

**The Vine at Home - The Big Church Sing at Home**  
**6<sup>th</sup> December 2020 - Second Sunday in Advent – Year B**

**Call to worship**

Advent God, come amongst us.  
God of hope, shine your light upon us,  
Flickering, like a candle flame,  
Advent God, we put our hope in you.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

**Hymn: 212 StF – O come, all ye faithful**

**Opening Prayers**

Holy God,  
Quieten our minds from their ceaseless chatter,  
Still us now as you calmed the storm...

*[Pause]*

We come before you today in awe and wonder

Knowing our words can never be enough,  
but aware that they will be acceptable in your sight.

*[Pause]*

We approach you with thankful hearts  
for reminding us that you are coming,  
that we are not forgotten...  
that despite the worst we can throw at you,  
you still come.

*[Pause]*

Our penalty is paid.  
Straighten our highways,  
raise up our valleys,  
and make our rough places smooth.

*[Pause]*

Help us to prepare a place for you...  
in our hearts, in our street,  
in our school, in our workplace,  
in our nation, in our world. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

**We say together the Lord's Prayer**

**Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11 - God's People Are Comforted**

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<sup>1</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Phil Craine

**40** Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. **2** 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.

**3** A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. **4** 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.

**5** Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

**6** 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. **7** The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.

**8** The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

**9** Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;<sup>[a]</sup> lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,<sup>[b]</sup> lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah,

"Here is your God!"

**10** See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. **11** 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

**1** Lord, you were favourable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. **2** You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin.

<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

### **Mark 1:1-8 The Proclamation of John the Baptist**

**1** The beginning of the good news<sup>[a]</sup> of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.<sup>[b]</sup>

**2** As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,<sup>[c]</sup> "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,<sup>[d]</sup> who will prepare your way; **3** the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"

**4** John the baptizer appeared<sup>[e]</sup> in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** 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

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<sup>3</sup>, <sup>4</sup> Bible Text is from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved

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<sup>[f]</sup> water; but he will baptize you with<sup>[g]</sup> the Holy Spirit."<sup>5</sup>

## Reflections on the readings

Much like many of us might be at this time of year, this week's readings are full of anticipation. Each passage feels like it's teetering on the edge of a big arrival, anticipating a change to come. But, perhaps frustratingly, each passage leaves us just short. We are left waiting for the 'big moment' to arrive.

For many, this is the feeling we place ourselves in each year as we arrive at advent. A time of awaiting. This anticipation can be hard. Sometimes, instead of being able to fix our eyes on the change to come, we can get lost in the waiting. Anticipation without a sense of the destination is an anxious feeling.

But, as this week's passages encounter this same anticipation, they offer with it a reminder of the goal on which we fix our eyes.

Each passage talks about the arrival of God's kingdom. Isaiah 40 hears a voice say 'prepare a way for the Lord', and Psalm 85 believes that the Lord will 'give what is good'. In 1 Mark, we meet John the Baptist, a messenger tasked with going before Jesus, calling on people to anticipate his arrival.

In each of these circumstances, the writer speaks of what it looks like when God arrives. They paint a picture of the Kingdom of God that they are waiting for. What does this Kingdom look like?

In Isaiah 40, each challenge on the unstable path ahead is dealt with as it needs to be: 'every valley shall be raised up, every mountain shall be made low, the rough ground shall become level, and the rugged places a plain'.

In Psalm 85, we read that when God dwells in the land, righteousness is at the centre. That instead of instability, 'steadfast love and faithfulness will meet'. As a consequence, goodness will come, and the land will produce more and more. This is a picture of a world set right with itself, and abundance blooming as a consequence.

And, in Isaiah we read both at the beginning and end of the passage that all of this will be held in comfort. That God will meet us tenderly, and lead us gently towards this coming Kingdom. All of this is a picture of hope – that the land in which we dwell might be met and transformed by God into a land where in peace, love, faithfulness and righteousness might be at the forefront.

This advent, we might be finding it hard to anticipate a world that looks like this. After a year of so many changes, of fear and worry, it might feel as if we have become untethered from this hopeful vision of God's kingdom come. As we head into 2021, how might we anticipate this 'good news' for the world we live in?

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Once again, we can look to the passages to explore this. In each of these passages, as people wait for the coming Kingdom they're anticipating, they do so not passively but actively. In each, they are living out and declaring the good news upon which they are fixing their eyes.

In Isaiah, the writer invites the bearer of 'good news' to 'go up on a high mountain' and 'lift up your voice with a shout'! Those who see the vision of God's kingdom come are invited to make it known to everyone, that the 'glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together'. They are called to have a prophetic voice, to speak God's Good News to others.

Finally, in Mark 1, John the Baptist declares the Good News in his actions. He goes before Jesus, baptising people with water and declaring that soon, one will come who will offer so much more.

In each of these ways, we are shown how to live in Holy anticipation. To wait for the coming of God's Kingdom not anxiously, but by actively seeking to fix our eyes on the Good News God offers us.

How might we, as the Church, seek to live in Holy anticipation this Christmas? In today's world, where the future is uncertain, Isaiah 40 and Psalm 85 offer a vision of things set right that is Good News in uncertainty. And, churches around the country have been offering this vision to those around them practically. As churches have engaged in mutual aid, food provision, mental health support, provision for those who are homeless, they have helped people to see a reality of faithfulness and love. As the Methodist Church, together with others, has called on the Government to 'Reset The Debt' of those trapped by Covid-19 related household debt, we have offered a picture of a different reality, where each challenge is met with the response it needs, and all things are set right for all people.

By declaring the good news, living differently and acting for change, we are called to fix our own eyes on God's Kingdom. And, in doing so, we might be able to offer this vision to others, offering hope in anticipation this advent.

*[As a church congregation or in small groups, you may like to read the Reset the Debt report and discuss some of the actions available as part of the campaign – visit this website to share some of these resources with your church: [jointpublicissues.org.uk/reset-the-debt](http://jointpublicissues.org.uk/reset-the-debt)].*

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Prayers of intercession**

Leader: Gracious God,

Response: **Speak peace to us today.**

God, You have been favourable to your people

In your grace pardoning us for the times we have neglected you,

Ourselves and one another.

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<sup>6</sup> Reflection written by Hannah Brown from the Joint Public Issues Team

In your endless love for us you have promised to speak peace over us,  
That we might turn to you in our hearts and seek to be faithful.

Gracious God,

All: **Speak peace to us today.**

In your Kingdom, steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
Righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

As you seek to set all things right,  
Might we seek to fix our eyes on this vision of your Kingdom,  
Trusting in your promise that you will give all people what is good.

Gracious God,

All: **Speak peace to us today.**

God, Sometimes we struggle to see your vision for the world.

In the midst of change and challenge,  
It can be hard to see where you are working for our good.

During this advent season,  
Might we come together as a community  
To support one another to catch glimpses of your kingdom,  
That our faithfulness might spring up from the ground in abundance.

Gracious God,

All: **Speak peace to us today.**

God, We pray for those for whom the waiting is too hard.  
For so many, poverty, debt and hardship has made this year unbearable.  
For those families unsupported by our social care system.

For those whose mental health makes it hard for to see your goodness.

For those who need a reminder of your steadfast love and faithfulness.

May your righteousness go before them,  
Making a path for their steps so they will not stumble.

Gracious God,

All: **Speak peace to us today.**

God, May we hear your voice of peace,  
And know that in your kingdom is abundance of life for all. Amen.<sup>7</sup>

**Hymn: 203 StF – I had a dream that I was standing on a hillside**

## **Blessing**

We go from this moment, into a week of many moments. Hoping for an encounter with  
your grace, with your Spirit. Come amongst us, Advent God, Amen.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Hannah Brown from the Joint Public Issues Team

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<sup>8</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker