

12th December 2021 – Morning Service

Advent 3 – Herod Feared

Rev Josephine Soon

Introduction

Advent season greeting to you all who love God! On behalf of the Vale of Stour Methodist Circuit, I welcome you to join us in worship and we are using this seasonal service series: *Christ is coming...what is your response?*

Today, through two passages of the scriptures, one from the Old Testament and another from the New Testament, we focus on God's own words about human's emotion: FEAR. We search for God's wisdom by listening to His command through the lips of Moses in Deuteronomy and learn to examine Herod's way of life – his fear. We ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see and to reflect on our own response to Christ – with fear.

Call to Worship

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed are those who will come from east and west, from north and south, to feast in the kingdom of God.

Advent Candle

We light this candle to remind us of the terrible response of Herod, who in fear of losing his power caused pain and death. Lord Jesus you came to show a new way - to serve and not be served - help us to love our neighbour as ourselves as you have called us to do.

As we light our advent candle - **Light of the world, shine on us.**

As we prepare for Christmas time - **Light of the world, shine on us.**

In this world of pain and darkness - **Light of the world, shine through us.**

To all the people who don't know you - **Light of the world, shine through us.**

Jesus you are coming again - **Light of the world, light the way.**

In our service here today - **Light of the world, light the way.**

Please find a comfortable position and to sit quietly, to allow time and space to wait on God's presence. Sing the chant the words (below) twice.

Song – Servant King we wait on you

Servant King we wait on you,	Love that will not let us go,
Watching for that special day,	Born in humble human form,
When your glory will descend to us we pray.	May our hearts respond with faith, in you O Lord.

Alan Combes CCL No. 515642

Prayer

God of all glory, you brought the universe into existence, and raised up witnesses to your greatness and love. We praise and adore you. Grant that by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit we may worship and serve you, and praise your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: 'The first commandment is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.' **Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

Prayer of confession

Let us confess our sins to God, trusting in his mercy and forgiveness.

Holy and forgiving God, we have sinned against you and each other in thought and word and deed. We have turned from your life-giving word, and ignored the message of those you sent. We are unprepared for the coming of your Son. Have mercy upon us and forgive us, that strengthened by your love we may serve you more faithfully; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Silence]

'I am making all things new,' says the Lord. This is Christ's gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven.'

Amen. Thanks be to God.

God of mercy and power, whose Son rules over all, grant us so to live in obedience to your holy will, that at his appearing we may be raised to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Benedictus

Blessèd be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has come to his people and set them free.

The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, born of the house of his servant David.

Through the holy prophets, God promised of old to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us, to show mercy to our forebears, and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous before him, all the days of our life.

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from heaven shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.

StF 177 – Lo He comes with clouds descending

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| 1) Lo, he comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
God appears on earth to reign. | 3) Those dear tokens of his passion
Still his dazzling body bears;
Cause of endless exultation
To his ransomed worshippers:
With what rapture, With what rapture
Gaze we on those glorious scars. |
| 2) Every eye shall now behold him
Robed in glorious majesty;
Those who set at nought and sold him,
Pierced and nailed him to the tree,
Deeply wailing, Deeply wailing, Deeply wailing,
Shall the true Messiah see. | 4) Sing, amen, let all adore thee,
High on thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory,
Claim the kingdom for thine own:
Come, Lord Jesus! Come, Lord Jesus!
Everlasting God, come down! |

Charles Wesley CCL No. 515642

Sermon – Herod feared

Today, through two passages of the scriptures, one from the Old Testament and another from the New Testament, we examine one of our human emotions: FEAR. We search for God's wisdom by listening to His commands through the lips of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy and learn to examine Herod's way of life – his fear. We ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see and to reflect on our own response to Christ – with fear.

Reading: Deuteronomy 31:9-13

So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the Levitical priests, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. Then Moses commanded them: “At the end of every seven years, in the year for cancelling debts, during the Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”

May you hear and learn to fear the Lord your God

Do you fear the Lord your God? This is a commandment written in the Law of God (the seventh-year covenant) to the priests, the elders or the parents to read out loud to their ‘holy family’ – so that they ‘may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God’. Every seven years, the reading out loud of these written Laws of God is a solemn ceremony of covenant renewal. It is similar to the idea of the annual Methodist Covenant Service.

In God’s perspective, ‘fear’ is something we need to learn - if we are to ‘fear’ in the way that is acceptable in God’s eyes. That even ‘fear’ itself can bring benefit to ourselves and to others. Like all others human emotions, Christians are called to learn to contain these feelings in a godly way. If you have children at home, you will know that both excitement and anger can be hazardous if the children do not yet learn how to contain and express these emotions appropriately.

May you hear and learn to fear the Lord your God

Learning to “fear the Lord” is like learning any other skills – cooking, driving a car, teaching, communicating etc. For example, only when we are driving we may find out whether we are able to drive a car or not. The people around us will very quickly be able to tell if we can or not drive a car too. You see, if you are driving a car in a way that does not cause damage to yourself, the people around you or things along the way, this shows that you have learnt the skills to drive a car!

May you hear and learn to fear the Lord your God

For our own children, at least during their young age/ childhood years, we can offer them the opportunity to stand with the holy family/ the community of faith and share in this great act of the covenant renewal ceremony – a solemn ceremony for all the ‘holy family’ of God. For God has command that:
12’...you shall read this law before them in their hearing.... so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. 13 Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.’
(Deuteronomy 31:12-13).

The root meaning of the Hebrew word *yirah* (fear) is ‘to flow’ and is related to words meaning rain or stream as a flowing of water. In Hebrew thoughts, fear can be what is felt when in danger or what is felt when in the presence of an awesome sight or person of great authority. These feelings flow out of the person through their actions, such as shaking when in fear or bowing down in awe of one in authority. Hence, our reaction ‘to fear the Lord’ is our willingness and desire to surrender in obedience to the one in authority, Our Father and our Lord, by our commitment to live a way of life that follows God’s standard of holiness and wisdom.

May you hear and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law

We desire to fear you, the Lord our God, and want to diligently follow your words and law. **Amen.**

Reading: Matthew 2:1-8

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.' When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.'

Herod – feared: what can we learn from Herod's way of life – his fear.

Christmas season – holiday season. You may be planning to visit your family or friends at this time. Just pretend that you are planning to go away for a week to somewhere. Now, imagine on your return, as you are approaching your home, you see three cars parked in front of your house. Then, you see some people holding gifts and flowers in their hands and they are ringing your doorbell. The thing is, you do not recognise them, so in your head you are maybe asking, 'Who are they? What are they doing here in front of my house?' When they see you coming toward them, one of them is saying to you, 'Hi, do you know Mr. & Mrs Carpenter, they moved in recently. We are here to visit them. Are you here to visit them too?' Another person continues saying, 'We have come a long way from the East to visit them. We are really looking forward to meeting them. We have come as soon as we knew that they moved in here.' What? Here in my house? Mr. & Mrs. Carpenter moved into 'my house'? It cannot be because this is MY HOUSE and I am the house owner! By who's authority did this 'new owner' move into my house – without my permission? You will be left shocked and feared, if this had happened, would you?

[1/11/2021] A BBC investigation has revealed that a man's house was sold and his furnishings removed without his knowledge, in the latest example of property fraud. The Reverend Mike Hall was working away from his property in Luton and was tipped off by neighbours that building work was under way in his home. [Hall's identity had been stolen and used to sell the house and the fraudster was able to bank the proceeds.] Hall was left shocked and feared as his house is 'stolen'.

This seems to be like what Herod the Great was feeling; when the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him' (Matthew 2:2). They didn't come all this way to see King Herod but another king. Here in Herod's 'kingdom' and born another king!

Herod the Great was king of the Jews when Jesus was born. Herod and his sons ruled Judea during Jesus' life and ministry. Under Caesar Augustus, Herod's position as king of the Jews was secure. However, Herod was constantly in fear. He feared conspiracy: he executed his wife, three of his sons, another wife, and his mother-in-law, on each occasion when he suspected them plotting against him. Ungodly fear leads to suspicion and loss of the trust and love for others. In Matthew's account, Herod's slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem fits well with what we know of the king's ambition, paranoia, and cruelty (Matt. 2:1–18).

Jesus represented a new kingdom and His coming, though misunderstood, represented a threat:

- to Herod's kingship powers,
- to the Pharisees of their spiritual authorities as well as to the teachers of the law later in the gospel.

We need to constantly remind one another that all the power and authority are from God (Colossian 2:10). Since we believe that God has given us '*...the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you (us)*' (Luke 10:19 19), therefore, nobody and nothing can take away our power and authority which is from God. It is only God who gives and takes away (Job 1:21), and so, who shall we fear?

Holy Spirit, Soften our heart to trust you and follow carefully all the words you have taught us today. Open our eyes to see and reflect on own response to you – with fear. **Amen.**

StF 183 – Praise to the God who clears the way

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

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Prayers of Intercession

In joyful expectation of his coming to reign we pray to our Lord, saying,

L: Come, Lord Jesus **R: Come, Lord Jesus**

Come to your world as King of the nations. We pray for the world, that its leaders may have the courage to take the steps toward greater openness, authentic dialogue and sincere concern for their people. Before you rulers will stand in silence.

L: Come, Lord Jesus **R: Come, Lord Jesus**

Come to your Church as Lord and Judge. We pray for this 'holy family' of believers, that we may experience anew the glad tidings of wonder and hope, even in the strange, world Pandemic, this very different Advent season. We pray for the Church, that we may faithfully testify to the Light and to live in the light of your coming. Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing to do your will.

L: Come, Lord Jesus **R: Come, Lord Jesus**

Come to your people as Saviour and bearer of pain. We pray for all on our churches' prayer lists, that they may be helped and healed. We pray for those who have died during this pandemic, that they may be gathered safely into the Kingdom of God. Enfold us all in your love and mercy, wipe away the tears of failure, fear and distress, and set us free to serve you for ever.

L: Come, Lord Jesus **R: Come, Lord Jesus**

And we pray for the unspoken prayers of our hearts and the needs of those who have no one to pray for them.....[Silence]

L: Come, Lord Jesus **R: Come, Lord Jesus**

Oh, God, receive with mercy the prayers of your faithful people. We ask through Him whose coming is certain, whose day draws near -- your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. **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 404 – God’s spirit is in my heart

- 1) God's spirit is in my heart;
He has called me and set me apart.
This is what I have to do -
What I have to do:
- 2) Just as the Father sent me,
So I'm sending you out to be
My witness throughout the world -
The whole of the world:
- Ch) *He sent me to give the good news to the poor,
Tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,
Tell blind people that they can see,
And set the down-trodden free,
And go tell everyone
The news that the kingdom of God has come;
And go tell everyone
The news that God's kingdom has come*
- 3) Don't carry a load in your pack;
You don't need two shirts on your back;
God's workers can earn their own keep -
Can earn their own keep:
- 4) Don't worry what you have to say;
Don't worry, because on that day
God's spirit will speak in your heart -
Will speak in your heart:

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Blessing

The day of the Lord is surely coming. Be faithful in worship God, unwavering in hope, fervent in the work of God’s kingdom and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**