

**Winchester, Eastleigh, and Romsey Circuit
Worship at Home sheet 5th December 2021**

Advent 2

Preparation

As we journey through Advent, create an 'Advent Ring' of 5 candles, and light one each Sunday.

Listen, read, pray, or sing along

<https://youtu.be/Yj-Ci8afpFM>

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.

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.

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.

Praise to the God who comes to bring
comfort to all who mourn.
The whole creation 'Glory' sings
as Christ the light is born.

Jan Berry (*b.* 1953)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 183
Words: © Jan Berry

Prayers

God of the wilderness and the wild places,
We come now to worship you,
We come to listen for the voice of one
proclaiming in the desert.
We come, ready to hear the voice of the prophet
announcing your Kingdom, preparing the way
for the coming of Christ.
Jesus, the Christ, whose love brings light in the
darkness, good news to the oppressed, joy to the
world, is coming soon.

God of grace and mercy,
forgive us for dozing when you have called
us to watch and pray, forgive us when we fail to
see the signs of your coming, when we struggle to
choose hope over despair. Forgive us that in the
rush of the Christmas season we so easily forget
to stop and listen for the voice of the prophet and
the sound of angel voices. Keep us alert and
watchful, ready, and waiting in hopeful
anticipation for the coming of Christ.
In Christ's name we pray **Amen**

Old Testament Reading: Malachi 3 v 1-4

Gospel reading: Luke 3 v 1-6

Reflection

In 1962, two scientists Francis Crick and James Watson were awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine for their discovery of the structure of DNA. It was undoubtedly one of the most significant scientific discoveries of the 20th century. And yet, there were others who went before them, who paved the way and whose work remains relatively unknown. One such person was Rosalind Franklin. This trailblazing woman worked at Kings College in London and her research involved using X - Ray diffraction to study DNA. Crick and Watson later used her findings in their own research.

You can probably think of other examples of people who have done great things with the ground having already been prepared by others.

Today's readings are in essence about just that. They are about the paving of the way, the getting things ready, the preparation for the incarnation, the birth of Immanuel, God with us.

John the Baptist is a fascinating character. All four Gospels place him as an important figure in the narrative of Jesus' origin. And yet, I don't think I've ever seen an Advent Calendar that featured John the Baptist. I wonder why?

Luke tells us that the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. John has

clearly given up his hereditary claim to the priesthood and wandered off into the desert. Why would he choose to inhabit such an inhospitable and barren place when he could enjoy the comfort, security and privilege which would come from being born the son of a priest?

The first two verses of Luke 3 contain a long sentence naming no less than seven powerful rulers of the time. Between them they represent the centres of political and religious power. One might therefore quite understandably expect the word of God to come to one of these men located as they were in a Palace or Temple.

Luke, however, makes the link between the proclamation of God's word and the prophesy from Isaiah: *'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the lord, make his paths straight'*.

The wilderness, or desert, is an exposed, risky, raw place and John is presented as a lone figure, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, born to them in their aging years. It seems that this is a lesson about power. God does not choose to use an earthly ruler, whether political or religious, to proclaim the message of the coming of the Christ.

Instead, he chooses John, a man who has turned his back on entitlement, privilege, and comfort. The place of proclamation is to be the wilderness precisely because it's a place which lays bare human need. When we find ourselves in the wilderness there is no choice but to wait, watch and trust that God will show up. It's a place which calls us to repentance as we are faced with the reality of our lives. It's not an easy place to be. Luke tells us that John went into the region around the River Jordan and proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Crowds of ordinary people came out to him, leaving the security of their everyday lives, venturing into the unknown to be baptised by this strange and enigmatic prophet.

'Sin' and 'repentance' aren't words I find particularly straightforward to grapple with.

They're loaded words which for some can all too easily be associated with paralysing guilt and fear rather than grace and mercy. 'Sin' is a word which it seems to me, is rather too easy to manipulate in order to justify one moralistic agenda over another. Perhaps a more helpful way to understand what 'sin' is might be to consider it as anything that leads to - or contributes towards - disharmony, disconnection, estrangement, apathy towards God and towards one another.

The message brought by John the Baptist is an invitation to put things right, to be ready and prepared for the coming of Christ.

The Old Testament reading from Malachi reminds us that Advent is a season of anticipation, even of apprehension, over the coming of Christ the Judge, the One who will set straight all the world's wrongs by presiding in glory and in justice over a world which is disconnected and estranged from its Creator. There is an urgent argument taking place here between God and the people. At the end of chapter 2, Malachi says that the people have wearied God, and they ask indignantly what it is they have done. Malachi replies that they have called into question God's justice, and in so doing have called into question God's very character. They have said 'all who do evil are good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them..... Where is the God of justice?'

Both Bible passages affirm that God is indeed a God of justice. They confront us with the reality that the Advent expectation is not just a longing for the sweet little baby Jesus who doesn't cry (at least not according to the theologically dubious words of the well-known carol, 'Away in a Manger'), it's a longing for the arrival of God's justice on earth.

God will send a messenger and, with the message he brings, the world is put on notice that things are about to change, that old wrongs are about to be uprooted and replaced with the values of God. Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

Listen, read, pray, or sing along

<https://youtu.be/XDEgli4aQDo>

I cannot tell why he, whom angels' worship,
should set his love upon us, now or then,
or why, as Shepherd, he should seek the
wanderers, to bring them back, they know not
how or when. But this I know that he was born of
Mary when Bethlem's manger was his only home,
and that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
as with his peace he graced this place of tears,
or how his heart upon the cross was broken,
the crown of pain to three-and-thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
and lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,
for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
how he will claim his earthly heritage,
how satisfy the needs and aspirations
of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,
and he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
and some glad day his sun shall shine in
splendour, when he the Saviour, Saviour of the
world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
when at his bidding every storm is stilled,
or who can say how great the jubilation
when every human heart with love is filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will
answer : 'at last the Saviour, Saviour of the world,
is King !'

William Young Fullerton (1857–1932)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 350 .

Prayers for God's people and world

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

Come, Lord Jesus

Come, Lord Jesus

Come to your world as King of the nations.
We pray for places in the world where there is
violence and conflict, poverty, and injustice.

Before you rulers will stand in silence.

Come, Lord Jesus

Come, Lord Jesus

Come to your Church as Lord and Judge.
We pray for the Church worldwide, for unity and
a renewed vision of your Kingdom on earth.

Help us to live in the light of your coming
and give us a longing to do your will.

Come, Lord Jesus

Come, Lord Jesus

Come to your people
as Saviour and bearer of pain.

We pray for those who suffer in body, mind, or
spirit. Enfold us all in your love and mercy,
Wipe away the tears of failure, fear, and distress,
and set us free to serve you forever.

Come, Lord Jesus

Come, Lord Jesus

Come to us from heaven
with power and great glory,
and lift us up to meet you,
where with all your saints and angles,
we will live with you forever.

Come, Lord Jesus

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Dedication

Offer your regular giving to God.

As we bring these gifts to you, and offer you our
lives, we thank you for all your good gifts and
especially for your coming Kingdom.

Listen, read, pray, or sing along

<https://youtu.be/yuvbW7gVwal>

There's a light upon the mountains, and the day is
at the spring,
when our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory
of the King ;
weary was our heart with waiting, and the night-
watch seemed so long ;
but his triumph-day is breaking, and we hail it
with a song.

There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the
air ; and the breath of God is moving in the
fervent breath of prayer :
for the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon
the throne, and the travail of our spirit is the
travail of his own.

He is breaking down the barriers, he is casting up
the way ;
he is calling for his angels to build up the gates of
day : but his angels here are human, not the
shining hosts above ; for the drumbeats of his
army are the heartbeats of our love.

Hark ! We hear a distant music, and it comes with
fuller swell ; 'tis the triumph-song of Jesus, of our
King, Immanuel :
Zion, go now forth to meet him ; and, my soul, be
swift to bring all your finest and your noblest for
the triumph of our King !

Henry Burton (1840–1930)

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Closing Prayer and Blessing

The day of the Lord is surely coming.
Be faithful in worship,
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.

**Service prepared by
The Revd Ruth Fry**

Prayers taken from 1999 TMCP The Methodist Worship Book

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