

# twelvebaskets



## ADVENT 2B

A complete Sunday service ready to use  
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

Produced by **twelvebaskets**. Subscription available from **[theworshipcloud.com](http://theworshipcloud.com)**

**Advent 2 - Year B**  
10th December 2023



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**165 STF – Advent candles tell their story OR**

**166 STF – ‘Christmas is coming!’ The Church is glad to sing**

Opening Prayers

The Lord’s Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**33 STF – O Lord we are always in your presence OR**

**55 STF – Immortal, invisible, God only wise**

Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

**Hymn:**

**180 STF – O come, O come, Immanuel OR**

**714 STF – The God who sings a new world into being**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy OR**

**189 STF – Wild and lone the prophet’s voice**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**738 STF – There is a new heaven; there is a new earth OR**

**732 STF – Day of judgement! Day of wonder!**

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

**Many more resources and inspiration for this week’s lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on [www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).**

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## Call to worship

*(You may wish to use your own liturgy for lighting Advent candles at this point in the worship).*

Here we are Lord, your grace has called us, and we come to worship you.

Come amongst us, holy, Advent God.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

165 STF – Advent candles tell their story OR

166 STF – 'Christmas is coming!' The Church is glad to sing

## Opening Prayers

Light of the world,

This Advent season comes to us as an annual reminder that you are not a God of distance, of high-heavens and of power,

Rather, you are a God of presence, of earthly-ordinariness and of poverty.

Light of the world,

Who appears through star, through angel and as baby in the familiar Christmas story,

Show us again today the way we should go, the message we need to hear, the encounter we need to have.

Show me, show us, show the world,

Immanuel.

Light of the world,

In the darkness of our own lives, shine your light.

Forgive us, love us, set us free, we pray.

Light of the world,

Come amongst us, as we worship you,

Knowing ourselves to be a part of your kingdom of light.

And in this week of fairy lights, candles and winter wonderlands,

Bring your eternal, ethereal, unwavering light,

That we might see peace on earth,

And every person's potential might be fulfilled.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## We say together the Lord's Prayer

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<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by All We Can – you can order an Extraordinary Gift for someone this Christmas at [allwecan.org.uk/gifts](http://allwecan.org.uk/gifts)

## All Age Talk

Did you know... that a grizzly bear's bite is so strong that it can crush a bowling ball?

Did you know... that camels can drink 50 gallons of water in one minute - that's more than an entire bath.

Did you know... that salamanders can grow back body parts if they lose them?

That's all quite hard to believe, isn't it? I'll be honest, I had to go and look these facts up to make sure they were true.

We have two Bible stories to explore today, and they're both about believing the unbelievable.

Q: Does anyone know what a prophecy is?

We often hear about prophecies in fantasy or adventure movies. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the beavers tell the children about a prophecy: "When Aslan returns to the land, the Winter will be over and Spring will come again."

A prophecy is a story someone tells about the future - prophets, like Isaiah, look around at the way the world is and make a prediction about how things will be.

In our Gospel story, Mark tells us about a prophecy shared by John the Baptist who is telling the people all about what life will be like when Jesus comes. He says, "There is one coming later who is greater than I. I am not good enough even to kneel down and untie his sandals. I baptise you with water. But the one who is coming will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

Imagine you were one of the people listening to John speak on that day. Would you believe what he was saying?

Lots of the people listening on that day didn't. They had no idea who Jesus was. Perhaps some of them needed to see it for themselves before they could believe.

There's another reason why people might have found it hard to believe. At this time, life was really hard for people. They were living under the rule of selfish leaders, and it felt like nobody was listening to them.

Lots of people felt like they were living in darkness, so when John the Baptist started talking about a great leader who would come and make their lives better, some of them rolled their eyes and shook their heads. They'd lost all hope, so it was really tough for them to imagine a better life.

Sometimes, at church or in Sunday School, we hear that it's our job to go out and tell people about Jesus. We need to go and share the Good News - Jesus was born in a manger, then grew up and died for our sins. He came into the world to teach us how to live, and to show us the power of love. We need to share the Good News of God's love, reminding people that we are never alone. God loves us just the way we are, and we can find so much joy in our lives from knowing that.

That's important, and it's a brave thing to do. But there's a problem. What if you're talking to someone who is having a really hard time? Maybe someone you know has lost someone they love, or they're struggling with an illness that is making life hard. Perhaps they might find your message hard to believe. They might tell you that it can't be true, because there's no hope.

Maybe, in this situation, **showing** works even better than telling.

We can share the Good News of Jesus through what we do. We can listen to people, and show them we care. We can offer to help someone with something they need, or just be there for them and keep them company. We can reach out the hand of friendship, which might just remind

someone that there is always hope. We can speak out when something isn't right, so people across our world can get justice.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

**Hymn:**

33 STF – O Lord we are always in your presence OR

55 STF – Immortal, invisible, God only wise

**Readings:** Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

**Hymn:**

180 STF – O come, O come, Immanuel OR

714 STF – The God who sings a new world into being

**Reflections on the readings**

Old Testament prophecy is often a message of doom and gloom, declaring 'to Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin' (Micah 3:8). Isaiah chapter 1 describes 'offspring who do evil', sounding not unlike modern prophets of doom as they exclaim a 'broken Britain' paint a picture of an entire generation that no longer feels integrated into society or welcomed in our communities.

Whilst prophecy of the terrible consequences of our actions no doubt has its place, the simple, powerful first verse of Isaiah 40 ('Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God') expresses something different, something altogether more positive. It is a direct instruction, almost a command, a message calling for a response from the community of readers. In the repeated 'comfort' and the exasperated 'O', we can see something of the desperation in this cry – the writer of Isaiah 40 clearly recognised that there was a great need for comfort at the time of writing.

Today, as we near the end of 2023, we know what it is to live in a world that needs comforting. Ours is a world where war continues to rage in the Middle East, where the inequality and malnutrition of poverty continues for millions of families, where there is still homelessness across developed and developing countries, where we have higher numbers of slaves than ever in human history, and as we enter the season of Christmas, where rampant consumerism without regard for ethics is on display at every corner. Alongside that, perhaps many of us have a growing sense that we live in a spiritually bereft society.

The issues on this (far from exhaustive) list look very daunting, but Isaiah 40:1 does not instruct us to 'sort the world out' or 'fix everything yourself'. Rather, the prophet cries 'comfort, O comfort my people'. We are called to give support and love, not find overnight cures for a wounded world.

Comfort can be found in a peaceful moment shared, in a hand of solidarity offered, in painting an image of hope. The powerful closing verses of Isaiah 40 demonstrate exactly the kind of hope that a Christian community can offer a fallen world. 'Those who wait for the Lord' (Is 40:31) find a renewal of strength, a faith in a power beyond any of the forces of oppression on this planet. This is the authority behind the prophet's instruction to 'comfort my people', this is the power of 'your God'.

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Emma Dobson

David Foster Wallace, a brilliant American writer and thinker, recognised that as human beings we 'have other options' to those most obviously provided by this world. He famously said: 'it is within your power to experience a crowded, loud, slow, consumer-type situation as not only meaningful but sacred, on fire with the same force that lit the stars.' As Christians, we believe in a God who created the universe, but also continues to move within that creation. Therefore, as we experience the every-day (even the every-day of long queues for the tills and overcrowded commuter trains), we also experience the eternal, the heavenly.

That is the experience John the Baptist points to by 'preparing a way' for Jesus. Not providing a solution or fixing the problem himself, but making a way for the saviour, pointing towards 'the one more powerful than I'. John is a radical, a challenger, but also a messenger of comfort – bringing news of transformation to a world that needed to change. Can we do the same?

Part of the role of the Christian comforter to a broken world is to inhabit that spirit of John the Baptist and David Foster Wallace: to show people that they 'have other options'. We are called (Isaiah 40:3) to 'in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord', to open up a passage to healing through the redeeming power of an omnipotent God. This is not a project we engage in critically, or piously, but 'tenderly' (Is 40:2), showing people the comfort of love. We believe that the sufferings of this world are not the limit of our experience because there is a utopian equality promised in verse 4: 'Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain'.

In a darkening world of rising inequality, sex slaves, war, unemployment, media-exploitation, conspicuous consumption and increased secularisation (almost for its own sake), Isaiah 40 offers an alternative, a different narrative that speaks into twenty-first century Britain as it did into exiled Israel at least 2600 years ago. Amongst the inequality of this world, there is a God who is beyond oppression, beyond worldly forces of any kind, and this God will make 'Himself' known to us at the end of all things. We believe in a time when 'the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together' (vs. 5).

Our challenge, as church in 2023, is to convey the empowering comfort that this message brings into a world that does not know or feel it.

Is there someone you could comfort this week?

Do you have a comforting message to bring to family and friends during this Christmas season? How will you point people to the possibility of change, in the way that John the Baptist does? How will you create a space for the Christ to come, into the wilderness?<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy OR

189 STF – Wild and lone the prophet's voice

### **Prayers of intercession**

God of justice, in this season of consumption and consumerism, remind us of your desire to see every person's potential fulfilled.

Creator God, as we anticipate the birth of your Son, we recognise our responsibility to care for the Earth. We pray for the healing of our planet, that we may be good stewards of the environment and protect the precious gift of creation you have entrusted to us.

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Tim Baker

Lord of Light, as we light the Advent candles, we acknowledge the darkness that can sometimes envelop our world. May the hope and promise of Christ's coming dispel despair and bring new beginnings to those who are struggling.

Prince of peace, in a world of conflict and disagreement, shine the light of your peace and come by your grace.

In a moment of quiet, we bring our own prayers for a just, safe, fair world and for comfort and healing for those known to us.

*[Hold a few minutes of silence]*

Lord, you know our hearts and you hear our hurts. This Advent season, come amongst us by your Spirit, that those in need might experience the miracle of your coming close, your Christmas story born again in their hearts today.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

### **We will now take up the offering.**

Advent God,

Take these gifts – the gifts given by us here today, and the gifts of our whole lives.

Put them, put us to use for your kingdom-building here on earth, that peace and goodwill to all people may become a reality.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

738 STF – There is a new heaven; there is a new earth OR

732 STF – Day of judgement! Day of wonder!

### **Blessing**

Go out and meet a God who is already out there,

Step forward and find a Christ who is amongst us,

Be bold and discover a Spirit who is willing to take risks.

As you prepare, may the Christ-child make himself known to you in the extraordinary ordinariness of each day.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by All We Can

<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker