



# SUNDAY 13<sup>th</sup> December – Advent 3

## Hymn

*Played by Nagi from Caldecote*

1 Come, thou long-expected Jesus,  
Born to set thy people free,  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.

2 Israel's strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth thou art,  
Dear desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.

3 Born thy people to deliver,  
Born a child and yet a king,  
Born to reign in us for ever,  
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.

4 By Thine own eternal Spirit,  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By thine all-sufficient merit  
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

## Opening Words and Advent Candle Lighting

God our Father,  
you gave to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age  
a son called John.

He grew up strong in spirit,  
prepared the people for the coming of the Lord,  
and baptized them in the Jordan to wash away their sins.

Help us, who have been baptized into Christ,  
to be ready to welcome him into our hearts,  
and to grow strong in faith by the power of the Spirit.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,  
the light who is coming into the world.

**Amen.**

Among the poor,  
among the proud,  
among the persecuted,  
among the privileged,

**Christ is coming to make all things new.**



In the private house,  
in the public place,  
in the wedding feast,  
in the judgement hall,  
**Christ is coming to make all things new.**

With a gentle touch,  
with an angry word,  
with a clear conscience,  
with a burning love,  
**Christ is coming to make all things new.**

That the kingdom might come,  
that the world might believe,  
that the powerful might stumble,  
that the hidden might be seen,  
**Christ is coming to make all things new.**

Within us, without us,  
behind us, before us,  
in this place, in every place,  
for this time, for all time,  
**Christ is coming to make all things new.**

## Confession

When the Lord comes,  
he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness,  
and will disclose the purposes of the heart.  
Therefore in the light of Christ let us confess our sins.

Heavenly Father,  
you call us to prepare for the coming of your Son:  
forgive us our unreadiness to receive him.  
Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**  
Lord Jesus,  
you were proclaimed by John the Baptist:  
help us also to prepare your way.  
Christ, have mercy.  
**Christ, have mercy.**



Holy Spirit,  
you speak through the prophets:  
make us attentive to hear your word.  
Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

## Readings

*Read by Joshua Vanneck from Comberton*

### **Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-end**

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;  
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
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.  
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.

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.  
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.  
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.  
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.

## **John 1.6-8, 19-28**

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said,

'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,  
"Make straight the way of the Lord"',

as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

## **Reflection**

*Written by the Cathy Michell, Methodist Lay Preacher, based in Toft.*

Well, what a mixed up Sunday this is liturgically speaking. Our Gospel reading is all about John the Baptist, and if you're lighting Advent Candles today's candle is "for" him. But today is also St Lucy's day and in some places, such as Sicily and Scandinavia, this is a big celebration. And finally today is also called Gaudete Sunday.

Three festivals for the price of one gives us the perfect excuse for a 3 part sermon to match the three candles that are often lit today for the third Sunday in Advent.



We have three figures and three key themes to look at.

The first figure is **John the Baptist** in all his wild splendour; John the Forerunner John the sign post. John's story – from birth to beheading - lays out the great themes of Advent for us, but especially the theme of **HOPE**, as expressed with such poetic power by Isaiah,

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me, he has sent me to announce the good news'.*

The gospel writers want us to know that here is a prophetic figure like Elijah, like Isaiah himself, who God has chosen to point forward and embody the hope of better things to come - God's kingdom, his rule and will triumphant for ever. The long-expected Messiah is about to appear on the Earth in power and glory, to bring judgement and a reckoning. The human response must be swift - repentance, a washing clean, a renewed life now and sure faith in God's promise of redemption, His good news for all humanity.

And how this theme speaks to us at the end of a year like no other. Even our small hopes and small joys have been dashed and disappointed since March – the domestic pleasures of hospitality and popping round for a coffee; the hopes of seeing friends and family, grandchildren and grandparents; of going on holiday, or that long-looked- forward to concert or celebration dinner. Hopes to see colleagues and yearned for freedoms, these we have lost. But think of the greater life-hopes that have turned to ashes for those who have been bereaved, who have lost jobs and homes all over the world, those who had hoped for a safe haven and received instead only rejection or punishment. We are badly in need of John's message, however hard to hear for some. We need a larger hope, the Hope of the World, to come and come quickly. We need the man Jesus to be born, to bring us all hope and good cheer this Christmas.

Our second figure is not to be found in the Bible but rather in history and folk lore. It is **Saint Lucy or Lucia** – for it is her day today in the Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox and Anglican calendar of saints to be honoured. Lucy was a Christian of noble birth born in Sicily in the third-fourth century AD, and she eventually died a martyr during the persecutions of the Roman emperor Diocletian. There are many stories of her acts, for example, that having dedicated herself to God's service, she gave her inherited riches away to the poor and even smuggled food to help fellow Christians hiding in the catacombs. It is said that in order to carry more provisions to them, she wore a wreath of candles on her head to light her way in the dark night. So celebrations for St

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Lucy's day in Scandinavian countries, include young girls dressed in white, each wearing a red sash of the martyr's suffering, but bearing a wreath on her head illuminated by candle flames.

The name Lucy, or Lucia, derives from the Latin word 'lux' – meaning **LIGHT**. So here is our second theme, as a number of traditions about Lucy present her as the bearer of light and sight in the darkness of our northern winters, as such she is the bringer of warmth and hope. Because of this her feast day today is seen as a break in Advent, a pause from the theme of penitence, to celebrate the gift of 'seeing' (she is of course the patron saint of the blind) and the gift of light with all the beauty and joy this brings. It makes us remember what Isaiah also wrote;

*'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, on those who lived in a land dark as death, a light has dawned.....' (Is. 9:2)*

And John's gospel echoes this in the great Prologue of chapter I which tells us that like Lucy, John the Baptist came to witness to a light not his own, a light shining in darkness; a light that can never be extinguished;

*'The true light which gives light to everyone was even then, coming into the world'.*

It is light that we too are looking for. Our politicians have used many metaphors to describe the coming salvation from Covid 19 that the world is looking forward to in this, the darkest time of the year. The sighting of a train in the distance was one of these images, its headlights shining out as it draws slowly towards us. On Tuesday the first people received the vaccine for a disease that has brought death and severe disease to millions. This is one of our 'lights' (together with, dare I say, the election of Mr Biden in the States), that is to enlighten our lives in 2021; and how eagerly we look forward to it shining.

But greater than this is our sure knowledge of Christ who is The Light of God's abiding presence with us, that we anticipate coming once more this Christmas into our world. Here it will shine most brightly, with our participation, on the people who Isaiah lists in our reading; on the poor, on strangers, captives and prisoners; on those who are heart-broken and those who mourn. How relevant, how cogent is this to where we are now!

And so to our third figure who is, of course, **Jesus** himself. Today is Gaudete Sunday. It is called this because, by liturgical tradition, the opening anthem of

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the Catholic Mass this Sunday began with the word 'Gaudete'. It means 'rejoice' and was the first word of a quotation taken from Philippians:

*'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.'*

The same theme is taken up in the well known Christmas carol entitled, 'Gaudete'. So JOY is our third Advent word this Sunday. As we wait in **hope** with John, and in darkness for the dawn from on high to bring us **light**, so we also wait for Jesus the **joy** of our desiring. The well-known theologian Henri Nouwen wrote that joy is,

*"the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing – sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death - can take that love away."*

This is the heart of what our world needs to hear; what we need to hear. Because it is in Jesus that we can look forward this year, despite all our difficulties great or small and the many sufferings of this present time, to a joy deeper than mere happiness, rooted in Him, a joy grounded in God's endless and faithful love. This is what Isaiah witnesses to when he writes in chapter 61 of good news for the poor, comfort for mourners, liberty given to captives, release for prisoners, the binding up of all wounded hearts, garlands instead of ashes, gladness replacing tears.

As we prepare in penitence and faith this season, but also by lighting up all our city centres, churches, homes, and trees, opening our Advent calendars day by day, igniting the candles on our Advent rings.....may we know the hope, light and joy, and may we conduits of that Christ-joy, that abiding, life-changing love, to others all around us. Amen.

## Prayers of Intercession

*Written by Michaela McNeill, from Hardwick*

The response to the words 'Your kingdom come' is '**Your will be done**'

Let us pray.

Holy God, ever with us and ever on your way towards us, we look to you this Advent, willing your kingdom to come, but knowing it's not ours to take. So come to us in the many guises of love; meet our longing; enter our waiting; give

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life to our hoping.

Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

Advent God, Hope of the hopeless, you alone give us reason to go on. Give hope to those who this day all over the world are hungry for basic gifts – food to stop the children aching with hunger, a home to put pictures on the wall, education to open the door to a job, justice to give everyone a chance. We particularly pray those that battling with the COVID pandemic, be they patients or the staff at hospitals. We pray for those that will administer the vaccine and that it proves effective.

Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

Advent God, Love of the loveless, you are the One who never fails to love to the limit. You love without question the loveless, the unlovely and the unlovable. May we do the same. We are aware of people or groups of people whom we instinctively reject because of what they have done to us or what they represent to us. We identify them in our hearts right now ... *(pause)*. Give us strength to love; give them strength to respond. And give us the gentleness to love ourselves as well. God of love, give love to the loveless.

Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

Advent God, Joy of the joyless, you are the source of inexhaustible delight. In a world of desperate pleasure and stale smiles, take us to the place where true joys are to be found. We pray for those who face Christmas and New Year with deep apprehension knowing it to be a time where much true poverty is revealed – poverty of love, of friends, of purpose, of spirit. In silence, we pray for particular families – including even our own ... *(pause)*. God of joy, give joy to the joyless.

Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

Advent God, God of those who think themselves godless, you are the rock on which are lives are built. Have mercy on those who try to live without you and lead them gently to the truth that set us free. Come afresh to the minds of those who think they have thought their way out of your reach. Come afresh too to those of us who think we have it all taped, for whom your mystery and power have become dulled and routine. Come afresh to the hearts of us all,

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whether they be full of distractions or swept clean and empty. We long for you to be central to our lives, and central to the life of the world.

Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

Holy God, this Advent we set ourselves to longing again – longing and waiting and hoping. We long for your kingdom to come and for this world to be transformed, for it to be on earth as it is in heaven. But the glimmerings of that new world have also to become real in us. So come, our Advent God, with the promise of a new birth, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Merciful Father,  
**accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

### The Collect

O Lord Jesus Christ,  
who at your first coming sent your messenger  
to prepare your way before you:  
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries  
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way  
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,  
that at your second coming to judge the world  
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;  
for you are alive and reign with the Father  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### 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.**

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**Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

## Blessing

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,  
scatter the darkness from before your path,  
and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory;  
and the blessing ...

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**