

Second Sunday of Advent

Second Sunday of Advent – 8 December 2019

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Dr Janet Foggie, Pioneer Minister at the University of Stirling, for her thoughts on the second Sunday of Advent. This material is linked to the Advent reflections produced by [Spirituality of Conflict](#).

We would also like to thank Heather French, National Vocations Promotions Officer, for her prayers for use today, Vocations Sunday.

Our new online music resource is now live: [here](#) you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4). The search function allows you to bring up a list of songs by keyword, tune, theme, author, composer and metre, covering all of the indexes in the hymnbook. The site features Weekly Worship and thematic/seasonal playlists, alternative settings and background information on the hymns.

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Introduction

Greta Thunberg may be thought of as a prophet of today. The conflict she causes simply by speaking her mind is needed. It is our responsibility to enter into that conflict in word and action to slow our global climate crisis. John the Baptist was a forager and believer in a natural lifestyle. The protest elements of his ministry were wearing clothes of leather and eating foraged food, locusts and wild honey. He might fit well today with those who practise 'die-ins' lying on the road to prevent fossil fuels being burned, or who inhabit trees to prevent road or runway construction. He was a protester, a voice shouting in the wilds. Jesus was the prophet, the son of God, the man with the radical message. The protester John grabbed attention, Jesus followed and hammered home His gospel, good news for some, and the end of entitlement and entrenched power for others.

[Isaiah 11:1-10](#)

Isaiah draws a metaphorical picture of peace to come; writing of the wolf lying down with the lamb and the leopard with the kid. This poetry turns around the normal predator-prey relationships seen by the peoples of the bible in their everyday lives. It is a picture of heaven or a life hereafter, when all the normal conflict of life will have been resolved or suspended.

[Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19](#)

I wonder what the people of Old Testament times who heard this psalm or sang it in worship thought that it meant. Were they singing of a real physical king? The psalm speaks of a reign that never ends, 'until the moon is no more'. Is this just hyperbole? Or is it about an eternal king, pointing forward to a Messiah to come?

[Romans 15:4-13](#)

In this part of his letter, Paul refers to the book of Isaiah and the prophecies relating to the 'root of Jesse', which we read before. Is this sort of 'post hoc' re-reading of the Hebrew scriptures justified? How would it be if another faith did the same to our stories of Jesus? If it is, what do we learn from Paul making this comparison? If it is not helpful, how do we understand the Old Testament references in the New?

Matthew 3:1-12

Is there a comparison here between Paul's use of the text from Isaiah, and his interpretation of that text relating to Jesus, and John the Baptist's reference to the same passage? What does it mean that both these men point back to those prophecies which, arguably, related not to a physical person but to the afterlife, and apply them to Jesus? Does this tell us something about Jesus' time? Or does it mean that Isaiah necessarily knew Jesus was to come?

Sermon ideas

If we take the role of protester and prophet for our reflection this week then it might be illustrative to look at the impact of the Youth Climate Strikes and the work of Greta Thunberg, who addressed the UN on 23rd September 2019. Just as Jesus did with the Pharisees and Sadducees, the protesters have roundly criticised the adult leaders of their communities. Greta Thunberg said, "How dare you!" with her whole person filled with emotion as she described the leaders of the world as obsessed with money and careless of the future of the planet.

Those world leaders, and many who subscribe to their values, have not been slow to excoriate Greta Thunberg. She has faced a barrage of insults on social media and in mainstream media. The powerful message she brings has the force of truth, the Polar Regions have a crisis we cannot control and the Amazon is burning. The Victoria Falls are practically empty and the people who live by the Zambesi fear they will never see its annual floods again in their lifetime.

The radical protester who has a plant-based diet, or only eats foraged foods, or only eats sustainably raised meat, or whatever the protest is, is a necessary part of a society facing a crisis. We need to see extremes in order to get the main body of opinion to shift. In this current case.

John the Baptist uses the analogy of a tree that needs to be cut down. The petrol-based economy is literally cutting down trees that bear good fruit. We want to be able to clear our own consciences, and so going on a litter pick might salve the soul but it doesn't cancel the impact of commuting, using a petrol car for short urban journeys, or buying single-use plastic, or flying for holidays or work.

We also like to point to the complexity of the problems in order to excuse ourselves from doing the little we can. Just because a vegan burger might contain imported soya from

more than one country doesn't excuse us buying junk food with intensively farmed and processed beef (which is probably fed the same imported soya). Both the soya and the beef need to be more sustainably farmed and eaten more locally.

Equally, the human justice required of our world leaders is for them to ensure that the world's wealth, food, health resources, and even those few oil-based products we really do need and can afford to keep, are more fairly redistributed. A good example is the need for accessible and widely used public transport as a viable option for the majority of urban journeys. Many people cite the inadequacy of public transport as a reason for taking the car on an urban journey. These sorts of 'helpless cycles' are really easy excuses for not mobilising a bigger social change. If we improve public transport, we also need to incentivise the use of it in order to ensure cars are not being used in urban areas where the effects of the air pollution are greatest.

If we want to hear the voice of John the Baptist today, we need look no further than Greta Thunberg. The question for us, as it was in Jesus day, is: are we wheat to be gathered into the granary, caring about our world neighbours; or are we chaff to be thrown into the global winnowing fire?

Prayers

My approach to writing prayers is to use everyday language and to speak to God directly, in friendly and accessible tones. It is important if we use faith 'jargon' to explain those words, but often we don't need them at all.

Approach to God

God of the green pastures and the quiet waters.

We come to You today to pray, sing and listen together.

Enable our worship so that we aren't gathering in just our own strength.

Hear our praise and words of joy

like lambs playing in green fields.

But also, be with the quiet ones,

who maybe walk in a valley or are down in a dip this week.

Let each of us be blessed and bless one another in our service today.

Amen

Thanksgiving

God of all goodness we thank You today for prophets,
those people who are strong enough to speak out with clear voices.
We thank You for protests
and protesters who challenge our society and our thinking.
In grateful prayer we bring our thanks
for all who see what is going wrong with the world,
and who have voices trying to make it better.

Confession

God of eternity
we come before You today
sorry for all those children who could turn to us and say,
'You have stolen my dreams and my childhood.'

For children facing an uncertain world due to climate crisis,
and our part in burning the fossil fuels of our planet.
We are sorry for the wrong we have done to the children
whose future we have gobbled up in shopping,
and using the earth's resources.

We hear the children saying, 'How dare you!'
And we are sorry.
Sorry to the pit of our stomachs.
Sorry to the bottom of our hearts.
Forgive us, gracious God,
and let that forgiveness be neither easy nor quickly forgotten.

[Silence]

We pray to You,
our God who forgives before we ask,
however little we deserve it.
As we step towards You to receive that forgiveness
so may we be enabled to live more humbly,
consume less,
buy less,
and grow more like Jesus every day.
Amen

Intercession

I like to keep intercessions topical so it is best to bring in issues of the day at this stage, sometimes an extempore intercession says more to the congregation than written words, but either way it is good for it to be fresh.

You may also like to include a collect and/or a blessing

Blessing

Go to speak the truth

Spoken by God,

And the Prophets,

And the Disciples,

And all followers of Christ today

And the blessing of God... (in words that fit your tradition)

Vocations Sunday

The Christian faith affirms that we all have a vocation – the call of Jesus Christ to discipleship and the adventure that lies ahead in that life-long journey.

We may also have a call to voluntary work, family life, secular employment, to serve within a congregation or perhaps even to serve in ministry locally, or in the national recognised ministries of the Church of Scotland [full-time Ministry of Word and Sacrament, Ordained Local Ministry, the Diaconate, the Readership].

While vocational reflection and encouragement is for every day and week of the year, Vocations Sunday is specifically a time when we can share with people the opportunities to serve the Church in a new way. This allows a focus to explore the call of God upon each and every life, and to offer encouragement to people in discerning and recognising their gifts.

If you ask anyone serving in ministry, their journey has been one of steps and stages, twists and turns, encounters and opportunities. Most people have been surprised at some point by the way God's call has touched their lives and led them somewhere unexpected. That is part of the excitement of the discipleship journey; that we are encouraged into new places and walk alongside others in faith and in community. Essentially it is the story of our faith, encountered in the Scriptures by generations who have sought to follow God's call.

Vocations Sunday offers the opportunity to write new pages of that Christian story as people today continue to hear the call of God, and find confirmation of their gifts for the mission of God today.

Prayer of approach and confession

Loving God,
You search us and You know us,
You know when we rise and when we lie down.
You know our thoughts, and all our ways.
You know what we are about to say, even before we say it,
You are behind and before us,
And Your everlasting arms surround us and comfort us,
And we praise You, God.

Lord God,
We are amazed that You care for us,
That You pay such close attention to us,
That You love us despite our faults and our failings,
That You know all our strengths and our weaknesses,
And still You call us to work in partnership with You,
The Perfect God.
And we praise You, God.

Forgiving God,
We recognise Your grace and mercy in our lives.
We know our own limitations,
And acknowledge our failings,
For we know we sometimes choose not to listen when You call us,
We respond half-heartedly instead of giving You our full commitment,
We busy ourselves with the ways of the world, to avoid going Your way.
And yet You continue to call out to us,
And so we praise You, God.

We praise You that You accept us,
Not because of what we can achieve ourselves,
Or what we are equipped to do,
But through our faith in Christ Jesus.

God of mercy and compassion,
We receive Your grace, by which we are made new every day,
By which we are refreshed to go out in Your service,
To love and serve the world You have made,
In the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord,
Amen

Prayer of intercession

Loving God,
We did not choose You, but You chose us.
You call us to know You better.
You broke through the barrier of sin,
Through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ,
To draw us close to You.

We thank You for Your transforming power,
which brings life, and strength, love and joy into our lives.
We thank You for the presence of the Holy Spirit,
Who equips us for a lifetime in Your service.

We pray for those whom You call to serve in Your church.
For those who feel inadequate to the task,
Who feel You can't possibly want them,
For those who try hard not to hear Your call.
Reassure them of Your blessing, Lord,
inspire them in Your service,
remind them that You equip those whom You call,
and don't simply call those who are already equipped.

We remember that You called as Your disciples
James, and John, those impetuous fishermen,
Doubting Thomas,
Matthew, the tax-collector, and enemy sympathiser,
And Simon the Zealot.

You worked through Moses, who stuttered,
Jeremiah, who thought he was too young,
David, the adulterer and murderer,
Rahab, the foreigner and prostitute,

Jonah, who ran away, and
Mary, the teenage, unmarried, soon-to-be Mother of God.

Lord God, You call all Your people,
To serve You in many different ways,
And we pray for all who serve Your church.
For the ministers and elders,
the musicians and the choir members,
for those who arrange and distribute flowers,
and those who make and serve the tea.

We pray for those who handle the administration, and the finances.
For the church officers, the cleaners,
those who deal with the maintenance of our buildings,
and all those who do Your work in our communities.

Your church is a vast body of people, Lord,
Of all different shapes and sizes,
With unique life experiences.
All skilled, in many different ways.
All called to serve You,
as Your body,
the church, here on earth.

Bless us in Your service,
We pray
Amen

Prayer on the theme of call and discernment

'The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.' Frederick Buechner, *Wishful thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) p.95.

Loving God,
thank You for faithfully guiding Your people.
You go ahead of us and promise that You will equip us for the life You call us to lead.

Forgive us when we struggle to trust Your promises
in our daily living and in our dreams for the future.

Forgive us when we approach 'Your will' as we would a maths puzzle to be solved or a destination to be reached, rather than holy encounter to be experienced.

Help us to recognise the longings of the hearts You have placed within us for the needs of a hurting world can seem easier to locate than the geography of our own deep gladness.

In our questioning and our doubting remind us that You do not ask us to be perfect, You call us to be faithful.

Whatever roles You would have each of us play remind us that our primary identity is as Your children. That is the one needful thing and it shall not be taken away from us.

In grateful response, may our daily walk with You be a living testament, a witness, to Your ongoing care and provision.

Lead us by the hand, and by Your Spirit, to see the shape of Your plans in the gifts You have given us.

We ask all in the name of the greatest gift of all, Jesus the Christ.
Amen

Alternative Material

This material has been supplied by kind permission of Spill the Beans and allows you to explore the readings or theme of the service in creative ways that include everyone gathering for worship.

New material from Spill the Beans is provided in the latest issues available from their [website](#).

Advent – Prophetic Pathways

During Advent and Christmas we will be focusing on the Old Testament passages from the prophets and thinking about the pathways the prophets encourage us to walk through Advent and beyond.

Here are a couple of suggestions for building pathways through your worship space to help people to remember and reflect on the words of the prophets and the connections those words have with their lives at this time.

Pathway Poster(s)

Prepare a large poster sized picture of a pathway. You can either have one poster which you add things to each week or a poster for each of the weeks. These can be hung around your worship space.

Pathways

Pathways can be made for your worship space by laying out stones to mark the edges of pathways or by using rolls of thick paper (or vinyl floor covering) cut into a pathway shape, the full width of the paper at one end and gradually tapering to a narrow path at the other end. These pathways could easily be tidied up or rolled away from one week to the other, could be shaped to fit your worship space and could be moved around to different areas of your worship space. It would be good to take a photo of the pathway each week before you put it away and to display images from previous weeks either on PowerPoint or on a display board. If you have some floor space that is not used for other things, you might want to lay out the pathway after worship and join the pathways together to make a mini labyrinth

[Isaiah 11:1-10](#) – *Pathway to Transformation*

Pathway Poster: add words 'Pathway to Transformation' and add images to represent change to the poster, for example: buds on trees, shoots growing from stumps, wells in

areas affected by drought. You could also include images from your local area, perhaps allotment gardens, or from a food bank.

Pathways: have twigs available and ask people to lay twigs along the pathway. At some point during worship add some images (mentioned above) to the pathway.

Bible Notes

Isaiah 11:1-10 – *Conscientious Transformation*

In this second week of Advent we continue on our Prophetic Pathway with the path to transformation. There are some who would mock Isaiah's imagery of a world where nature is robbed of its harsh brutality; animals and humanity are safe from predatory instincts and a different order is imagined. It is a vision of an idyllic creative order, and as such it is one that sadly bears no relation to reality, nor to the natural cycles of life (and society).

Isaiah's vision is hyperbole, it is a vision that captures our imagination because it is so unlikely. Yet his vision still points us to another of our human longings for the world: that of justice, and a world where the meek are not trampled, the poor not preyed upon, and the underprivileged neither abused nor disadvantaged.

The idealised vision of life has as its basis the justice of God's appointed one. Using the imagery and mythology of the Davidic line of Kings the hope is expressed for a King who will see beyond mere human understanding. It is almost as if he will have a sixth sense, a sense of justice and wisdom which is able to see beyond the foremost circumstances, to the structures and injustices that so often blight our lives and societies.

This brings to mind 1 Samuel 16:7, where there is some puzzlement of God's choice of David as Saul's successor: "for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Just as much of a paradox is the statement 'Jesus is Lord', when one considers who Jesus of Nazareth was. Yet for all his own lack of status, there was something in the way he was with people, the way he saw people and related to people that made many decide he was in fact God's anointed one. Jesus was one who could see past outward appearance to the deeper realities of human living, as evidenced by his teaching, parables and healings.

Thinking of our own world in this season of Advent: what would it require of us in our time to see a world as peaceful and safe as that idealised pastoral scene from Isaiah?

Still all around us the wealthy devour the poor, and the mighty trample the weak. For all its benefits, unfettered global capitalism remains in existence in order to benefit those who already have more than they need, and at the cost of those who have less than they need.

How in this season of Advent, as we approach the annual Christmas consumer boom, can we engage the conscientiousness of our congregations to spend wisely, to use our resources with justice in mind? As we prepare for a time of year when we will have more opportunity than usual to speak to the wider communities around us; how do we communicate this longing for justice and the transformation it could bring to our communities?

Transformation is no pipe dream; either in ourselves or in our communities, where we follow Jesus Christ. Transformation personally, locally and globally is something for which we long with all our hearts, work towards with all our commitment and pray for with a deep vision of what could be.

Retelling for young people – Sung to “*Old MacDonald had a farm*”.

Our Isaiah had a dream,
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
And in that dream he saw a tree
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
With a tree stump here,
a tree stump there,
here a stump, there a stump,
everywhere a tree stump,
our Isaiah had a dream,
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!

Our Isaiah had a dream
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
And in that dream he saw a king,
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
With a Royal King here,
a Royal King there,
here a king, there a king,
everywhere a Royal King
our Isaiah had a dream,
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!

Our Isaiah had a dream
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
And in that dream the King brought peace,
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
With wisdom here,
understanding there,
respect there was for everyone
everywhere,
our Isaiah had a dream,
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!

Our Isaiah had a dream
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
And in that dream the king was fair
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
With a lot of goodness here,
a lot of fairness there,
goodness here, fairness there,
justice reigning everywhere,
our Isaiah had a dream,
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!

Our Isaiah had a dream
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
And in that dream there was a farm
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
With a leopard, here,
a wee goat there,
all types of animals
everywhere,
old Isaiah had a dream,
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!

Our Isaiah had a dream
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
And in that dream we lived in peace,
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!
With no more war here
and no more war there,

here no war, there no war,
people caring everywhere
our Isaiah had a dream,
Yeah, O Yeah, O Yeah!

Call to worship

A shoot shall come out
from the stump of Jesse.
A stump that will sprout life,
a life of righteousness and faithfulness.
Wolves, lambs
leopards, kids
lions, calves
lead us on a path to transformation.
Let us here take our place on that path.

Prayer of adoration

Not just then and there but here and now,
we delight to know, Gracious God,
you bring new beginnings to be:
our hearts rise to adore you.

Yes, then and there and here and now:
the shoot from the root,
the branch, bringing new hope,
new healing, new purpose,
in a wayward world:
our hearts rise to adore you.

Yes, then and there and here and now,
your son in the hay,
your being born as us,
your will and way given substance:
our hearts rise to adore you.

Yes, here and now, not just then and there,
your loving purpose knows no bounds
in time or nation, in all Creation,
your word is light and life:

**our hearts rise to adore you.
Amen.**

Prayer of intercession

Loving God,
with the gathering excitement,
hearts and minds all too readily
turn to trees and tinsel
and “tissued fripperies”
and forget the far more there is.
All too often, attention turns inwards,
when Christmas ought to be outwards.
In prayer, we pray the balance is redressed:
tilting fully to faithful care
for the needs we know—
far from us, right beside us, within us.
As we turn to these needs,
we pray we judge with justice,
and fear not to speak a truth
countering callous disregard
of vulnerable souls.
As we turn to these needs,
we pray we care with compassion,
and shrink not from defending and
delivering
those impoverished and oppressed
by a too often careless world.
As we turn to these needs,
we pray we presume
your will might just be
that we break free from received earthly
wisdom
and embrace, instead, a heavenly folly -
a broken-openness:
through which new light and life emerge.
Amen.

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Musical suggestions

You can hear samples of these suggestions in the 'Weekly Worship' section of <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/>. This new online music resource will allow you to listen to and search the breadth of music available in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4).

You will find hidden gems and alternative arrangements to familiar songs that will inspire creativity and spark fresh curiosity about how we best use music in worship.

- CH4 264 – “Judge Eternal, throned in splendour” – A great traditional advent hymn which reminds us of God’s judgement on those who take children’s hopes and dreams
- CH4 265 – “Pray for a world where every child” – Similar theme, choice of tunes for this hymn
- CH4 185 – “Come, children join to sing” – A contrasting hymn of response, maybe after a children’s talk about looking after God’s planet
- CH4 193 – “God is love, his the care” – Again a song about God’s love for people and planet regardless of deserving
- CH4 472 – “Come thou long expected Jesus” – Another advent traditional hymn about Jesus’ second coming which references the texts for today

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Scottish Charity Number: SC011353

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