

# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



## ***The Church's prayer for this Sunday – the Second Sunday of Advent***

Almighty God,  
purify our hearts and minds,  
that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again  
as judge and saviour  
we may be ready to receive him,  
who is our Lord and our God.

## **Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2020, the Second Sunday of Advent**

### **Psalm 85: 1-2, 8-13**

**Prayer for the Restoration of God's Favour**

**To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.**

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

<sup>2</sup>You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you pardoned all their sin. *Selab*

Let 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.<sup>[a]</sup>

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

<sup>10</sup>Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

<sup>11</sup>Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.

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

<sup>13</sup>Righteousness will go before him,  
and will make a path for his steps.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is  
now and shall be for ever. Amen.**

# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



## A reading from the Old Testament: Isaiah 40: 1-11

### God's People Are Comforted

<sup>1</sup> Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries out:  
'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every 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.

<sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, 'Cry out!'  
And I said, 'What shall I cry?'  
All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

<sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

<sup>9</sup> Get 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!'

<sup>10</sup> See, the Lord God comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,

# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



and his recompense before him.  
<sup>11</sup> He 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.

**For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.**

---

## **Today's reading from the gospels: Mark 1: 1-8**

### **The Proclamation of John the Baptist**

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup> As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

<sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

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

<sup>4</sup> John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And 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. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

**For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.**

---

## **A reflection for the Second Sunday of Advent from Revd Charles Fraser, lead minister for Great and Little Eversden, and interim lead minister for Harlton**

I was reflecting with a group of sixth formers this week how much our lives had all changed this year. It was a long list each of us could add to: working at home; cycles of lockdown; contact with children and grandchildren; fear of going to the shops; Zoom, Zoom and yet more Zoom; isolation and depression and, of course, over 60,000 deaths. The present is pretty dreich, who knows for certain when we will get back to some semblance of our old lives?

# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



In the light of our current exile and afflictions we turn a hopeful and yearning ear to the prophet Isaiah. How can we not be drawn to a reading that opens, "Comfort, give comfort to my people says your God."? It reminds me of when I was a child and fell, grazing my knees and my mother scooping me up onto her lap, soothing me and saying, "There, there, don't cry, everything is going to be all right."? Aren't those the words we long to hear now when the whole human body is wounded, grieving and afraid?

Advent is described as a season of waiting. But it is not just like waiting for a package from Amazon to arrive, is it? Waiting these days seems harder than usual and yet funnily enough more habitual too.

We are approaching the darkest time of the year. Shorter daylight, longer darkness which causes so many to find these days even more difficult than most of us. Lots of people are enduring psychological and spiritual darkness more intensely than during previous Advents. The supermarket sales figures tell us that we are turning to the bottle for relief but the yearning and hungers we feel require a deeper healing. As Christians we turn to the Word of God and place our faith in the promise it voices to us about our nurturing God who is coming to comfort us.

Come thou long expected Jesus, indeed.

The pattern for the Advent Sundays during the three-year liturgical cycle is the same each year. The first Sunday's theme – Christ will come again. The second and third Sunday's – Christ comes today. The fourth Sunday's: Christ has come. All the Advent texts are quite clear that only God can complete the work of blessings on our world. The passages guide us how to live in these in-between times before God brings a new age into being. Today Isaiah beckons us to trust and hope in a future God is preparing for us. He reminds us that, though we have sinned, our "guilt is expiated." God has a destiny for us: to release us from whatever holds us down now.

When we forget or ignore God we too, like the Israelites, go into an exile from which we can't easily extricate ourselves. They were taken into Babylonian captivity because they were not faithful to their covenant with God. They had sinned, but now God has forgiven them. Which means, God will return them to their homeland where, once again, they will be God's people. The roads are to be prepared for a swift and unobstructed return by God. God's coming will be obvious to all nations: "Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed..." The prophet is sent out to announce the good news that the devastated Jerusalem will be restored and will, in turn, announce the good news to the other cities of Judah.

# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



There are times when we feel trapped in one way or another and need God's mighty arm to bring us out. But then, wounded by our past wanderings, we need our tender shepherd God to guide us on the path of renewal and well-being.

Certainly, this past year has revealed how fragile and divisive we are. We all long for a personal and societal healing, which we cannot accomplish on our own. But God has spoken and has life for us. Isaiah tells us "Here comes with the power, the Lord God who rules by his strong arm." And more... We can have new life, a growth into a new future, because our gentle shepherd God cares for the sheep and gives us comfort, like my mother with her bruised child on her lap. God's Word draws us exiles from our hurts and broken past to a new future, to a homecoming.

God has told Israel that all her sins are forgiven, her debts cancelled and a way is open for her to go home. That's the good news Mark will reveal in his gospel about Jesus, who will cleanse the people by a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Mark introduces his gospel by revisiting Isaiah's prophecy. He returns us to the desert and prepares us to hear the fulfilment of Isaiah's promise. Exiles are going to be brought home and John the Baptist is preparing the way for them, announcing the One who is more powerful than himself, because he comes with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The evangelist is pointing us to Jesus who will fulfil all the hopes of the people that were stirred by the words of the prophets. John preached in the clear light and emptiness of the desert, a good place to hear a message, free of distractions and a place to reflect on our lives. He calls us to repentance, to rethink our way of life. Someone told me recently, "This pandemic and the free time it has forced on me, have given me an opportunity for reflection. It makes me realize how much I have taken for granted. Not just the things I own, but my relationships with family and friends. It has made me want to give more to other people. In some ways this pandemic has been a strange blessing."

What that person realized reminds us of something else about this time. While Advents calls us to wait with eager expectation for the coming of Christ, there is another waiting too. The paradox is that the One for whom we are waiting is waiting for us, because it is in and through us that Christ enters our world today. In terms of Isaiah: we are the ones who need comfort. But we are called by the One we are expecting to give comfort to others. He waits on us to do that and empowers us with His Spirit so we can.