

# 14<sup>th</sup> December 2025 – Morning Service

## Advent 3

Rev Michael Payne

### Advent Candle Liturgy

For unto us a child is born, for this world... Jesus, who is Emmanuel. Joy was proclaimed, presence and comfort were promised. Jesus, Emmanuel, meet us this day, for we wait on you. Surround us with your presence. *The third advent candle is lit.*

All pray: **Jesus, Emmanuel, with your presence, transform this world.**

### Call to Worship

In this joyful season we continue our Advent journey, we celebrate the joy that God gives to us through the gifts of his creation, his Son, the Lord Jesus, and his love. Let us worship and celebrate with joy and singing, prayer, listening and silence. **Amen.**

### StF 264 – Make way, make way

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| 1) Make way, make way, for Christ the King<br>In splendour arrives.<br>Fling wide the gates and welcome Him<br>Into your lives.  | 3) And those who mourn with heavy hearts,<br>Who weep and sigh;<br>With laughter, joy and royal crown<br>He'll beautify. |
| Ch) <i>Make way! (Make way!) Make way! (Make way!)<br/>For the King of Kings (For the King of Kings)<br/>Make way! (Make way!) Make way! (Make way!)<br/>And let His Kingdom in.</i> | 4) We call you now to worship Him,<br>As Lord of all.<br>To have no gods before Him<br>Their thrones must fall!          |
| 2) He comes the broken hearts to heal<br>The prisoners to free.<br>The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,<br>The blind shall see.  |  |

Graham Kendrick © 1986 Thankyou Music

### Prayers of Approach, Adoration and Confession

Come Jesus, as the prophet promised, come Jesus, fill us with joy. Come, that the desert will rejoice and flowers bloom in the wilderness. Come Jesus, so that those who feel vulnerable and sad can shout for joy, blossom and be glad in you. Come into our midst as we draw near to you and one another. **Amen.**

Mighty, Holy God, we come to worship and adore you: You are the God of revelation, revealing yourself to humanity, through the ages, in different ways; You gave promises to Abraham and his descendants for ever; You inspired the prophets of old to offer rebuke in time of denial and hope in times of trial, and a purpose in their journey; You gave the gift of your Son to reveal true love, and the gift of your Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith and life. Today we rejoice in the blessings we have in our lives and your faithful loving care. **Amen.**

Holy God, we confess that we fail and falter in our faith journey; we get caught up in the trimmings of the season more than the message it contains, our looking for the better is temporal and not eternal, your message is strong our delivery weak and our courage flimsy. Advent God, forgive us we pray and bless our journey in this season. The Lord God, the Holy One, the Almighty, the Redeemer, the giver of life, hears our prayer and forgives our sins. **Amen.**

### **Reading: Isaiah 35: 1-10 (NIV)**

The desert and the parched land will be glad;  
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.  
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;  
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.  
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,  
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;  
they will see the glory of the Lord,  
the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the feeble hands,  
steady the knees that give way;  
say to those with fearful hearts,  
“Be strong, do not fear;  
your God will come,  
he will come with vengeance;  
with divine retribution  
he will come to save you.”

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.  
Then will the lame leap like a deer,  
and the mute tongue shout for joy.  
Water will gush forth in the wilderness  
and streams in the desert.  
The burning sand will become a pool,  
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.  
In the haunts where jackals once lay,  
grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

And a highway will be there;  
it will be called the Way of Holiness;  
it will be for those who walk on that Way.  
The unclean will not journey on it;  
wicked fools will not go about on it.  
No lion will be there,  
nor any ravenous beast;  
they will not be found there.  
But only the redeemed will walk there,  
and those the Lord has rescued will return.  
They will enter Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy will crown their heads.  
Gladness and joy will overtake them,  
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

### **StF 564 – O Thou who camest from above**

- 1) O Thou who camest from above  
The pure celestial fire to impart,  
Kindle a flame of sacred love  
On the mean altar of my heart!
- 2) There let it for thy glory burn  
With inextinguishable blaze,  
And trembling to its source return,  
In humble prayer and fervent praise.
- 3) Jesus, confirm my heart's desire  
To work, and speak, and think for thee;  
Still let me guard the holy fire,  
And still stir up thy gift in me -
- 4) Ready for all thy perfect will,  
My acts of faith and love repeat,  
Till death thy endless mercies seal,  
And make the sacrifice complete.

*Charles Wesley*

### **Reading: Matthew 11: 2-11 (NIV)**

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.'

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

## Sermon

Today, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent, is Gaudete or rejoicing Sunday. The Old Testament reading offers us a joyous vision of renewal while the Gospel centres on joy being given in a place of questioning or despair. What makes you joyful? What causes you to celebrate? Is it the football team you follow winning? Is it the cake coming out of the baking tin whole? Is it a kind word or smile being shared with you as you go along the street? The answer of course varies widely.

Many of us enjoy going away on holiday, or used to but can do so no more. We were looking forward to the time away, and we rejoiced gladly when we arrived at our destination and all was well with the accommodation. Whilst we were away there would come the time when, despite all that was good, we were ready to return home; though enjoying the time away we become ready for home.

We have heard a lot in recent months and years about migrants coming to our country for different reasons. There is much "fake news" about many of them. Many of those who have left their homelands to come here want the day to come when they can return in safety to their homeland; their natural home is of importance to them. We have seen pictures of the displaced of Gaza making their way back to their place of home only to find rubble and destruction. What is their hope? Is there rejoicing?

Isaiah was a prophet in turbulent times for the people of Israel. At the start of his ministry the two areas we easily just call Israel, the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, were independent nations. During his ministry, the Northern Kingdom were overcome by the Assyrians as a result of their failing to be faithful. The Southern Kingdom of Judah were warned that unless they changed their ways a similar fate could be on the horizon for them. Eventually, in the time of the prophet Jeremiah, they were overcome by the Babylonians, and many were taken into exile.

When the passage from Isaiah 35 was declared is hard to know, for the prophecies are not written in chronological order. God's people were living in a state of spiritual exile and hardship following their life away from God, those longing to return to their "spiritual homeland" heard a message of hope. In the time of Babylonian Exile for the people of Judah these words would have given hope of a physical return to their homeland.

It is prophecy, a message of hope and joy, that has a message beyond the time of Isaiah (approx. 740 – 700BC). To a people in despair, it is a stunning and shameless vision of a glorious homecoming and a renewed world. But how long would they need to wait?

How long can we cope with waiting. A few days ago, I went to Russells Hall Hospital to visit a person who was in there. Outside there were a number of ambulances; a paramedic was standing next to one speaking to a nurse. I asked, "is this the queue?" The reply was "Yes, it's a four hour wait." The person I was visiting had waited 12 hours for an ambulance to arrive after they had fallen and a call was made. I am not making comment about the health service but the reality of waiting.

Waiting is not easy without hope of things changing for the better; the wait being worth it. Patience is not the forte of many. The queue, wherever it is, can get us worked up.

The passage from Isaiah gave hope to a people living in hard times, their need was known by God, and it was to come to an end; but it had (and still has) a message beyond the time of writing. There is within it of hope for a Messiah was to come, we recognise that person as Jesus; it has a message of hope for today and tomorrows. To those living in a time of spiritual wilderness and exile it has a message for today – you can find refreshment and a brighter time of faith, reach out to God, call out to Jesus and find renewal through his love, you may need to wait a while but change and renewal will come.

There is hope here for humanity, hope for the weak, hope for the fearful, hope for those seeking healing and release, hope too for ‘travellers’. There is also hope for the rest of the created order, a hope for a world full of the glory and the majesty of God. For that hope to be realised we are to be the person of the saviour/the rescuer, the hope giver, through the choices we make and the things we do.

The renewed world, the place of glorious future, is still to come to fulfilment but what are we doing to bring it about?

I leave you with 4 questions to ponder upon and pray through with God.

- What makes you happy or joyful?
- What do you hope for?
- What hope can you offer to the world around?
- To whom could you send a message of hope this advent season?

### **StF 342 – All hail the power**

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| 1) All hail the power of Jesu's name!<br>Let angels prostrate fall;<br>Bring forth the royal diadem,<br>And crown him, crown him, crown him,<br>Crown him Lord of all!      | 4) Let every kindred, every tribe<br>On this terrestrial ball,<br>To him all majesty ascribe,<br>And crown him, crown him, crown him,<br>Crown him Lord of all.    |
| 2) You seed of Israel's chosen race,<br>You ransomed of the fall,<br>Hail him who saves you by his grace,<br>And crown him, crown him, crown him,<br>Crown him Lord of all! | 5) O that with yonder sacred throng<br>We at his feet may fall,<br>Join in the everlasting song,<br>And crown him, crown him, crown him,<br>Crown him Lord of all! |
| 3) Hail him, the heir of David's line<br>Whom David Lord did call,<br>The God incarnate, Man divine,<br>And crown him, crown him, crown him,<br>Crown him Lord of all!      |  |

*Edward Perronet*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Lord God, you know the whole picture of the world as it was, as it is, and as it can be. You love what you have created and call us to love it too. In stillness let us listen for the nudge of God in our prayer. Lord Speak into our lives of the ones you would have us express love for before you:

Speak into our hearts of a nation, or area of the world you would have us pray for.

Speak into our hearts groups of people you would have us pray for.

Speak into our hearts individuals you would have us pray for.

Speak into our hearts the areas of our life that you want us to hand over to you this day and this week.

## 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 180 – O come, O come Immanuel

1) O come, O come, Immanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear:

*Ch) Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

2) O come, O come, thou Lord of might,  
Who to your tribes, on Sinai's height,  
In ancient times did give the law  
In cloud, and majesty, and awe:

3) O come, O Rod of Jesse, free  
Your own from Satan's tyranny;  
From depths of hell your people save,  
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

4) O come, O Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heavenly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery:

5) O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer  
Our spirits by your advent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight:

*Based on Advent Antiphons translated by John Mason Neale*

## Blessing

God of Advent, God of Coming, travel with us as we are leaving here. God of Advent, God of Coming, bless our going that a message of hope shall be lived out and shared with our neighbours, near and far. **Amen.**

## The Grace

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