



Advent 3

13 December 2020

The Bell is rung and we stand for the Bible - sign of the enduring and ongoing word of God.

Acknowledgement of First peoples and Ancestors.

We acknowledge this land as that cared for and nurtured by the people of the Kulin nation from time immemorial.

This is the land where the people of the Wurundjeri language gathered and celebrated their stories, songs and dances passed on by their ancestors and the Great Spirit of the Dreaming over countless generations. We acknowledge these ancestors and give thanks for their memory.

We also give thanks for the foremothers and forefathers of our St. Andrews' Uniting Church and the Hanbit Church; all those who have given their gifts and graces to be a shining light of God in the Christ among us for the wider Community of which we are a part.

To the community of saints, living and of the past, named and unnamed we give honour and respect.

The Advent Wreath is lit.

Hymn 289

*'Christmas is coming'
the church is glad to sing
and let the Advent candles
brightly burn in a ring.*

*The first is for God's promise
to put the wrong things right,
and bring to earth's darkness
the hope of love and light.*

*Christmas is coming'
the church is glad to sing
and let the Advent candles
brightly burn in a ring.*

*The second for the prophets
who said that Christ would come
with good news for many
and angry words for some.*

*'Christmas is coming'
the church is glad to sing
and let the Advent candles
brightly burn in a ring.*

*The third is for the Baptist,
who cried, 'Prepare the way.
Be ready for Jesus, both this and everyday'.
'Christmas is coming'
the church is glad to sing
and let the Advent candles
brightly burn in a ring.*

Sentence I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God

Isaiah 61:10

Invocation

Be known to us now, Holy Spirit, for the life of faith is calling us with anticipation. Show to us your life: show to us your mind and speak to our expectant hearts

Come gracious Spirit, come.

The Peace The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Welcome and Notices

Hymn 272 *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.*

*Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to rein in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.*

*By thine own eternal Spirit
in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.*

Assurance and Thanksgiving

O God, it is sometimes in the centre of our waiting that we lose hold of hope – when we have moved past the enthusiasm of our beginnings but are not yet near enough to see your gifts to us. We long for quicker answers and find ourselves impatient to know your will and to see your face more clearly.

Be with us in our anxieties and our hope, Lord Jesus Christ.

Take our hands and lead us towards your grace.

O God often we discover small beginnings of your work in us, seeds of new life which call us on to greater things. Sometimes we let that die in us because we are afraid of where it will lead us; or we see that happening in others who grasp such beginnings in spite of their frailties, and we dare not stand with them in case they may bring changes which we do not want in our reality.

Be with us in our anxieties and our hope, Lord Jesus Christ.

Take our hands and lead us towards your grace.

Restore us to your way.

Be assured. God is faithful to us forever. The Christ is among us and will remain with us. We give thanks to you, O God, that day after day, year after year, we can have absolute confidence in your love for us and presence among us. We thank you for those moments when we find and share your faithfulness in and with other people who have become your good servants through the community of faith.

Amen

Hymn 497

*Let all mortal flesh keep silence
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly-minded,
for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descending
comes full homage to demand.*

*King of kings, yet born of Mary,
as of old on earth he stood,
Lord of lords, in human vesture,
in the body and the blood,
he will give to all the faithful
his own self for heavenly food.*

*Rank on rank the host of heaven
spreads its vanguard on the way,
as the Light of light comes shining
from the realms of endless day,
that the powers of hell may vanish
as the darkness clears away.*

*At his feet the six-winged seraphs,
cherubim with sleepless eye,
veil their faces to the presence,
as with ceaseless voice they cry,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
Lord most high!*

Scripture Isaiah 61:1-4 ,8-11

Your word, O Lord is a lamp to our feet
a light to our path.

**The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those
who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God ; to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress
instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of
praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.
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 wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will
make an everlasting covenant with them. Their offspring shall be known
among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all
who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the Lord
has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul 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 like a priest with a
beautiful headdress and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as
the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to
sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up
before all the nations.**

Reflection

So many of the passages in the Hebrew Scriptures are statements of faith and this passage today is certainly a joyous affirmation by the prophet. His conviction is a clarion affirmation of his experience of God's reality in his experience and his certainty that the reign of God is at hand. Yet he lives in troubled times and is experiencing places and situations which could so easily have undermined his faith. Isaiah's affirmations are hard-won songs of joy and they stand in the midst of the tears of life. They are claimed in the face of oppression and emptiness. Would that our songs of hope in our often fraught life experiences had the ring of authenticity when challenged by life's uncertainties. They certainly should as the hope that is ours as we prepare to welcome the Christ child is founded on the rock of the love of God entering

into human experience with the finality of the ultimate action of God: his complete presence in a human life through birth, death and resurrection.

Gospel John 1:6-8

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

John 1:19-28

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ". And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to 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, "Then why are you baptising, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptise with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptising.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

At this time of Advent the focus of the gospel is preparation for the One who comes, the One for whom the long history of Israel had been the preparation, not the fulfilment. The Christ child of the Christmas stories is an unlikely fulfilment; yet this child is the ultimate presence of God for humankind. This is the moment of the challenge of God ending the long faith journey of the ages and in this amazing act of presence is a fulness of life that we would not otherwise know. Being a Christian is about being a faith person who is truly open to the presence of God, about knowing that God is there as the ultimate reality for us even when we are uncertain about the specific way in which God is choosing to be present, even when we are uncertain about the moment at which God's presence will impact upon the situation in which we find ourselves. As we move towards the Christmas season for which Advent is the time of preparation, we are reminded of this in the events in which the first Christians saw God. They saw God in an unlikely pregnancy and in the interaction between two kinswomen, Elizabeth and Mary, as they both prepared for the

births of sons who would be cousins, John and Jesus. Yet only one would be the One in whom God would be the divine revelation in human form. They saw God in the simple vulnerability of a newborn child born in the humblest of circumstances imaginable. Ross Kingham, a contemporary Christian poet, captures the essence of the drama of Advent in his poem *The Powerful Unexpected* in his anthology ***Whispers: Prayers and Poems***

*The Powerful Unexpected
Beyond our dreaming,
Planning,
Our predicting.
Far, far beyond our imagining
(No God-in-a-box, tinsel and card
'O thank you, just what I always wanted!'
Said with a giggle.
God has not come in this manner
But will
Certainly.*

*Beyond summer-winter cycle
More certain than seed -to -flower miracle,
More full than fruit, ripening deathward
Leaping from cosmic splendour,
Regal, with fragile, beauteous strength,
Bathed in love.
All-transforming.*

Hymn 288 *Not the powerful, not the privileged,
not the famous in the land,
but the no-ones and the needy
were the first to hold God's hand.*

*Not a well-established family
with an heirloom christening shawl
but a homeless, wandering couple
parented the Lord of All.*

*Not, at first, to little children,
nor to those whose faith burned bright
but to adults, stalled in darkness,
angels brought God's love and light.*

*God, determined to be different
from the standards we think best,
in his choice of friends and family,
lets forgotten folk be blessed.*

*Not obsessed by our achievements,
worldly wealth or family tree,
may we, in and with God's chosen,
find our fondest pedigree.*

Offering

O God, as we make these offerings for the work of the church in the world, we pray that our lives will be opened through faith so that we see and know where your love is needed.

Receive our gifts in Christ's name. Amen

Prayers for Ourselves and Others and Lord's Prayer

Loving God, we dare not sing a glad song this day without bringing before you those here and in other places for whom singing a song of joy is a costly and hard-won moment of hope.

Even our own songs of faith are apt to arise from small moments of delight in the midst of struggling life. We come to you now with our prayers for ourselves and others:

for you are the source and ground of all our hope, you are the wonder at the end of the waiting of Advent and you are the God of all eternity.

Hear our prayers, O God of hope: Take the ashes of burnt-out life, the fragments of frail futures and cover them with flowers of your creative possibilities. Take the tears of the world and transform our weeping with the oil which burns with warmth and light for a new day.

Lift our hearts with your compassionate encouragement so that we go to this week filled with inspiration for a different future of your making;

for you are the source and ground of all our hope, you are the wonder at the end of the waiting of Advent and you are the God of all eternity.

And so we pray in the words that Jesus taught us

***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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours
now and for ever.
Amen***

Hymn 312

*Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.*

*He came down to earth from heaven
and is God and Lord of all,
his shelter was a stable,
his cradle was a stall;
with the poor, despised and lowly
lived on earth our Saviour holy.*

*And through all his wondrous childhood,
day by day like us he grew;
he was little, weak and helpless,
tears and smiles like us he knew;
and he feels for all our sadness,
and he shares in all our gladness.*

*And our eyes at last shall see him,
through his own redeeming love,
for that child so dear and gentle
is our Lord in heaven above,
and he leads his children on
to the place where he is gone.*

*Not in that poor lowly stable,
with the oxen standing by,
we shall see him: but in heaven,
set at God's right hand on high,
when his children gather round
bright like stars, with glory crowned.*

Go now.

The Christ is near and soon we will hear the sounds of Christmas joy.

Benediction May the whole earth be renewed in its God,
the universe sound with the Christ's promise of
resurrection life
and the Spirit surround us with a cloud of grace.
Amen

Reverend Graeme Kerr