to take hold of your promises again

and to anticipate the end of death and mourning, crying and
pain.

Prayer of confession

Lord, our God, we come to you with sorrow for our sins,
and we ask for your help and strength.

Help us to know ourselves and to accept our weakness.

Strengthen us with your forgiving love,

so that we may courageously follow and obey your Son, Jesus,
whose birth we are soon to celebrate.

Let us hear today the call of your prophet, John the Baptist,
that we may truly repent and be changed.

Let what is crooked in us become straight,

let what is rough in us become smooth,
and let what is empty be filled, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

The good news is that when we face ourselves and God with the awareness of our need, we are given grace to grow, and courage to continue the journey. **Amen.**

Reading: The Gospel of Mark 1:1-8

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

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight’ “.

John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He 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. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.

Reflection

This year Christmas will be different.

How often have we heard or said that in these weeks?

We can’t look forward to the nativity play or the carol service, the parties and the gatherings in the way we have done in the past. We shall be more dependent on words. This year I have already decided that I will take more care over my Christmas cards and make writing and sending them a more meaningful remembrance of friendships past and hope for better days to come.

Advent is a time when in our part of the world the nights get longer and this year more than others we close our doors to shut out the darkness, and maybe we light our candles, one more each week, symbols in which we anticipate the celebration of the light of Jesus being born into our world.

Maybe this year, without the traditional distractions, these days of waiting and watching in Advent will carry more significance as we prepare again to celebrate the light shining in the darkness and God’s Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

When I was a girl, I lived in a village in Derbyshire that had no electricity. We did have gas and when I was twelve, they put in gas street lamps at rather infrequent intervals. We thought it was going to be wonderful to be able to see our way in the darkness. In fact, it made me much more nervous. Standing under a light was fine, but as you walked away from it the shadows you made, elongated and became monstrous. So you hastened towards the next lamp standard, only to be aware of the shadows you were making that danced behind you. We learned to still carry a torch whose light kept us from stumbling, but better still was to walk with a companion.

We live in a world where the shadows of conflict, poverty and pollution obscure the light. The shadows of past pain and the fears of the future make us heavy with dread. Advent offers hope and the circuit Advent resources and study groups are about light shining in the hardest times and places. Today's study focusses on the light that God's prophets shone in their time and invites us to learn to live in the promise of God's eternal purposes.

And the readings offered to us today in the lectionary help us to see more of the way God engages with us.

Mark's gospel was the first to be written, about 30 years after the death of Jesus. He is perhaps the only one of the gospel writers who knew Jesus.

His gospel has no stories of the birth of Jesus. Did he not know them? Neither Peter nor Paul mention the birth narratives in their letters.

For John, the credentials of Jesus were not through a miraculous birth, but through a series of prophetic signs in the Scriptures and the introduction of a forerunner in the form of John the Baptist. The first time we meet Jesus is when he is baptised by John in the river Jordan. Then he is introduced to us as the Messiah, the one for whom the world was waiting. For Mark, Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophetic hope, the culmination of long years of preparation for the right time for God to act.

He begins his gospel with a quotation from Isaiah – well that is what he writes, but in fact he brings together two prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi. Isaiah was writing about 800 years before Jesus at a time when the exiles in Babylon were released from exile and could return to Jerusalem under God's forgiveness and protection, hearing words of comfort spoken tenderly as the way through the wilderness brought them

home. The other bit of the quotation comes from the prophet Malachi some 300 years later when the people had settled in the land again, rebuilt the Temple, but had seriously lost their way as God's chosen people. Malachi's message was they would receive a messenger to prepare them for God coming to renew his covenant with them.

So Mark says this is the beginning of the good news, when John proclaims, in the wilderness, the coming in power of God's anointed one. It is still good news for us as we wait in hope for the completion of God's Kingdom.

If I had chosen to read another of the lectionary readings, we would have heard from the letter of Peter his understanding that God's kingdom is being delayed because God is wanting to give more people the opportunity to believe and he writes (2 Peter 3:13) 'in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home'.

What a lovely thought!

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God, we inhabit your earth, we share in its faults and recognise that for many life is hard and painful and hope is diminished by experience.

We pray for all who feel life to be in the wilderness:

for those affected by the pandemic – in physical or mental health, anxiety or loneliness

for all facing redundancy and economic hardship

for all engaged in finding and delivering a vaccine

Give strength and determination to health care agencies and the government to find ways to give hope.

We pray for your church, struggling to uncover new ways of proclaiming the good news of Jesus.

Make us less concerned about the preservation of old ways and more ready to face new challenges.

We pray for all people who long for new life and hope but feel helpless against violence, poverty, conflict, injustice, and prejudice, or who are weakened by illness or overwhelmed by grief.

Give strength to all agencies who work to alleviate the stress and pain and bring hope.

Help us to truly believe in your power to heal and transform and to live in the confidence that you are ever present with your people, that your promises are sure, and that one day your Kingdom will come and righteousness will be at home.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name;
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

Hymn: There's a light upon the mountains (Singing the Faith 188)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuvbW7gVwal>

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 our heart with waiting, and the night-watch seemed
so long;
but his triumph day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.

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 the Christ upon the throne,
and the travail of our spirit is the travail of his own.

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 hosts above;
and the drum-beats of his army are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark! We hear 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)

Blessing

God's blessing be upon you.
Be the light you long for.
Be the hope for others you crave for yourself.
It is in giving that we receive.
And in living in the light of the gospel
We proclaim God's glory. **Amen.**