

*Christ Church New
Southgate & Friern Barnet*

11 December 2022

Welcome

Lord, you are the source of all hope and healing.
As we gather today, and winter approaches fast,
may you warm our cold hearts and strengthen our weak spirits.
Lead us away from the dark places where our doubts take us,
and take us instead along your holy, hope-filled way.

Amen.

Advent Candle

Song: Prepare the way

Reading: Isaiah 35.1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ²it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.
³Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
⁴Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
'Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.'
⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for

joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
⁷the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,^[a]
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.
⁸A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,^[b]
but it shall be for God's people;^[c]
no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.
⁹No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
¹⁰And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Song: Psalm 145 How great

Prayer

Sometimes I am a desert, Lord.
I am dry and hard and difficult;
nothing will grow in me – no good idea or kind thought.
Sometimes I am like rock –
I offer no comfort and can find no comfort in myself.
Heal me, Lord, with holiness like streams.
Restore me. Let me rest in you.
Fill me with blessed space and let me wait,
attentive for whatever you might say. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 11.2-6

²When John heard in prison what the Messiah^[a] was doing, he sent word by his^[b] disciples ³and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for

another?' ⁴ Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers^{le} are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶ And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

Lord, when we see people hurting, being healed:

(make hurting face, then joyful)

we thank you for being there.

When we see people who are weak, made strong:

(bend over, then strong man pose)

we thank you for being there.

When we see anyone who is feeling low, lifted up:

(crouch down, then stand tall)

we thank you for being there.

When we know that we are doing your will:

(walk on the spot)

we thank you for being there.

Whenever we feel that we are in a dark place:

(cover eyes, then uncover)

we thank you for being there. Amen.

All age: Make a pathway of feet

A way to acknowledge those who prepared the way for us.

Ask everyone to draw around their feet (shoes on). Then, within each foot, write the name of at least one person who helped to shape who they are and/or their understanding of God, or of someone who has been particularly influential in the history of your local church community.

Song: I'm gonna up and down
I'm gonna jump up and down
Gonna spin right around
I'm gonna praise Your name forever
I'm gonna shout out loud!
Gonna deafen the crowd
I'm gonna send my praise to heaven

I'm gonna jump up and down
Gonna spin right around
I'm gonna praise Your name forever
I'm gonna shout out loud!
Gonna deafen the crowd
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I will run this race and I will never stop
I'll follow Jesus 'til the day I drop
I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me
(Christ who strengthens me)
When you've got such a lot
When you've got not a lot
What?
Be happy!

God-who-saves,
deliver us from visions that are narrow,
restricted and uninspiring
and from fears that threaten to overpower us.
Through your Spirit,
stir and refresh us to hope and trust
in your expansive, open, sure, joyous and extravagant love.
We pray in the name of the One who embodies love to the fullest.
Amen.

Song: It came upon the midnight clear
It came upon a midnight clear
That glorious song of old
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold

Peace on the earth, good will to men
From heaven's all gracious King
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing

Still through the cloven skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world

Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing

All ye beneath life's crushing load
Whose forms are bending low
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow

Look now for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing
O rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing
And hear the angels sing

Sermon: Spring bulbs at Christmas time

Growing up, we often used to go for Christmas day lunch to my grandparents. Going to grandma and granddads was pretty good for two reasons: 1/ only they had enormous chocolates hanging on their tree just for us and 2/ In their front room, they had a big long windowsill, and always my grandma had bulbs growing at Christmas time. Crocus, hyacinths small and massive scented ones, daffodils, and sometimes – if they were on special offer – an amaryllis. I had never really thought about the significance of these bulbs, you might have seen some in the supermarkets now or indeed have some at home just about to peak out. Why do we have spring or even summer flower bulbs in our homes at Christmas time?

It might be because there are not many fresh flowers that grow in the UK or Europe at Christmas time and the shops want to sell something.

But it might also be because spring flowers remind us that even in these dark and exceptionally cold days, spring is coming.

The prophet Isaiah paints a picture for the weary exiled people of God that a spiritual spring is coming for them. He encourages

them – even though they have been forced to leave their homes, even though they are economically, physically, socially and politically broken, that there is hope. He describes their situation as like a desert that will bloom and will rejoice and will rejoice and blossom like crocus, like spring flowers in winter.

This is the beauty of the Lord, like a spring flower in the desert, like a spring bulb in a warm front room next to tinsel and twinkling Christmas tree lights.

Isaiah's prophesy was recorded many hundreds of years before Mary bore Jesus, before John the Baptist grew up and started to proclaim the way to follow God. John had been shouting in the desert for his adult lifetime, until Herod got so annoyed with his sermons that he put in him prison. From his dark cell, from his place of torment and from his fear of execution he sends a question to Jesus : are you the one who is to come? Are you the one we can hope in? Are you the one who is going to save us? Who are you Jesus?

Jesus son of God in a manger is sign of God's love and compassion. Jesus son of God healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead to life, is a sign of God's hope and the transformation that is only possible with God.

God looks at a desert, and wants to bring spring flowers, and he will.

God looks at a wilderness, and wants to drive out jackals and plant crops, and he will.

God looks at our suffering, and wants to bring complete peace, and he will.

God heard the cry of his people and brought them out of the desert and into the promised land. And they were led by his presence by day and night.

God heard the cry of his people, and sought to bring them out of the desert and into his presence.

And God hears our cries, in our darkness, in our wilderness and to every single cry, God seeks to bring us into hope.

Sometimes spring time bulbs forced into growing in overly warm Christmas front rooms, grow too fast and flop over, sometimes they're not what you expected, but they normally grow. The bulbs change from dormant bulb to green shoots. It is the green shoots that are the sign of God's presence. The kingdom of God is always about power, power to transform. Power to grow, power to move from the darkness to light, despair to hope and it always starts with small things.

As the people of God seeking him at advent right here at Christ Church how can we sing Isaiah's song to each other? How can we encourage each other as we look for his presence as we look for his way? He mentions very physical details doesn't he? Strengthen weak hands – or in other words - time to roll up our sleeves. This doesn't mean do like politicians do and turn up everywhere with rolled up sleeves, it does mean volunteer to do something practical. Share the load. Volunteer to make tea and coffee, or tidy up afterwards. Make firm feeble knees, let us be persistent and determined and encourage those with fearful hearts. What do we encourage each other with?

God sent his son, to be the saviour of the world. He brings the presence of God right into our lives, in our hearts today. God sent his son, to show us the way, he proves his identity by signs of the kingdom fulfilled from Isaiah in the gospel of Matthew alone. And we remember that the same God has not given up on us, but is calling each of us to seek his transformation in our lives right now. It is only God who can change the world now, and we lean forward to the day when every desert is carpet of crocuses, and every barren place becomes a field of plenty. But for now we take each sign of salvation, every moment of peace, every hope that

sustains, every act of love that spurs us on and we celebrate it for it gives a glimpse of the glory to come, of spring flowers in winter and of the splendour of the king and his kingdom that will never end.

Song: The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

Communion

Prayers for the world

Creator God, maker of all that is
Creator God, maker of all that is,
we come before you, knowing of the world's
distress.
We ask you to bind up the wounds of your
Church
and to heal our fractured lives.
**For we are in need, Lord God,
and we can do nothing without you.**

Your world is in danger, Lord.
Through foolishness and ignorance we have
harmed it.
Help us to put right what we have spoiled.

**For we are in need, Lord God,
and we can do nothing without you.**

Give us courage, Lord, to journey out in
faith,
to put ourselves at risk for the sake of your
kingdom.

Wherever there are barriers to faith, love or
joy,
help us to remove them.

**For we are in need, Lord God,
and we can do nothing without you.**

We pray for people who live in barren
places,
for those who scrape a living from bare
earth,
those whose homes are destroyed by floods.
Help and support all those who work for aid
agencies,
give wisdom and compassion to those who
govern us.

Give us generous hearts, Lord,
and remove from us the fear of want
that makes us unwilling to share what we
have.

**For we are in need, Lord God,
and we can do nothing without you.**

Amen.

his blood can make the foulest clean;
his blood availed for me.

5 To God all glory, praise, and love
be now and ever given
by saints below and saints above,
the Church in earth and heaven.

Blessing

1 O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

2 My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread thro' all the earth abroad
the honors of your name.

3 Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease,
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life and health and peace.

4 He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;