

twelvebaskets



ADVENT 2A

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

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Advent 2 - Year A
4th December 2022



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

165 STF – Advent candles tell their story OR

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

178 STF – Long ago, prophets knew OR

378 STF – Father of everlasting grace

Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

Hymn:

394 STF – Spirit of God, unseen as the wind OR

228 STF – Hail to the Lord's Anointed

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

707 STF – Make me a channel of your peace OR

180 STF – O come, O come, Immanuel

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

173 STF – Into the darkness of this world OR

183 STF – Praise to the God who clears the way

Blessing

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Call to worship

Generous and loving God,
We place ourselves in your power this day.
Come amongst us, Lord Jesus, by your Spirit,
Amen.¹

Hymn:

165 STF – Advent candles tell their story OR
706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness

Opening Prayers

Dear Lord,

Thank you that you are constantly drawing us towards you. Not forcing or coercing, but inviting and encouraging us into deeper relationship with you.

Thank you for that which you use to prepare the way. The people and things which break down the barriers we put up. The barriers that, intentionally or otherwise, keep you out. For the wonder of your creation which humbles us, for the challenging words of a close friend which rouse us, for the kindness of a stranger which reminds us of the divinity in everything.

May we draw near to you today. Prepare this space for us, and prepare our hearts to receive what you have in store for us this Advent.

Just as John the Baptist proclaimed “repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,” may we answer that same call, knowing that transformation comes through acknowledging that the status quo, in ourselves and in the world, is not as it should be. We repent today, because the Kingdom of Heaven has come near, and with God’s grace we can bring it nearer still.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord’s Prayer

All Age Talk

Is there something you are particularly looking forward to at the moment?

[Invite people to share what it is for them].

Perhaps some of us are looking forward to the excitement of Christmas morning, perhaps others are dreading it or stressed about not being ready yet.

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by All We Can

Whatever we feel about Christmas, and all the gifts and food and family meals and crackers and hats and Santa Claus and fairy lights – however we respond to that – Christmas only really exists because of the amazing Christian story that hardly ever makes it onto the front of Christmas cards anymore!

It is worth pausing, this morning, as the countdown to Christmas continues, to remember that and to recognise what it means for us. The most exciting thing, the real message about Christmas, is that God is interested in us, right here and now.

That's what lies at the heart of the story of a little baby Jesus, born in a poor, refugee family and laid in a manger. The message is: God came and lived with us. And God continues to do that – perhaps not as obviously, perhaps not with all the fanfare of angel music and wise people travelling hundreds of miles...but God is here all the same.

Too often, the Christian message is presented as something that is about the 'after life', or what happens when we die. Christmas reminds us that God doesn't just wait in heaven to see us when our life here is over. Rather, God comes amongst us.

This year, as you get excited about the gifts and the family time, let's also remember the amazing miracle of Christmas – God became a human being, and walked around this world, like we do. God is not as far away as we might think...

Amen.³

Hymn:

178 STF – Long ago, prophets knew OR

378 STF – Father of everlasting grace

Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

Hymn:

394 STF – Spirit of God, unseen as the wind OR

228 STF – Hail to the Lord's Anointed

Reflections on the reading

Gaze on harvest time in ancient Canaan: the whole community must work hard together to bring in the grain. First the men cut down the ripened grain, gripping their hand sickles till they get blisters. Then the women must bind the barley or wheat into sheaves, much like those we used to see in our fields, before those ugly black plastic wraps became commonplace. Watch them bending and straightening, bending and straightening, mopping their brows in the warm air.

Then the grain is carted back to the open-air threshing floor, where it is loosened from the straw, sometimes by the heavy tread of cattle. The site has been specially chosen because it is exposed to the prevailing winds. By now, it is late afternoon, and the breeze has risen in time for the grain to be winnowed. Up in the air they toss the grain, straining their shoulders, so that the wind will blow away the straw and chaff, leaving the heavier grain at the winnower's feet. This is the grain that they can use; this is the grain that is good.

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

The wind is vital to this operation, for without it, the good grain could not be collected. John the Baptist is telling us this is just like the Holy Spirit, not always gentle and mild, but sifting, and judging. For the last job of the harvest was to burn the chaff.

Consider how glibly we use the metaphor of the wheat and the chaff when we want to judge others, and divide them into the 'approved' and the 'disapproved'. In today's Old Testament lesson, from Isaiah, we heard how, when God's plans reach fulfilment, the lion and the ox, the bear and the cow, the wolf and the lamb, and the leopard and the kid, will all lie down together. So we learn that God's plan is for the kingdom of heaven to be inclusive. God does not choose to exclude us, but so often, we exclude ourselves by thinking we are better than others, or purer, or more righteous. Just like the Pharisees and the Sadducees, in fact. Consider how God is teaching that we must be prepared to share the kingdom with unlikely bedfellows.

Consider how John, in common with all prophets, meant his message to be for us as a community, as well as individuals. It is often the collective choices made by a society which show our real values. We cannot blame the economic crisis of 2009 on a few bankers; we must be honest about our complicity and repent. We cannot hide behind our church membership and say we didn't subscribe to greed. What did we actually do to change people's hearts and minds? 'Do not think you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father"', said John.

Contemplate how short Advent is. We have only four weeks to prepare for the kingdom. But if we had longer, would we be any more prepared? Sense the urgency in this reading. We are told to repent now.

Contemplate how you are preparing for Christmas: when you write your cards, do you dash them off in a hurry without a thought for the person you are sending them to? Or do you think of each person in turn, and contemplate what they mean in your life, and how they have played a part in your life's journey, and give thanks?

The reflections on today's lectionary invite us to contemplate, they move us towards discussion. For the next part of our service, we are going to take time to break into little groups of around 3 or 4 people, and share with each other some of our responses to the challenges in today's readings, and in the reflection we just heard read.

There are two main things we are going to discuss:

- 1) How can we 'prepare' for Christmas in a way that helps us with our discipleship and journey of faith (i.e. how can we make Christmas meaningful)?
- 2) What are some of the things we would like to change about the world, that we often blame on others or assume are nothing to do with us (e.g. politics, economics, climate change, etc.)? Are there some achievable actions we can do or change that will make a difference?

[You may need to repeat the questions, or have them available for people to refer back to during their conversations. Give people at least 5 minutes to talk, and ideally closer to 10. Depending on the size of your congregation, it may not be possible to have feedback at the end, but you might invite a few people to share something of the discussion with the whole church – especially if people have points they think it would be helpful for others to hear].

As you draw back together, share this prayer:

Dear Lord, help me to prepare for your coming
By making space and staying still.

Help me to prepare by honest examination of myself.
Help me to lift my face to the wind of your Spirit
And be prepared for your coming.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

707 STF – Make me a channel of your peace OR

180 STF – O come, O come, Immanuel

Prayers of intercession

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the example of John the Baptist – the example of someone who prepares the way for your arrival

May we be people who prepare the way for you in ourselves and in others this Advent.

Thank you for the model of humility which John offers us – choosing to point to you when he could have accepted personal acclaim.

Fix in us the same humility. Not a humility which backs away from action or shirks responsibility, but one which seeks to release power not cling to it, one which points to something greater and has no need for ego.

We pray for the work of All We Can as it seeks to put local communities facing poverty in the driving seat. Grant All We Can the humility to constantly amplify the voices of local communities, not its own, the humility to allow communities to flourish on their own terms, not ours.

We thank you for the sharp words John has for those who do not recognise the injustice they commit.

While all of us fall short and require repentance, we think particularly of those places and situations where great suffering ensues because of a refusal to repent. We pray for the war in Ukraine, which could be so easily ended with one man's repentance. We pray for the countries All We Can's partners operate in, that leaders domestically and internationally would not turn a blind eye to poverty.

We take a moment now to bring to mind any personal prayers we want to offer.

All this we pray in Jesus' name,

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

⁴ Taken from Gazing on the Gospels by Judith Dimond, with reflection questions written by Tim Baker

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by All We Can

Let us give thanks, for we have received so much.

Today, we offer something of what we have received back to you, Lord God.

And we put that to use in the communities around us, and this church which seeks to serve them.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.

Hymn:

173 STF – Into the darkness of this world OR

183 STF – Praise to the God who clears the way

Blessing

Out we go, into the midst of winter and the middle of advent. As we wait, as we prepare, as we open our hearts to you, Lord God, come amongst us and inspire us, by your grace.

We go in grace, in hope, in anticipation, we step out in love,

Amen.⁶

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker