



Diocese of Ely
THREE RIVERS GROUP
Chippenham, Fordham, Isleham, Kennett, Snailwell

Sunday 29th November 2020 – Advent 1

Advent Wreath Prayer:

God of Abraham and Sarah, and all the patriarchs of old, you are our Father too. Your love is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of David. Help us in preparing to celebrate his birth to make our hearts ready for your Holy Spirit to make his home among us. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the light who is coming into the world. Amen

Hymn 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFzbxnMnxZc> Melody: Dublin

Thy kingdom come! On bended knee
the passing ages pray;
and faithful souls have yearned to see
on earth that kingdom's day.

But the slow watches of the night
not less to God belong;
and for the everlasting right
the silent stars are strong.

And lo, already on the hills
the flags of dawn appear;
gird up your loins, ye prophet souls,
proclaim the day is near:

The day in whose clear-shining light
all wrong shall stand revealed,
when justice shall be throned in might,
and every hurt be healed;

When knowledge, hand in hand with peace,
shall walk the earth abroad:
the day of perfect righteousness,
the promised day of God.

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.

Turn to us again, O God our saviour, and let your anger cease from us:
Lord, have mercy.

Show us your compassion, O Lord, and grant us your salvation:
Christ, have mercy.

Your salvation is near for those that fear you, that glory may dwell in our land:
Lord, have mercy.

Amen

Collect

Almighty God, as your kingdom dawns, turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness, that we may be ready to meet you in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Readings

A reading from the prophet Isaiah (64.1-9)

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity for ever. Now consider, we are all your people.

Psalm 80.1-8

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us!
3 Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.
4 O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
5 You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.
6 You make us the scorn of our neighbours; our enemies laugh among themselves.
7 Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.
8 You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.

A reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (1.3-9)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

A reading from St. Mark's Gospel (13.24-end)

'But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.'

'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'

'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the

house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

Sermon (with thanks to Sue Potts)

<https://youtu.be/Bt5QSPJo2q8>

Advent has always been a special time for as long as I can remember. Those cold, wet, dark mornings when, as a child, I was cheered by the sight of the glitter-decorated Advent Calendar propped on the kitchen windowsill. My sister and I took turns in opening the little windows and doors to reveal chubby angels and churches and donkeys and the like. There were whispered secrets and the counting up of money in our piggy banks and time spent muffled up in bobble hats and mittens gazing at the brightly lit display of bath salts and soap on a rope and packaged perfume in the local chemist's shop window.

I'm sure you've probably got similar memories, too, for it is a season when there is, in the waiting, a palpable sense of anticipation and excitement of the joy that is to come. Moreover, Advent Sunday marks the beginning of the Church Year; a time to start afresh and prepare to receive that most wondrous story of all into our hearts and lives. And in times past, I have found the encounter with this particular set of readings depressing and jarring; frankly a kill-joy in a season that's all about hope and joy and peace!

But this year is *way* different. We're all tired and weighed down by long months of watching and waiting and longing. Waiting in fear of the virus; longing for some sort of return to normal life. Waiting to see what will happen post-Brexit and post-USA election. Longing to see loved ones and friends. Waiting to be free from fear and anxiety and longing to witness the restoration of peace and equity and community and well-being. Months of waiting and longing ! And so, standing on the threshold of this new church year, Isaiah's dark lament of loss and suffering, Jesus' description of a world turned upside down and shaken and the psalmist's keen longing for restoration resonate deeply with our particular time and context, for in the midst of the turmoil and uncertainty we are profoundly aware of the brokenness of the world, and, as God's people, long for the light of Christ to overcome the creeping darkness.

These disturbing texts resonate deeply within us, for in them is a great honesty and realism, allowing us, as countless millions of God's people who have suffered and lamented and despaired before us, to be open about the mess humanity has made of the world, to own to our dark and painful feelings and like the psalmist, even to get angry with God, and yell out, Where are you? Restore us!

In mirroring the sorry mess of humanity's present predicament, the readings can cause us to withdraw further within ourselves and fear to venture forward. However, as with so many of our sacred texts, a deeper reading reveals the constant thread of Covenantal promise and glimmers of hope and grace sufficient to act 'as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path', encouraging the listener to step over the threshold into unfamiliar territory.

So, in Isaiah is, yes, the sad and sorry recognition of humanity's horrendous sin and folly and the longing for any sign of God's presence.

'Is there any hope for us? Can we be saved?'

Yet the glimmer of God's grace is evident. However disappointing and despicable the actions, God can surely never forget all he has so lovingly and tenderly created. And Isaiah clings to the promise made to Abraham, 'I will be your God, and you will be my people'

Still, God, you are our Father.

We're the clay and you're our potter:

All of us are what you made us.

Don't be too angry with us, O God.

Don't keep a permanent account of wrongdoing.

Keep in mind, please, we are your people—all of us.

(The Message).

In Isaiah's analogy, the vessel is damaged and dysfunctional. The potter has chosen not to completely destroy the vessel, but could be justified in rendering it useless and ignoring it. But Isaiah's plea is uttered with hope, looking to the potter as one who will turn not only to correct the flaws, but work to reshape and restore and make new.

Likewise the psalmist, well aware that the consequences of the people's sinful actions have led to sorrow and anguish and tears, still has the confidence and faith to come before God who is as Shepherd and owner and tender of the vineyard that is Israel; Look, we've messed up big time. We know we deserve your wrath and anger, but we can't get along without you. Restore us, God! let your face shine, that we may be saved!

Mark's gospel was most likely written either at the time of the siege of Jerusalem or after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Today's text, often referred to as 'a little apocalypse', finds Jesus, shortly before his own suffering and death, predicting both the destruction of the temple and the time of great trial that will come before the ushering in of the fulfilment of God's purposes;

*the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
Stars fall out of the sky,
cosmic powers tremble. (The Message)*

For Mark's readers this description of a world turned upside down was a reality, experiencing first-hand what it meant to live with and in Christ in the real world, remaining faithful, even through the suffering and awfulness. In Mark's rendition, Jesus' words, as all apocalyptic literature, could be read as encouragement in the waiting and watching and longing. In the words of one commentator

"The basic message of apocalyptic visions is this: The rebellion against the reign of God is strong, as the wicked oppress the righteous. Things will get worse before they get better. But hang on just a little longer, because just when you are sure you cannot endure, God will intervene to turn the world right side up."
(Christopher Hutson: Feasting on the Word)

This year, so very many have, on a personal level, experienced their world being turned upside down through unspeakable loss and suffering. The last stanza of W H Auden's poem on loss describes such a personal apocalypse perfectly:

*'The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good'.*

When it may seem like the end of the world, Christ is there at every ending, every loss, ready to enfold those who are lost and without hope in his love; ready to gently encourage and enable those brought low to stand upright again, to be alert to the dawning of a new beginning that will surely come and bring wholeness and healing.

This is, I think, what Advent is all about...an honest recognition of our brokenness and the sure and certain hope that God is, in every time and season, going about the work of revealing His presence. And in this awful year, this longest season of longing and waiting, we are exhorted to keep watch; to keep awake, to be alert, to keep grounded in the hope of our faith, and to prepare our hearts so that not only may we be ready for Christ when he comes in all his glory on the last day, but also that we may recognize him in the here and now. For amid the seeming myriad of 'little apocalypses' that are all too evident, Christ beckons us, each and every one, to perceive and to play our part in the promised healing, renewal, reconciliation and redemption of his creation.

Hymn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TS7AlBeApwk>

Longing for light, we wait in darkness
Longing for truth, we turn to You.
Make us your own, your holy people
Light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice. (*Refrain*)

Longing for food, many are hungry
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us Your bread, broken for others
Shared until all are fed. (*Refrain*)

Longing for shelter, many are homeless
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others
Walls made of living stone. (*Refrain*)

Many the gift, many the people
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another
Making your kingdom come. (*Refrain*)

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

was incarnate from the Holy Spirit
and the Virgin Mary and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Intercessions *(with thanks to Muriel Hood)*

Heavenly Father, on this first Sunday of Advent, we remember the promises delivered by the prophets and the hope we have in your son Jesus Christ.

Father, let your hope arise in our hearts. In this season of waiting, watching and expectation, may we lift our eyes to see that you alone are where our hope comes from.

Help us to shake off the anxiety, discouragement and distractions that have filled this year.

Listening God, we thank you that you are God with us, that we can glimpse your kingdom around us and that we see signs of you in our world.

Lord hear us. *Lord graciously hear us.*

As we begin our advent journey we think of those who are living in darkness. They might be on the other side of the world or right next door to us.

God shine your light on those living with fear, loneliness, oppression, depression, poverty or violence. We are mindful, that as well as those who are very much alone during this pandemic, there are those who are finding being together is causing an immense strain on each of them.

We pray Lord for your special protection, especially during lockdowns, on children caught up in situations which are frightening and strange.

We thank you that schools and colleges, having reopened, have enabled children and young people to make new friends and see old friends again. We pray for the safety of all communities as the Christmas holidays approach and there is more sharing of indoor spaces.

Lord hear us. *Lord graciously hear us.*

Heavenly Father, there was no room at the inn for your son, give courage to all those who are homeless.

Heavenly Father your son and his parents fled into Egypt, give comfort to all refugees.

Heavenly Father, your son fasted in the desert, give relief to all who are short of food.

Lord hear us. *Lord graciously hear us.*

Lord, have mercy on those who are living in the place of the shadow of death, those in that valley coping with terminal illness or those who have lost loved ones.

God who is light, bring strength, hope and comfort today.

We pray that your light Lord may shine in prisons where prisoners are spending long hours alone, we pray for safety and calm for them and their families and all prison staff.

Lord God help us to reflect on our own lives. Show us the darkness within us, where we have become hardened to the plight of others, losing the will to do good.

Bring your light and forgiveness and help us today to walk in your light, knowing that in the darkest places it is possible for the light to shine brightest.

Finally, Heavenly Father, we ask you to come into our world of darkness. Light up our lives with your coming. Fulfil all our longings with the joy of your birth and strengthen our resolve to work for change in our world. May we share with others the hope of your birth which each Advent brings.

Lord hear us. *Lord graciously hear us.*

Amen

Reflection

At the point in our service where we would usually be remembering the Last Supper together, we pause to pray for those with whom we would usually be receiving bread and wine in church. Quietly think of each of those in church, those you know well and know what to pray for them and those you know less well and are unsure of how to pray. Perhaps at this point you would like to eat some bread and drink something. We are reminded that although separated at this time we are still members together of the body of Christ.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen

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

O come, O come, Emmanuel! Redeem thy captive Israel
That into exile drear is gone, Far from the face of God's dear Son.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou Branch of Jesse! draw the quarry from the lion's claw;
From the dread caverns of the grave, From nether hell, thy people save.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, thou Dayspring bright! Pour on our souls thy healing light;
Dispel the long night's lingering gloom, and pierce the shadows of the tomb.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O Come, thou Lord of David's Key! The royal door fling wide and free;
Safeguard for us the heavenward road, and bar the way to death's abode.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Adonai, Who in thy glorious majesty
From that high mountain clothed in awe, Gavest thy folk the elder Law.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.

Amen.

Closing Music:

Classical Chorale: Wachet Auf. J.S. Bach

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=1J8hrZzorno&list=RDAMVM1J8hrZzorno>

Contemporary Hymn: 'There is a longing in our hearts'. Anne Quigley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gP9BBz6fRkk>

Contemporary Worship Band: 'So will I'. Hillsong Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJts9DgX8SA>

Notices

MU Prayers by Phone for Advent

The Mothers' Union will be joining together to mark the start of Advent with another 'Prayers by Phone' session on Thursday 3 December at 11.30am. To join in, dial 0203 901 7895, then enter the following Meeting ID number on your keypad when prompted: 817 4323 6690

Beatitudes Course

The Pilgrim Course on the Beatitudes will be held on Zoom at the following times:

- Tuesdays, 7.30-9pm (starting 3rd November)
- Fridays, 10.30-12 noon (starting 6th November)

There is still space and time to join if you're interested. Please contact Rev'd Anna for details if so.

Bible Book Club

Next instalment will be on Wednesday 2nd December 7.30-9pm. We will be looking at the letter to the Hebrews. Good if you can have read the book in advance.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82818509505> Meeting ID: 828 1850 9505

Sunday Evening Service – 8pm

A quiet service to round off Sunday (open to everyone but may be particularly valuable if you're not able to come to church in the morning). The Zoom session will open from 7.30 to allow people to chat beforehand, and worship will start at 8pm. We will explore different forms of Night Prayer through the month (1st Sunday: traditional Compline; 2nd: Celtic Night Prayer; 3rd: Compline in contemporary language; 4th: Contemplative Night Prayer), beginning on 25th October with a contemplative service. Please consider who you might invite to join us for this new venture. Meeting ID: 810 1509 1842.

Intercessions:

Wedding

Friday 4th December 3pm (Fordham)

Luke Jonathan Darley and Hanah Marie Kilchenman

Funerals: (Attendance by invitation only)

Stanley Gilbey (Fordham)

West Suffolk Crematorium Tuesday 1st December 11.30am

Jo Stevens (Fordham)

West Suffolk Crematorium Tuesday 8th December 2pm

Three Rivers Ministry Team

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