

Sunday 5th December – Second Sunday of Advent

Led by Sue Nelms, LLM



Gathering and Greeting

○ Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

○ God, make speed to save us.
○ Lord, make haste to help us.

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Praise the Lord.
The Lord's name be praised.

We light the Advent Candle

God our Father,
you spoke to the prophets of old
of a Saviour who would bring peace.
You helped them to spread the joyful message
of his coming kingdom.
Help us, as we prepare to celebrate his birth,
to share with those around us

the good news of your power and love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ,
the light who is coming into the world.
Amen.

Hymn – Hills of the North Rejoice

- 1 Hills of the North, rejoice,
echoing songs arise,
hail with united voice
him who made earth and skies;
he 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:
the God whom you have longed to know
in Christ draws near, and calls you now.

- 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 on,
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 sons of earth be blest.

Editors of English Praise (1975) based on Charles E Oakley (1832-1865)
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Benedictus (The Song of Zechariah)

**1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel,
who has come to his people and set them free.
2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of his servant David.
3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
4 To show mercy to our ancestors,
and to remember his holy covenant.
5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
6 Free to worship him without fear,
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet
of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
8 To give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
9 In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.**

Luke 1.68–79

**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.**

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.

cf 1 Corinthians 4.5

Heavenly Father,
you call us to repent of our sins:
soften our proud and stubborn hearts.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus,
you declared the forgiveness of God:
teach us to forgive one another.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Holy Spirit,
you search our hearts and show us the truth:
direct us in your way of righteousness.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

cf Isaiah 40.3–5

Alleluia.

Readings by Clare Crang

Malachi 3:1-4

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.

Luke 3:1-6

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 by Ven Alex Hughes

The word Advent means “coming”, and in the Christian calendar Advent refers to the coming of Jesus at Christmas, and also his second coming, when his glory will be revealed to all people.

A lot of the Bible readings set for Advent are quite disturbing, and today's are no exception. Listen again to this from the prophet Malachi:

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 a fuller's soap; 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.

And what about this from Luke's Gospel:

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 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; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

The prophet speaks of a time of purification, when everything that is not godly will be burned away, while the Gospel speaks of a time of great upheaval. And although I think we are supposed to understand these verses in a poetic way, so that they are not to be taken literally, the message is still clear: the coming of God is a testing time, a challenging time, a time of radical change.

On the whole I think that nowadays we tend to play down the testing and challenging demand for change. In our culture, you're not allowed to interfere with what people get up to, unless it becomes obviously harmful or dangerous. You don't dare to criticise the way people live and the choices they make. Rightly or wrongly, you don't want to be accused of being offensive or politically incorrect. And however frustrating this might seem at times, when we think other people are making a silly mess of things, I'm sure we all like the fact that we can do more or less whatever we want, and think whatever we like, without anyone trying to make us do or think differently. It is surely a good thing that we have this freedom. And it is probably a good thing that we are not free to cast our prejudices willy-nilly upon other people.

But the danger is that if no one is allowed to question us, or challenge us, we might start to believe that we are always right, and that we don't need to question or challenge ourselves; we don't need to change anything about the way we are: it's all just fine. This is surely a bad situation to be in.

The philosopher Socrates said that "an unexamined life is not worth living," and Christian spirituality makes a similar point. If you just live however you feel like living, and never stop to ask why, then you may end up living badly, damaging yourself and other people too. And it is the witness of the Bible, and all the saints, that this is in fact what happens. We all live badly in some ways; and very often we have become so used to the way we live that we can't see that it is a problem. We just take it for granted that what we think and do is more or less ok. To pick up the image from Malachi, we don't imagine that our lives are like rusty metal, in need of a good clean. Or to use the Gospel image, we don't see that the road we are travelling is crooked, and needs to be made straight.

Well maybe I'm just talking to myself now. Maybe you are only too aware of your weakness and failings. But either way – whether you think you're better than you really are, or whether you're very familiar your mistakes - there is good news; because the message of Advent doesn't just stop at telling us that we're all a bit dirty and crooked: it goes on to say that God wants to clean us up and straighten us out. The message of Advent is not one of despair, but of hope. God may be our judge, but he is also our Saviour. God will not leave us in the mess that we've created.

Advent, then, is a time to look forward in hope. But it's a particular kind of hope. It isn't dreamy and naïve; it doesn't imagine that God will just wave a magic wand and everything will suddenly be alright. Instead, Advent hope knows that it's in for a bumpy ride: it understands that in order for God to come a lot of things have got to

change, and that change is often hard and slow. So Advent hope is an act of faith and faithfulness. It is an act of faith because it trusts that God's promises will be fulfilled – that the wicked will be made righteous and the crooked straight; that despite all appearances to the contrary, God will bring all things into a perfect unity in Christ. And it is an act of faithfulness because it is prepared to go through change, to expose itself to the refiner's fire, and to let itself be pushed and pulled into shape.

It's not surprising, is it, that Christmas is more popular than Advent? In fact, Advent has been all but forgotten in our culture. But Christmas without Advent is a fairy tale – easy, painless, but ultimately hopeless too. It must not be so for us, who know that there is no short-cut to God's coming. We must walk the long Advent road, for we believe that it is the path that leads to God's eternal kingdom. Amen.

Affirmation of faith

Let us affirm our faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Though he was divine,
he did not cling to equality with God,
but made himself nothing.

Taking the form of a slave,
he was born in human likeness.

He humbled himself
and was obedient to death,
even the death of the cross.

Therefore God has raised him on high,
and given him the name above every name:

that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bow,
and every voice proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession led by Rick Nelms

Father God we pray to you today
God of love, **hear our prayer.**

Father God, we thank you for the freedom to meet in your name and for the technology that allows us to do so like this. We thank you for the lovely home that you created for us, this gorgeous little planet, floating in an enormous and magnificent sea of stars and galaxies. We thank you for the richness brought into the world through biodiversity, and for the beauty of relationships with one another and with you. We thank you that we love because you loved us first. We thank you that your solution to the problem of our sin was to send Jesus, to save us not to condemn us. We thank you that, through the life and testimony of John the Baptist, we can be confident that Jesus is indeed what he appears to be, truly fully man and truly fully God. And we thank you that through Jesus' life and death on the cross and his glorious resurrection, you made a bridge of love between us in our sinfulness and you, perfect Father God, which means that through believing in Jesus, we can have a relationship with you.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

Father God, we pray for the universal Church across the world, some 2 billion people. We pray for persecuted Christians, harassed in over 150 countries worldwide and subject to high levels of government restrictions in over 50 countries. We pray for churches which have fallen into the sin of persecuting other people. We pray for unity, for understanding that what unites us in Christ is far more important than what divides us into denominations. We pray for our archbishops, Justin and Stephen, for our Bishops, Stephen and Dagmar, and for the clergy and lay people who contribute to the church in the Lordsbridge team. We pray especially for those churches bearing the brunt of interregnum; for the people You have already chosen to come here as new members of the team, that they will hear Your call and be obedient to it. We pray for the Holy Spirit to guide those who will have a role in making appointments. We pray for us all to seek to make

the best use of the gifts which the Holy Spirit gives us, so that we might be your hands and feet and voice in the world around us.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

Father God, you made everything. Motivated by love, you made us. Help us to love the creation that you made and pronounced to be very good. Today we pray against the worst biodiversity crash in the history of the world, and against the potential rises in sea level that endanger whole nations and the homes of billions of people across the world. Through your Holy Spirit give us all the wisdom to see that every little helps in the stewardship of creation. Help Governments to speed up the process of responding to the climate crisis. Help individuals across the world to make decisions as consumers which minimise climatic consequences.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

Father God, we pray today for the many people who are suffering in many countries and regions of the world, using a series of short silences:

For the places worst affected by the pandemic;

For places where there is conflict;

for places affected by natural disasters;

for places most affected by the climate crisis;

for places where there are high levels of criminality;

for places where people are persecuted;

for the many migrants on the move across the world;

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

Father God, we pray for the local communities within which we, as an online congregation, live. We pray for our neighbours, for our friends, for our families and for those people who we find it hard to like. We pray for all those who serve in various ways to enable our communities to function. We pray for those who keep us safe and care for us, for those who educate us, for those whose research and development improves our lives, for those who provide for our needs for commodities such as housing, electricity, food and fuel.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

Father God we pray for those known to us who suffer, both those whose suffering is known to us and those who suffer alone but for you. In a series of short silences we pray:

For people whose suffering is spiritual, from worshipping false gods or no god at all:

For people whose suffering and distress is mental whether widely known or hidden:

For people whose suffering is physical, the result of injury, infection, congenital or degenerative disorder or frailty:

For people whose suffering is the result of loneliness, poverty, homelessness, captivity, modern slavery, persecution or other social deprivation.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

Father God, we pray for those people who are dying, whether they know it or not. We pray for all those who mourn, knowing that grief is not limited by time.

Reflecting the light of Jesus, the resurrection and the life, we give you thanks for all who have lived and believed in you, whether their faith was known to all, or to you alone. Raise us with them to a joyful resurrection and the fulfilment of Your eternal kingdom.

In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen

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

Collect

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.

Amen.

Awaiting his coming in glory, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:
**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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

Hymn – 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 comes,
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.
Chorus

- 3 Mary hail! Though afraid,
she believed, she obeyed.
In her womb, God is laid:
till the time expected,
nurtured and protected,
Chorus
- 4 Journey ends! Where afar
Beth'lem 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!

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Conclusion

May God the Father,
who loved the world so much that he sent his only Son,
give you grace to prepare for life eternal.

Amen.

May God the Son,
who comes to us as redeemer and judge,
reveal to us the path from darkness to light.

Amen.

May God the Holy Spirit,
by whose working the Virgin Mary conceived the Christ,
help us bear the fruits of holiness.

Amen.

And the blessing of God the Father,
God the Son and God the Holy Spirit
Be with us all, now and evermore. **Amen**

As we await our coming Saviour,
go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.