

# 10<sup>th</sup> December 2023 – Morning Service

## Advent 2

Rev Michael Payne

### Advent Liturgy

Our Advent journey calls us on in preparation for what's to come. Our dusting off and getting ready tweaking, changing what we do. Advent God, **dust us off today.**

Because we've always done it doesn't mean we always must, as our journey makes us think again and change the way we live. Advent God, **dust us off today.**

The challenge is to learn what old ways should be no more, to encounter and experience and be brave in stepping out. Advent God, **dust us off today.**

The more we learn, the more we change. The more we think, the more we grow. The more we dust our old ways off, the more our faith shines out. Advent God, **dust us off today.**

*[The 1st and 2nd candles are lit]*

Advent God, as we light this second candle, may we accept the challenges and changes to our living and our loving that your extraordinary gift leads us all to make. May we be prepared to dust off old ways, learn new ways and become more Christ-like. **Amen.**

### Call to Worship

Come with your thoughts, and your feelings. Come with your busyness, and your chaos. Come with your calm, and with your worries. Come with your hopes and your fears. Come with your whole being that the light of God will fill your whole being in this time of worship.

### A Gathering Prayer

Lord, we come because we want to see you today, we come because we want to hear your story, we come because we want to experience your love, we come because we want to encounter you in our lives.

**Amen.**

### StF 443 – Come let us sing of a wonderful love

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| 1) Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,<br>Tender and true;<br>Out of the heart of the Father above,<br>Streaming to me and to you:<br>Wonderful love<br>Dwells in the heart of the Father above.              | 3) Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;<br>Why do they roam?<br>Love only waits to forgive and forget;<br>Home, weary wanderer, home!<br>Wonderful love<br>Dwells in the heart of the Father above. |
| 2) Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,<br>Joyfully came;<br>Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,<br>Sharing their sorrow and shame;<br>Seeking the lost,<br>Saving, redeeming at measureless cost. | 4) Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,<br>Come and abide,<br>Lifting my life, till it rises above<br>Envy and falsehood and pride,<br>Seeking to be<br>Lowly and humble, a learner of thee.   |

*Robert Walmsley*

### Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy God, You spoke and order came out of chaos. You spoke and life came into being. You spoke and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. You speak and we can hear you. We praise and adore you for you are the God of the now yet the God of eternity, the God of the here and yet the God of beyond.

You are the God we can encounter in daily living and the God who invites us to share in your love for all you created. God of Nazareth, Bethlehem, Galilee and Jerusalem we worship you. God of Israel, Gaza and West Bank; God of Russia and Ukraine we worship you. God of where I am, where I have been and where I shall go I worship you. God of encounter, challenge and life, we worship.

[Silence]

Forgive us, Lord, for focusing on our problems and not looking beyond them to you and the bigger picture. Forgive us for thinking we know best and becoming frustrated and impatient when our desires and plans are not met. Forgive us for letting the wrong things of the world entrap us so that we can become entrapped up only in the earthly, help us to focus our eyes on the Messiah, heaven's ultimate gift of Christmas as we journey this Advent. **Amen**

By confessing our sins, we are cleansed by the power of Jesus Christ, Son of God. Through the power of his blood, shed for us, we are forgiven. **Amen.**

### **StF 471 – Lord I come to you**

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| 1) Lord I come to You,<br>Let my heart be changed, renewed.<br>Flowing from the grace,<br>That I found in You.<br>And Lord I've come to know,<br>The weaknesses I see in me,<br>Will be stripped away,<br>By the power of Your love. | 2) Lord unveil my eyes,<br>Let me see You face to face.<br>The knowledge of Your love,<br>As You live in me.<br>Lord renew my mind,<br>As Your will unfolds in my life.<br>In living every day,<br>In the power of Your love. |
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*Ch) Hold me close, let Your love surround me.  
Bring me near, draw me to Your side.  
And as I wait, I'll rise up like the eagle.  
And I will soar with You, your Spirit leads me on.  
In the power of Your love.*

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### **Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11**

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

## Reading: Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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 Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 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. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

## StF 183 – Praise to the God who clears the way

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| 1) Praise to the God who clears the way<br>Preparing room and space;<br>For power and pride will lose their sway<br>As peace comes in their place. | 3) Praise to the God who waits with us<br>For hope and joy to reign,<br>Who shares our suffering and our loss,<br>Embodied in our pain.  |
| 2) Praise to the God who comes to judge<br>The truth of word and deed,<br>Who calls our minds and wills to change,<br>Rebuking wealth and greed.   | 4) Praise to the God who comes to bring<br>Comfort to all who mourn.<br>The whole creation 'Glory' sings<br>As Christ the light is born. |

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## Sermon

Are you good at changing your mind? Let us resist the temptation to say "it's a woman's prerogative," - okay let's not resist that temptation! There are some times when it is relatively easy to change our mind. How often have you sat in a restaurant choosing what you would eat and just as the waiter arrives at the table you see something else on the menu and ask for a couple more minutes? How often have you had to make the decision shall I buy it or not? Which chocolate shall I choose from the big plastic tub that will soon be placed before you over Christmas?

Such choice or changing of mind has little long term affect on you or others, unless you choose to eat the whole tub of chocolates. When John the Baptist appeared on the scene around the Jordan Valley he placed a challenge before people. John the Baptist called the people out of their ordinary places into the wilderness for transformation. He preached 'metanoia' – literally "changing the mind."

*Mark 1:4-5 - John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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 Jordan, confessing their sins.*

People came confessing their sins but they were not all changing their minds regarding the Messiah who was to come amongst them, they were not changing their minds about who was in and who was out of the Kingdom; they were not changing their minds on how to treat one another.

Jesus preached the same message but with a different dimension– "the Kingdom of God is at hand repent, metanoia, and believe the good news." Or as I think of it in the words of Fagin from Oliver! "I think I better think it out again." In the light of the Kingdom we need to think things through again.

This is a continuous process as we move from falsehood to truth and on into deeper truth. In that process of re-thinking we may learn something new, we may learn we were incorrect or we may learn our thinking needs to be moulded and shaped afresh. New encounters and experiences cause us to rethink. Our brains literally re-wire themselves when we learn new things. Each encounter with another person is potentially, or even actually, transformative in one-way or another – positively or negatively.

When we meet with Jesus each encounter can be transformative in a positive way if we would but allow it to be so. When we gather for worship each time is a potential transformative encounter. For the process of metanoia to take affect there is the challenge to allow ourselves to have been wrong. That is not an easy one to conquer, particularly if we have been vocal and insistent on our way of thinking being right.

I remember reading a Peanuts Cartoon over 30 years ago, which had a line in which has stuck with me, “I have trouble with people who are dogmatic about things which are a matter of opinion.” The more dogmatic we are about something the harder it can be to allow ourselves to have been wrong. John challenged the people of his day to rethink life and God, Jesus challenged the people of his day, and all ages to rethink. As we journey through Advent we will allow God to speak from within the ordinary that we might discover more about the extraordinariness of God.

Our understanding and beliefs are based upon our experiences of life and what we have read, what we have been told by others and taken as true, with or without reflection upon it. May we this Advent sit with God and see where he wants us to rethink our understandings and attitudes that we might become more Christ-like in our daily living; that we can be more like the incarnate one.

It was some 22 years ago I learnt a lesson about incarnational theology\* whilst in the Hard Rock Café in Beijing. That evening I found myself in a place I would not normally frequent; I was listening to a Chinese Rock band playing Western music in a communist country; I saw a Chinese person with dreadlocks, I saw Chinese youngsters dancing to Western Rock music in a Communist Country; I heard the Band play “By the Rivers of Babylon” a Jewish Psalm set to Western Music, in a Communist Country being danced to by young Chinese people. An experience I never expected to have and I would be surprised if many of you have had that experience. It was in that place I learnt that incarnation theology goes deeper and means being amongst people so that we can share our faith.. It was here I was caused to rethink some of my ideas. God wants us to be the presence of Christ to our friends and neighbours, expressing His love and grace not our dogma.

We are daily presented with new opportunities to change, rethink and grow that we might become more Christ-like. Don’t be stubborn and stuck in the past, but allow God to open your minds to new truth for you in this Advent journey as you travel from the Ordinary to the Extra-ordinary.

*\*Incarnational Theology is in Christian Theology the area of study dealing with the coming of God to be with us in Christ Jesus, it is summed up in a phrase, “the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.” (John 1:14a)*

### **StF 489 – All I once held dear**

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| 1) All I once held dear, built my life upon,<br>All this world reveres, and wars to own,<br>All I once thought gain, I have counted loss;<br>Spent and worthless now, compared to this. | 2) Now my heart's desire is to know You more,<br>To be found in You and known as Yours.<br>To possess by faith what I could not earn,<br>All surpassing gift of righteousness. |
| Ch) <i>Knowing you, Jesus, knowing You<br/>There is no greater thing<br/>You're my all, you're the best,<br/>You're my joy, my righteousness,<br/>And I love you, Lord.</i>             | 3) Oh to know the power of Your risen life,<br>And to know You in Your sufferings.<br>To become like You in Your death, my Lord<br>So with You to live and never die.          |

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## Prayers of Intercession

Advent God **come to those in need.**

We remember those caught up in war – those who choose to fight, those forced to fight, and those who are innocent bystanders caught up in violence

Advent God **come to those in need.**

We remember those who hunger and thirst for life, physical and spiritual.....

Advent God **come to those in need.**

We remember those struggling to know what to do and what to choose.....

Advent God **come to those in need.**

We remember those seeking to learn and those called to teach.....

Advent God **come to those in need.**

We remember those who are living and dying in illness.....

Advent God **come to those in need.**

We remember ourselves seeking to be disciples of Jesus

Advent God **come to those in need. Amen**

## The Lord's Prayer

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.**

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.**

## StF 668 – Teach me my God and King

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| 1) Teach me, my God and King,<br>In all things thee to see,<br>And what I do in anything,<br>To do it as for thee.                     | 4) A servant with this clause<br>Makes drudgery divine;<br>Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,<br>Makes that and the action fine. |
| 2) A man that looks on glass<br>On it may stay his eye;<br>Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,<br>And then the heaven espy.            | 5) This is the famous stone<br>That turneth all to gold;<br>For that which God doth touch and own<br>Cannot for less be told.     |
| 3) All may of thee partake:<br>Nothing can be so mean,<br>Which with this tincture, 'For thy sake',<br>Will not grow bright and clean. |   |

*George Herbert*

## Closing Prayer

Loving God, help us to be people of change and transformation; help us to be Christ-like people and givers of grace and love; help us to be people who know we are blessed in abundance by you and, through the power of the Spirit, and so eager to pass those blessings on. We ask in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**