

HOW Mission Community & KSAT Worship Service for 6th December 2020

THEME: 'Promises! Promises! Fulfilled!'

Welcome to this week's service for 2nd Sunday in Advent. We meet in the presence of Almighty God, a God of promises fulfilled, of hope, justice and grace. Advent is a time of spiritual preparation. The prophets spoke to the people of God, telling them of the need to be ready for what God would do; John the Baptist called the people of his day (and us) to prepare.

Call to Worship: *'And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'* (Isaiah 40v5)

Prayer

God of all time and space, who are we, that You should come to us? Yet, You have visited Your people and redeemed us in Your Son. As we prepare to celebrate His birth, make our hearts leap for joy at the sound of Your Word and move us by your Spirit to bless Your wonderful works. We ask this, through Him, whose coming is certain, whose day draws near, even Your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen**

HYMN MP 393 – Joy to the world <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AolsRxT-YQQ>

(I have chosen this hymn because of the words, 'Let earth receive her King; let every heart prepare Him room! Jesus place is on the throne of our lives, as we open up ourselves to receive Him. And, I have chosen this version because of the 'joy' of their delivery of the good news. Rejoice, Jesus comes!)

Joy to the world! The Lord is come! Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room and heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing
Joy to the world! The Saviour reigns! Your sweetest songs employ
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy
He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love
And wonders of His love and wonders, wonders of His love

Prayer of Adoration

O Lord our God, it is beyond our power to put into words the wonder of your coming, and all that it revealed and continues to reveal. We praise You for the light that came into the world at the birth of Your Son, and because that light is still shining and showing Your glory to us. No longer need we desperately hope for the best, for we have the assurance of Your love and grace. Accept, we pray, the adoration which comes from hearts that are full of wonder, a wonder words cannot express; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayer of Confession

Lord, we have not kept watch for You. We have occupied ourselves with our own concerns. We have not waited to find Your will for us. We have not noticed the needs of people around us. We have not acknowledged the love that has been shown to us.

Forgive us for our lack of watchfulness. Help us to wait to know Your will. Help us to look out for the needs of others. Help us to work and watch for Your coming.

'I am making all things new', says the Lord.

This is Christ's gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven'. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

Lord's Prayer

Reading—Psalm 85 v 1-2, 8-13

You, LORD, showed favour to Your land; You restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of Your people and covered all their sins.

I will listen to what God the LORD says; He promises peace to His people, His faithful servants—but let them not turn to folly. Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him, that His glory may dwell in our land. Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. Righteousness goes before Him and prepares the way for His steps.

Thought

This Psalm opens the psalmist praising God for all that has been done and is inviting the people to join together in prayer that God would renew His favour & mercies to them, at a time when they are suffering distress. For me, this speaks clearly into the present time of disruption and anxiety—as we feel separated with the effects of Covid.

In v8-13, the psalmist looks forward with anticipation to what will come. The word 'will' is repeated ten times. Read the verses again, letting each 'will' resound in your mind. A stark contrast is established between the opening verses, lamenting lost blessing, and the future fulfilment in God's plan – supremely with the coming of Christ Jesus.

We, like the psalmist, are asked to stand in these challenging moments between times past and future fulfilment. We wait in hope for Christ's coming, when God will make all things new!

As a sign on the lawn of the vicarage in Bamford (Derbyshire) states, 'The vicar of Bamford lives in Hope' (ie the next village)!!

Will we share our HOPE in Christ this Advent?

Reading – Isaiah 42 v 1-9

"Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen One in whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on Him, and He will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out.

In faithfulness He will bring forth justice; He will not falter or be discouraged till He establishes justice on earth. In His teaching the islands will put their hope."

This is what God the LORD says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you."

HYMN H&P 109 – Let earth and heaven

combine <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FO1AihQTNFQ>

Let earth and heaven combine, angels and men agree, to praise in songs Divine
The incarnate Deity, Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.

He laid His glory by, He wrapped Him in our clay; unmarked by human eye
The latent Godhead lay; infant of days He here became, and bore the mild Immanuel's name.

Unsearchable the love that hath the Saviour brought; the grace is far above
Or man or angel's thought; suffice for us, that God we know, our God is manifest below.

He deigns in flesh to appear, widest extremes to join; to bring our vileness near,
And make us all Divine; and we the life of God shall know, for God is manifest below.

Made perfect first in love, and sanctified by grace; we shall from earth remove,
And see His glorious face; His love shall then be fully showed, and man shall all be lost in God.

Reflection

Isaiah 42v6 – “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles

‘Two is for the prophets and for the light they bring; they are candles in the darkness, all alight for Christ the King’ is a verse from the carol ‘The Holly and the Ivy’. These words fit well with Isaiah’s prophecy that *‘the people walking in darkness have seen a great light!’ (Isaiah 9v2)* In those times of darkness and despair for God’s people, the prophets remind them of God’s covenant blessings and gracious promises – and that they were to be alight to the nations. Jesus is described majestically by John, *‘In Him [Jesus] was life and the life was the light of men’ (John 1v4)*. No longer would people have to live far from the light. At Advent we wait for the coming of Jesus, who declared, *‘I AM the Light of the World’ (John 8v12)*. The true light has lived among us on earth and we wait in hope and expectation to celebrate again the birth of Jesus. Last Sunday at Families Adventing Together (Tebay/Orton area), the children had each been given a jam-jar, covered with coloured tissue paper and containing a night light. When all the room lights in the various homes were switched off, smiling faces lit in orange, red and yellow, beamed out of the ‘zoom’ screen – truly an illustration of ‘this little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine’ and the difference it can make! In these days of difficulty and darkness, Jesus calls each one of us to be lights in this world – a symbol and sign of HOPE, grace and of sins forgiven. In a recent school assembly, on light, I showed the children a shunter’s oil lamp – which is used on railways at night. This lamp has three purposes: to light the way in the darkness; to show red for ‘Stop, Danger’; and to show green for ‘Go’!

There are many similarities between the purposes of my shunter’s lamp and the messages and purposes of the prophets – and our responsibilities in the way we respond.

Firstly – **to light the way**. The psalmist says, *‘Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’ (Psalm 119 v105)*.

The prophets knew the Scriptures and listened to God’s words and revealed God’s truth to the people. It can be easy to get lost in this dark world, with so many voices calling for our attention and allegiance. The prophets (including John the Baptist) called the people back to God. The story is told of a local preacher, returning home, after preaching, over the Derbyshire moors on a dark and foggy night. He was unsure where he was in the fog, then looking up he saw the light from the Sherwood Foresters Lighthouse on top of Crich Stand and headed towards it – knowing it was his way home!

Isaiah said, *‘On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned’ (Isaiah 9v2)* and David uses a similar picture in *Psalm 23 v4*, *‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death You are with me’* – a picture of God ‘lighting our way’ home!

When we face times of trouble and doubt, and we all do (!), do we look back with regret or, perhaps, forward with fear? Do we look downwards in despair or become introspective and self-doubting? Or do we look upwards and fix our eyes on Jesus Christ – the light of the World?

But remember, Jesus also tells us *‘You are the light of the world ... let your light shine’ (Matthew 5v14f)*.

Secondly, on my shunter’s lamp, is the red light for **danger – stop!** Mark’s gospel begins with these words: *‘The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way – a voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.”’ (Mark 1v1-3)*

Both John the Baptist and Isaiah don’t pull any punches – Isaiah calls the people donkeys or mules (*Isaiah 1v3*) and John calls them a ‘brood of vipers (*Luke 3v7*) – both calling the people to repentance.

God has called His people to be a light to the nations and His desire is for them to *‘act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God’ (Micah 6v8)*. Instead they ‘religious’ in their actions but with hearts were far from God and both Isaiah and John say, ‘Danger – Stop – stop your

injustices, your intolerances, your sinning. Repent – ie turn around! Our worship is to reflect a lived reality, lives that speak of God's love and show that love to the world. God calls His people to holy, forgiving, compassionate and caring – just as He is. And our lives are to call out 'Danger-Stop' to the darkness of corruption, violence, anger and greed in our world.

The final light on my lamp is green for '**Go – move forward**'. In *2 Corinthians 1v20*, Paul writes, '*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are Yes in Christ. And so, through Him, the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God*'. Jesus comes to fulfil God's promises spoken by the prophets, to bring a new covenant, written on people's hearts, to bring peace between God and people, to bring a new way of living – a way of mercy, love, hope and eternal life – all through Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus came, '*Not to abolish the law and the prophets ... but to fulfil them*' (*Matthew 5v17*). The blind saw, the lame walked, lepers were cured, the dead were raised and the good news was preached! We are called to follow where Jesus leads – to **Go** in His footsteps into this world with His message of love.

Will we 'prepare the way for the Lord' this Advent. God calls us to be a covenant people and a light for the world. A light that shows the way, warns of dangers and moves forward in love.

Jesus said, '*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me, will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life*' (*John 8v12*).

Hymn – With a prayer You feed the hungryhttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56xKT8_mIQs

(I chose this hymn because of the words, 'Love incarnate, love divine'. The presence of Jesus in this world gives us hope. God is with us; Love is here! The final verse challenges us to respond to Christ's call in our lives. Last Monday evening, an item on BBC News, featuring two ministers who were distributing food, spoke of a powerful need for hands to reach out in love and tell of the hope in Jesus in our broken, hurting world)

With a prayer You fed the hungry, with a cry You stilled the storm;
With a look You had compassion on the desperate and forlorn.
With a touch You healed the leper, with a shout You raised the dead;
With a word expelled the demons, with a blessing broke the bread.

*Love Incarnate, Love Divine, captivate this heart of mine,
Till all I do speaks of You.*

As a sheep before the shearer You were silent in Your pain;
You endured humiliation at the hands of those You'd made.
And as hell unleashed its fury You were lifted on a tree,
Crying 'Father God, forgive them, place their punishment on me.'

I will feed the poor and hungry, I will stand up for the truth;
I will take my cross and follow to the corners of the earth.
And I ask that You so fill me with Your peace, Your power, Your breath,
That I never love my life so much to shrink from facing death.

Prayers of Intercession:

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father." (Matthew 24v36)

For those facing times of uncertainty:

For those facing a time of uncertainty about their health: as they prepare to keep hospital appointments or await the results of tests with apprehension; for those whose days are troubles with anxiety and despair and for those experiencing a loss of confidence and joy.

Let us pray to the Lord **with assurance and hope**

For those facing a time of uncertainty with their employment and for those who have already lost their jobs; for those experiencing rejection, bitter disappointment and fear as they wonder how they will support their family; and for those who are in danger of losing all sense of self-worth.

Let us pray to the Lord **with assurance and hope**

For those facing a time of uncertainty with their relationships as the demands of work and family mean there is less time for one another; for those homes & families under strain of conflict and misunderstanding as they struggle with broken promises and the pain of trust that is lost; and for those left alone with precious memories of relationships of love.

Let us pray to the Lord **with assurance and hope**

For those facing a time of uncertainty in their concern for the world, as all they see and hear speaks of a world which is daily tearing itself apart; for those filled with anguish for the millions who are hungry and starving, as they watch in despair a world that seems to care little for people or planet; and for those who ache for the thousands killed by war or disease.

Let us pray to the Lord **with assurance and hope**

For those facing a time of uncertainty with their faith as the familiar landscape of church, Bible and Christian faith are ridiculed; for those who have lost the faith they received as a child as they forgot the need to nourish it with worship and fellowship; and for those whose faith has withered through the failure to use it each day.

Let us pray to the Lord **with assurance and hope**

For those facing a time of uncertainty with themselves as they have lost their way on thye journey of life; for those who no longer know their own name or the names of those they love, as the years have stolen their memories of people and places once precious; and for those, young and old, who are simply longing to make a new start.

Let us pray to the Lord **with assurance and hope**

In the name of Jesus, the source of all hope and assurance

Amen

Hymn MP 449 – Love Divine<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSk42WBXXsY>

Love Divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, to earth come down,
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling, all Thy faithful mercies crown.

Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver, let us all Thy grace receive;
Suddenly return, and never, never more Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing, serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise Thee, without ceasing, glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish then Thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation, perfectly restored in Thee,
Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise!

The Blessing

Now may the peace and blessing of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest and remain with us this day and always. **Amen.**