

Second Sunday of Advent – Year A

Second Sunday of Advent – 4 December 2022

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Rev Dr Jock Stein, retired Minister, for his thoughts on the second Sunday of Advent and Rev Donald Campbell and Carol Finlay for their reflections and prayers for Vocations Sunday and World AIDS Day.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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Introduction

There are different ways of keeping the general traditions of Advent. For many, the four Sundays follow Prophets, John the Baptist, Mary, God's People. But CH4 282 gives us God's Promise, Prophets, John the Baptist, Mary. And there is also a tradition of giving the second Sunday of Advent a focus on the Bible, and one of the Advent Sundays a focus on the Second Coming.

The readings for today do include John the Baptist, but next week's gospel reading will also touch on the Baptist as well as featuring Mary; and today's reading from Romans begins with the purpose of Holy Scripture, so the lectionary does try and cover all the bases!

How do you prepare? Read a lot, listen and look a lot. Because I have been preaching for more than 60 years, I am able to work fast – I read the four passages, spot the connections, make some notes, decide what books I should read, check out song books, use my own indexed file system, then start setting down summary notes on the computer. I leave it a day or two, then revise. But for most folk preparing worship, I'd recommend that you read the passages, see if one of them is going to be the key one for Sunday, then live with it for a day or two, letting the wonderful brains we all have make the connections overnight, read what you need to read, then start writing ... people prepare in different ways, and the test is always, not, 'Do I think I prepared a good sermon?' but 'Did God bless people with that service?'

Some people major on 'what does this passage mean?' Others are quick to spot connections with what is going on in the Church and world today. Both matter, and if we easily prefer one to the other we may need to get a grip on our less preferred approach.

For what it's worth, let me share an experiment I did with a congregation. I told them, for the next two Sundays, I am going to preach in two different ways – one will be from notes, the other will be from a script. I won't tell you which is which, but I would like to ask you afterwards, which did you like more? The result rather surprised me – they all said they preferred the script (though they didn't know which it was), because they said I was freer. That was me – it might not be you – but you will at least get the message, that if you are using a script (as I now always do) it must not feel to a congregation as if you are reading it.

Advent worship has its own complications and opportunities, depending what is going on with your people and place of worship. It may also include people not usually in church.

Isaiah 11:1-10

This passage gives us an ideal – God’s kingdom of peace. Ideals are brilliant – and also dangerous. We can use them to moan about the world as we see it, we can use them to escape from the world as it is, or we can put the ideal into a glass case and leave it there.

A few ideas come immediately to me from this beautiful passage:

- It’s a way that Israel began to make some sense of the failure of David’s line. Psalm 89 brings the third book of Psalms to a close with a poignant lament for David, and in general the following fourth and fifth book of Psalms see God as King, not David. A messianic understanding of Isaiah 11:1-5 brings these together.
- The opposites are dramatic – wolves and lambs together, messiah as wise and perhaps gentle in verses 2-3, but killing the wicked with his breath in verse 4. Life is not simple, God is not simple, and the ‘contradictions’ of the Bible can be extremely fruitful, not least when you get them in a single passage. G.K. Chesterton said the point of verses 6 and 7 is not that the lion becomes like a lamb but that it retains its ferocity *and* lies down with the lamb – and he saw this as a parable of how God is both loving and severe.
- ‘A little child shall lead them’ is a major reason for including this passage as a reading before Christmas, and the idea itself is striking, unlikely in an age which knew nothing of Jesus saying we must become like children. I suppose that Samuel offers some kind of prequel. The only parallel among the prophets I can think of – and it’s not that close – is a prophet like Hosea naming his children to give Israel a message.

Psalms 72:1-7, 18-19

It’s not often the lectionary gives you the chance to have one of the rousing traditional Psalms, as set in CH4 48. However, if you wish to preach on it or refer to it, a poem I wrote (below) might give you some ideas (the reference to Bruce is simply because it concludes a series of poems on Book 2 of the Psalms comparing Robert the Bruce with King David in the Old Testament):

Psalms 72

The past seems far away,
the future’s now upon us,
knocking, scowling, mocking



our attempts to pray
for rulers, be they kings
or queens, prime ministers
or sheiks, Theresa May

or Sturgeon, Mao or Xi
Jinping, Pol Pot or Trump,
imam or president,
yes, all the powers that be
who hold elected seats
or fill by fouler means
the stage of history.

How does rule play out
in war and peace games? Could
the unseen prayers of common
men and women, doubt
and faith, lament and praise
mixed up in cries to God
be what it's all about?

*Grant the king your justice
God, and may he give
the poor a break, the rich
a fright. In fact, is this
the sort of king a God
might be, or is that just
a faint hypothesis?*

So, does it really matter
if the psalm is full
of jussives, 'may it be',
or something more than that, a
'he shall be', so dear
to Christians seeing prophecy
in lots of Bible data?

Our stories start with fire,
then flicker to their close,

limp off the stage, and cough,
apologise, retire.
Without some thread of hope,
the tales of David, Bruce
and everyone expire.

*Long may he live! He will,
with gold and grain and glory,
when the common weal
is all his care, a temple
built of living stones,
such potent prophecies
a leader must fulfil.* © Jock Stein

Romans 15:4-13

Verse 3, which immediately precedes the start of the reading, is an example of an Old Testament verse being taken as fulfilled by Christ, and verse 4 then makes a more general statement about the OT. It's worth remembering that we are not just 'New Testament Christians', we are 'Bible Christians', and (like our Lord Jesus) we are inheritors of all the wisdom, story, prophecy and search found in those 39 books. Paul says they give us encouragement and hope.

He then goes on (as he began the chapter, actually) to apply this to our common life. This is the same Paul who writes so much about doctrine – he is not wanting to puff up our heads with knowledge, but to build up the body of Christ. That said, he keeps relating how we live to sound doctrine. We should welcome one another, not just because it's the right thing to do, but because Christ has welcomed us. Christian ethics, and Christian living, are not so much a series of commands as a network of links to Christ. As someone has said, beware of 'oughtery and mustery', or of 'blocked oughteries'.

Paul's main concern here, of course, as a Jew is with the Gentiles. If we have become 'the new religious' like the Jews of old, who are the 'Gentiles' we should be welcoming?

Matthew 3:1-12

The abrupt opening of the chapter can easily make us forget that John the Baptist was actually Jesus' cousin. Jesus in fact would start His own preaching ministry with a similar

message of repentance, going on to make clear that the kingdom of God had arrived with His ministry of healing and other signs. Later (Matthew 11), this is exactly how He would reassure His cousin John when the poor guy was in Herod's prison.

Matthew sees John fulfilling Isaiah 40:3. When he writes that Isaiah spoke of him, it makes me think of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17), where Moses and Elijah talk with Jesus; Elijah being the first of the prophets in Jewish understanding.

We often think of Paul as the one who broke new ground in seeing Christian faith for Gentiles as well as Jews. It's significant that verse 9 is an axe at the root of exceptionalism, and that both the Old Testament readings are concerned with the whole world, not just the world of Israel (or the Church).

Notice that the 'axe' is not just in the hand of John the Baptist, but (as a winnowing fork) in the hand of Jesus also. He will baptise with the Holy Spirit *and* with fire. Here again we are back to 'contradictions' which can be fruitful (why else would they be in the Bible?), and it is the contradiction of Advent itself, which is about the coming of God in judgment to sort out the world, and His turning up as a baby who is Himself at risk from the rulers of the world. Yet the Advent hope that God will come and sort out all things remains in the Creed, and for that we watch and pray.

Sermon ideas

Here are three 'common themes' going through the readings:

Preparation: We are

- Preparing for Christmas
- Preparing a way for the Lord

How can we prepare well – in church, in the world, in our hearts?

Children: During Advent

- Children are getting ready for Christmas
- Scripture says that 'a little child shall lead them' (Isaiah 11:6)
- 'Welcome one another' (Romans 15:7)

How do we welcome children?

The Bible: It offers us

- Instruction and encouragement (Romans 15:4)



- Hope for the world (Isaiah and Psalms readings)
- Preparation for and focus on Jesus (Gospel reading)

Prayers

Call to worship

I usually choose a suitable verse from the Psalms, such as:

“The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth” (Psalm 145:18)

but in Advent, what about,

“The coming of the Lord draws near – let us wake and watch and worship”.

Confession

In worship we confess human sin, rather than sins that the worship leader knows the congregation are guilty of (except in special circumstances), bearing in mind:

- Sin is about being sinned against as well as sinning
- Praying for civil and political leaders includes confessing their sin
- A ‘general confession’ of what we have done wrong or left undone is helpful as people can fit that to their own known circumstances
- Confession should conclude with the gospel in some form, even if you don’t go so far as an absolution in the form “May Almighty God forgive you ...”

Lord God, You have promised to come and sort out all things and all people.
We have gathered in the midst of time to reflect on Your purposes,
to prepare ourselves for Your coming,
and to give You praise.

We confess our sins,
what we have done wrong,
what we have failed to do right.
We live in a world full of wickedness and injustice,
led by sinful men and women who need Your mercy, as we do.
We have hurt others and been hurt by them.
Forgive us and lead us in better ways, we pray.
We ask this in the name of Your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ,

the one whose coming we await to make all things right.
Amen

Thanks

For every good meal you have shared,
for every kind word you have received,
for every good book on your shelves,
for every good idea in your heads,
for every good message on your phone
may our good Lord be thanked.

For the gardens that rest,
for the nights of good company,
for the music of Advent,
for inspiring speech and positive writing,
for clothes that fit,
for the wisdom of age and the smiles of children,
may our wise and bountiful Lord be thanked.

For people who have taught and nurtured us,
for thoughts which have helped and restored us,
for friends who have listened to us and stayed alongside,
for the work of Your Spirit in our lives and in the lives of others,
may our gracious God be thanked and praised,
now and always,
Amen

Prayer for others

One practice which has worked for me, especially when I have led prayers in a place strange to me, is to walk up and down the pews with paper and pen, and invite people to name people and situations – I note them, and then form them into a set of prayers later on. Here are the bones of a more general prayer:

Today we are glad for those who have had good news,
for those recovering from illness,
for those discovering new friends and new ideas,
for all who with us rejoice in Advent as a season of hope and good cheer.

We remember those for whom Advent is a difficult time –

those on their own,
those with difficult memories,
those anxious about the stresses of the Christmas season.
We pray for those who are cold and hungry because of fuel poverty,
and all who seek to help them.
We pray for the sick in body and mind,
for the lonely and the fearful,
for the bereaved.

We pray for those who lead our nations –
for members of Parliaments and Councils,
for Governments at home and abroad,
and for all who have the power to make a difference in people's lives.
We join a great company around the world who seek peace and justice,
and long for a kinder world.

And we pause to give us time to pray quietly for particular needs which we carry on our hearts . . .

Remembering with thanks those who have prayed for us and with us,
we say together,
Our Father ...

Blessing

Hope for all things better,
and do something good towards it –
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you all, now and ever,
Amen

Reflection and Prayers for Vocations Sunday

Written by Rev Donald Campbell, Minister of Dumfries St George's / CofS Recruitment Team

The word vocation comes from the Latin *vocatio* meaning “call” (or *vocare* meaning “to call”) and is reflected in Christian theology as a call from God on the life of a person. In the Reformed tradition this call has been traditionally understood in two ways. First there is a universal or general nature to God's call, in the sense that everyone is called or invited, in

the words of Jesus, to “Come, follow me”, leading all Christians into a life of service to God and others. There is also a more specific call to a particular type of service or ministry and while we can listen for God’s call at any time, Vocations Sunday presents us with a reminder to focus on the call of God. Perhaps we are called to serve God where we are or perhaps we are being called to something new, something different. Whatever form the call of God takes for us, Vocations Sunday reminds us of the importance of reflecting on it by listening for God’s voice, however it may be heard.

In 1 Kings 19, the prophet Elijah flees to Horeb. His life has become difficult and he is trying to discern what God wants him to do next. He yearns for God to speak but as he listens, God’s voice is not heard in a great and powerful wind, nor in a spectacular earthquake nor in a blazing fire, but in a gentle whisper, what the Bible calls the ‘still small voice’ (KJV) of a gentle breeze. Listening for God, however God speaks, is essential in discerning God’s call in our lives.

As well as listening for God’s voice in our own lives we can be a blessing to others by encouraging them to consider their vocation. By encouraging and affirming a sense of God’s call in another, they may gain the confidence they need to take that first step in faith to serve God in a new way. Perhaps that new way will involve taking on a new role in the local church or the local community, or perhaps it will involve applying for Full Time Ministry of Word and Sacrament, Ordained Local Ministry, the Diaconate or Readership.

The Church of Scotland invites those who sense they may be called by God to one of the ‘recognised ministries’ of the Church to enter a Period of Discernment where they will be accompanied by a mentor and encouraged to prayerfully reflect on their sense of call.

Stories of people who have discerned God’s call in their life can be found here: [Talking Ministry | The Church of Scotland](#)

The Training for Ministry page of the Church of Scotland website: [Training for Ministry | The Church of Scotland](#) contains a wealth of information for those seeking to discern a call to ministry, especially here: [Your Calling | The Church of Scotland](#)

The Recruitment Team welcome any enquiries vocation@churchofscotland.org.uk and can arrange a Discernment Conversation for further exploration.



Short prayer

Lord God,
For Your call on the lives of your people
For the invitation to follow You
For the opportunity of living life with You
We thank You.

For the call to serve You
For the invitation to walk with You
For the opportunity to serve others
We thank You.

For the gifts You give us
For Your presence in us
For Your working through us
We thank You, Lord God
Amen

Short Prayer

Eternal and Everlasting God, who was, and is, and is to come
We offer You our praise as we come before You in prayer,
seeking to discern Your call in our lives,
seeking only to speak if we must,
seeking to listen for Your voice...

Pause in silence

Holy Lord,
Draw near to us, that we might draw near to You
And help us to listen for that still small voice...

Pause in silence

Gracious God
Help us to offer our whole life to You,
That we may serve You as You call us to.
In Jesus name we pray,
Amen

Reflection and Prayers for World AIDS Sunday 2022

Written by Carol Finlay, on behalf of the Church of Scotland Faith Impact Forum.

Isaiah 11:3-4

Fear-of-God
will be all his joy and delight.
He won't judge by appearances,
won't decide on the basis of hearsay.
He'll judge the needy by what is right,
render decisions on earth's poor with justice. (*The Message 2022*)

This World AIDS Day 2022 has the theme of *Ending the HIV Epidemic: Equitable Access, Everyone's Voice*.

The day is an opportunity for everyone to help raise awareness about the status of the HIV and AIDS pandemic and encourage progress in prevention, treatment and care around the world.

Over the years the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria has successfully integrated HIV support groups into the community, becoming a gold standard in the country. One of their clients shared her story. Akani told how she was engaged to her childhood friend and during the process of marriage preparations, they decided to be tested for HIV. She tested positive and her fiancé called off the marriage. Akani was devastated ... her life was over. Despite receiving medical help in the form of antiretrovirals, she saw no future for herself, then a member of the church brought her to the Support Group. She was able to speak freely, gain confidence to ask questions and to realise that she could continue to live a full life. She received counselling and gained the courage to face her life again. She fell in love with a man and made sure he knew her status, and today they are happily married.

This is one story from a partner church project that is supported by the Church of Scotland HIV Programme. This is a story of support, understanding and non-judgemental action from those who understand the need to be an equal and valued part of a society. It is one story from partners supported by people around Scotland and beyond who give financially to allow the HIV programme to happen. This story is one that could be replicated again and again and as with all these stories, God's justice and love for us all is woven throughout.

Unfortunately however, this is not always the situation in many parts of the world. Canon Gideon Byamugisha from Uganda, founder of our partner organisation, INERELA+ (International Network of Religious Leaders Openly Living or Affected by HIV), spoke recently about the realities of young people exposed to HIV and the consequences of unequal access to COVID-19 vaccines, because of unfair patent systems. He shared his own experience of receiving support from the Church in Uganda and how that support saved his life when he was about to die, with no access to HIV medications. For many people with HIV, that continues to be a reality today.

The role of the Church and the ecumenical movement is important in continuing the response to the HIV epidemic; not only in relation to HIV stigma, but also in advocating for a sustainable response to HIV, gender justice, human sexuality and the work on HIV-related intersectionality and inequalities. This is a matter of justice, love and reconciliation.

In the reading from Isaiah, the words remind us that all people should be treated with equity and fairness: sometimes this means cultivating a new heart for justice for all.

Prayer of Intercession 1 – *insert into your own prayer of intercession*

... we have heard the stories of Akani and Gideon.

We have the words of Isaiah highlighting justice, equity and love for all.

We pray today for all who are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS in the world,
that Your love would be showered upon them,
that those in churches who welcome, support, counsel and pray for people
do so with the love and tenderness of a parent,
and that those who receive support and healing
know that it comes from You.

Lord we pray for the work of the Church of Scotland HIV Programme
and for all our project partners around the world.
Help us never to grow weary of doing good in Your name,
and always to seek justice for all.

Help us to speak up and speak out
about issues that many keep quiet about
and to always seek equity for those whose lives are so much harder than our own.
Thank You for being the loving parent who cares equally for us all
and help us to follow Your example.

Prayer of intercession 2 – insert into a prayer of intercession

... today on World AIDS Sunday we pray especially
for all infected or affected by HIV and AIDS,
for children and young people,
for adults and old people,
for those who seek to provide spiritual care or health care,
for those who allocate resources,
for those who can shape policy,
for our Church of Scotland.

Loving God, our loving parent,
Let love abound in our praying and in our actions,
let Your kingdom come, let Your will be done,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

For latest information about HIV globally, see [In Danger: UNAIDS Global AIDS Update 2022 - World | ReliefWeb](#).

For more information about the Church of Scotland's [HIV Programme](#), contact Carol Finlay on cfinlay@churchofscotland.org.uk.

Alternative Material

The alternative worship material throughout Advent has been produced by the Joint Public Issues Team and offers a range of downloadable resources for the season, including liturgies, prayers, podcasts, images and videos.

Visit their website here: <https://jpit.uk/advent>

Musical suggestions

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.



- CH4 48 – “His large and great dominion” – or just verses 4-6
- CH4 241 – “Isaiah the prophet” – another hymn on that passage, to a singable Sydney Carter tune
- CH4 256 – “May the God of hope” – a good hymn to learn and sing beside or instead of a formal benediction
- CH4 273 – “O come, O come, Emmanuel” –unless already sung on 1st Sunday of Advent
- CH4 282 – “Christmas is coming” (verse 1 and 2)
- CH3 284 – “Hope is a candle” – links the Isaiah reading with daily life, good imagery
- CH4 334 – “On Jordan’s bank” – the obvious choice, applying the Gospel reading
- CH4 455 – “I greet thee, who my sure Redeemer art” – a nice hymn by John Calvin which fits the Romans reading, but needs good planning, e.g., get someone to sing verse 1 to the better tune ‘Stonelaw’ in CH3 – not an easy tune, needs a soloist, but then follow that verse immediately with the congregation singing the rest of the verses to Sursum Corda, CH4 96, with no change of key necessary
- CH4 470 – “Jesus shall reign” – well known, a good closing hymn
- CH4 583 – “Spirit divine, attend our prayers – a simpler devotional hymn, to a strong tune which fits the Advent theme
- CH4 710 – “I have a dream” – good for linking hope to action
- A suggested playlist of songs for Christmas can be found online here:
<https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/advent>

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- While singing in our congregations is still restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?



Did it function well as a whole?

How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?

- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and
download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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