Second Sunday of Advent – Year B

Sunday 6 December 2026

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Roy Henderson, Interim Minster, Balerno Parish Church, for his thoughts on the second Sunday of Advent.

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.

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

Advent has been defined as the 'season immediately before Christmas. In the Western Church it begins on the Sunday nearest St Andrew's Day. It is observed as a penitential season, in preparation not only for Christmas but also for the Second Coming of Christ.' *(The Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church, Oxford University Press, p.8).*

Each Sunday of Advent may have its own particular theme. If your congregation sings a suitable Advent carol progressively week by week you will be aware of 'Hope', 'Peace', 'Love' and 'Joy' – see 'Hope is a Candle' (CH4 284) and 'We are a people of Hope' (GWA 90), in a slightly different order). In 'Christmas is Coming' (CH4 282) the verses focus on 'God's Promise', 'The Prophets', 'John the Baptist' and 'Mary.' Perhaps you might think of other themes or 'headlines' for each week?

Advent then, holds up the double anticipation of the Nativity and of God in Christ "making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). As we look forward to the birth of Jesus, the Word made flesh, we can see that Advent hope must become rooted and grounded in our local and global contexts. Every observance of the season takes place in its local and contemporary setting. We will try to express our Advent hope in a manner appropriate to our people and congruent with our local, national and international situation.

Oh, and this is also the season of congregational sales of work, Christmas Fairs, seasonal school events, Nativity plays and all the rest. What a heady mix!

Isaiah 40:1-11

Where are we looking for God – 1?
The name Isaiah means 'God saves'. God's promised salvation, in the sense of a return from exile, is much present in this passage. In the biblical narrative, the people of Judah had been exiled to Babylon. According to the Oxford Dictionary of the Bible, the exile 'was a captivity in which the people enjoyed liberty of worship; synagogues may have been established then, and the observance of the Sabbath was emphasised. Business prospered.'

Nonetheless there were those who asked, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Psalm 137:4) and the book of Isaiah celebrates a change in the situation of the exiles. Cyrus, the Persian Emperor, conquered Babylon and allowed the return of the exiles to Jerusalem.

Today's passage places these events within the scope of the God of Israel – the giver of strength and comfort, the author of the end of exile. Their saviour.

- Where would you be looking for God, if you were one who remained 'at home' in post-exile Judah? Where would you look if you were an exile?

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Where are we looking for God – 2?
In 'Psalms of Life' (*SPCK, 2006, pp219-222)*, John Eaton describes the 'harmonious communion' pictured by the Prophets as 'bringing hope in hard times'. These verses of Psalm 85 imagine this as a 'promise of harmony in nature, a time when God will bless', begun, he says, 'by the Word of God'.

In the psalm, this hope or promise of communion begins with a statement of how 'out of joint' things were: a remembering of times in the past when God had redeemed or 'transformed such evil situations.'

This transformation is hoped-for or demonstrated not only in the environment, but in restored relationships too.

- Where do you discern this 'out of jointness' around you, in the world, the Church, etc?
- Where and how might you discern God at work in the healing of things?

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Where are we looking for God – 3?
My curiosity is piqued by the contrast at the heart of this passage. On one hand it describes, in vivid, dramatic language, the end of things, the 'Day of the Lord'. On the other it speaks of 'patience' and 'waiting', of both God's patience and the patient, watchful waiting of the faithful.

Advent is a season of 'watching and waiting' that acknowledges a sense of urgent expectation and an attitude of patience.

- Where and how do you see God in the urgent challenges of these times? Where and how do you find space to deepen an attitude of faithful patient waiting in these 'out of joint' times?

Mark 1:1-8

Where are we looking for God – 4?
In 'What were you arguing about along the way?' *(Canterbury Press, 2021)*, a book of Gospel reflections for seasons such as Advent, Pat Bennett invites us to look at an image or watch a film that we are familiar with. While doing this, we are to look intentionally at something less eye-catching, something at the edge or off-centre. In what way does doing so change anything in how we see the scene or the bigger narrative? We might try the same approach, reading or listening to a story, trying to be attentive to the characters, people and events 'on the edges'.

Mark begins not with the Nativity stories of Matthew and Luke, or the Eternal Word of John, but in the wilderness, with fragments of prophetic voices, people from the margins and the centre of their society and a man called John. Into this world comes Jesus.

- Where are you trying to discern God at work or the presence of the Good News of Jesus in your place and time? e.g. at the centre and hub of your church life? Away at the edge? What might be the equivalent of the 'wilderness' where you are?

Sermon ideas

Where are we looking for God in our context?
Things are 'out of joint' just now and are pressing upon us:

- Global unrest
- The climate crisis
- The opportunities and dangers of AI
- Contested ethical matters
- The reconfiguration of local church life

This week's Bible readings acknowledge this sense of unease and yet hold out the promise and expectation that God is to be found in:

- Exile and return
- Creation broken and healed
- Relationships fractured and restored
- Hope/fear of the end and the long-term practice of patience and faithfulness
- Good News announced in out of the way or marginal places

These can give us the resources to live attentively and faithfully in the here and now.

In 'The Eye of the Storm', Kenneth Leech writes, "A Pilgrim church must be a joyful confident church, which sings the songs of freedom in the midst of its bondage. 'Sing Hallelujah and keep on walking', says Augustine in one of his most memorable sermons. As we move into the heart of the storm we will sing but we will keep on walking." *(DLT, 1992, p233.)*

Prayers

The phrases in bold may be used as congregational responses, be spoken by a second voice or simply said as a part of the prayer by the worship leader.

- **Call to Worship / Gathering Prayer / Invocation**

As the seasons turn and the days pass,
A prophet says, "Comfort my people!"

As days grow short and nights long,
A prophet cries, "Prepare the Way of the Lord!"

Through our days and nights of joy and sorrow,
We watch, we wait and we pray …

Like unlit candles, awaiting a spark.
We watch, we wait and we pray …

- **Approach/Confession/Repentance** *(Use A: or B:)*

A:
"Comfort my people!"
"Prepare the Way!"
Come, light of God,
into Your longing world.
Come, life of God,
into our longing hearts.
Overcome our fear, deepen our trust,
Come, true light of God

Come, life of God,

into our sometimes-barren world.
Come, truth of God,
into our sometimes-wayward lives.
Open the way that leads us home.
Come, true light of God

Come, Word of God
into our mortal lives, as to the manger.
Come, Spirit of God
inspire us as You inspired the prophets
Come, true light of God

(A candle may by lit here, if not elsewhere in the service)

Jesus, the Light, is coming,
Prepare the way!

Bring good news,
Comfort my people!

Bring deep comfort,
Prepare the way!

Bring the truth that sets free,
Comfort my people!

Bring us peace,
Your will be done!

*Conclude with the **Lord's Prayer** or a short Collect. E.g.:*

God our healer,
whose mercy is like a refining fire:
touch us with Your judgement,
and confront us with Your tenderness;
that, being comforted by You,
we may reach out to a troubled world,
through Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Janet Morley, All Desires Known, Morehouse Publishing 2006, p36)

***Or* B:**
God our deliverer;
whose Prophet's comfort and challenge
encourage and confront us.
God of Jesus Christ;
whose humble birth
still shakes the foundations of our world;
we await His birth
as we await Your coming,
filled with deep longing,
restless, because neither we, nor our world
are as we wish them to be ...

We pray that You will turn our weariness to eagerness,
cynicism to trust,
and our fear to hope;
fill our shadow with Your light,
and in Your grace and mercy, blot out our sins ...

Lord, have mercy upon us
Christ, have mercy upon us
Lord, have mercy upon us.

(Or a sung version e.g. Kyrie Eleison CH4 776, or silence)

Loving, God,
we turn again to You today,
because You have first come to find us
calling us homewards
to Your welcoming embrace.

As You are our help,
so inspire us to face our fear
and embrace the challenges we face,
as if they were the birth pangs of Your new age ...

(*The **Lord's Prayer**, if not said later, or)*

Holy and living God,

who comes to lead Your flock like a shepherd;
gather Your lambs together
carry us in Your arms;
and lead us gently
on the path You are preparing ...
where every valley is lifted up,
and every mountain made low. Amen.

- **Dedication**

God whose nature is to give,
as we prepare ourselves
for Your coming into the world
in Jesus, the child of Bethlehem,
take these our gifts
financial, practical, prayerful,
use us and use them
as channels of Your true light,
coming into the world. Amen.

- **Thanksgiving / Gratitude**

Tender and compassionate God:
today we give thanks
for Your faithful and beloved people,
who in their time brought Your comfort to others,
who prepared the way,
whose lives became channels of Your true light coming into the world.

Today we give thanks
for every neighbour, friend and fellow traveller here,
who in our time are striving to bring Your comfort to others,
our lives together becoming channels of Your true light coming into our world.

Today we give thanks
for Your faithful people around the world today
who in our time are bringing Your comfort to others,
whose lives, sometimes at great risk,
are luminous with Your true light in the world.

Now, quietly, we bring our own personal prayers and thanksgivings to You…

[Hold a time of silence, leading into the prayers for others]

- **Prayers for Others / Intercession**

I like to adapt the opening prayer and turn into one of intercessions, a prayer for others, so that there are threads that run through the whole act of worship. Taking the first prayer above:

"Comfort my people!"
"Prepare the Way!"
Come, light of God, come into Your longing world.
Holy God, today we hold up places and people longing for an end to … *(e.g. war, terror, conflict, injustice, hunger etc., or conflicts or injustices in the news that are of particular concern)*

We pray with the people of … (*name peoples and places)*
Come, true light of God

Come, breath of God, come into every longing soul.
Holy God, today we hold up all who are filled with the longing to see right prevail,
all who live with unfulfilled hopes, or dashed expectations.

(Here we may invite people to name people or situations in silence)

Come, true light of God

Come, life of God,
into our sometimes-barren world.
Today we hold up people and places who … (e.g. *see no way forward, don't know where the next meal is coming from, are out of options, bereft of ideas … You will have your own context to guide you in what to mention here.)*

Come, true light of God

Come, truth of God,
into our sometimes-wayward world.
Today we hold up all who make claims to speak the truth or act truthfully.

We pray on behalf of *(e.g. our own elected representatives*, *world leaders and heads of state, officials, journalists, scientists, religious leaders, etc. Again you will have your own thoughts here.)*

Come, true light of God

Come, exile-ending God,
into our sometimes-lost world.
Today we hold up all who feel cut off or separated from others *(e.g. the exile, the traveller, the asylum seeker, someone whose relationships have been broken, etc.)*

Open the way that leads to home.
Come, true light of God

Now, in silence,
we name people and their present situations
who stand in the need of prayer today …

[Hold a time of silence]

Come, true light of God

We pray because
You are coming, Jesus Word of God,
coming into our beautiful yet broken world, as to the manger.
You are coming, Spirit of God
coming to inspire Your people today as You inspired the prophets of old.
Come, true light of God

Jesus the Light, is coming,
We will prepare the way!

Jesus the healer is coming,
We will prepare the way!

Jesus, the saviour is coming
We will prepare the way!

The Spirit of truth will set us free,

We will prepare the way!

The Lord's Prayer, if not said earlier, or a short collect or acclamation, e.g.

Holy and living God,
whose day is coming;
inspire us always to watch and wait and pray
that Your kingdom come
and Your will be done
on earth as in heaven
until all creation cries "Glory!" Amen

- **Sending**

Christmas is coming,
God's true light is coming into the world!

We will walk in the light,
the light that shines in the darkness!

Jesus is coming,
God's true light that enlightens us all!

Waiting in expectant darkness,
we will celebrate the light!

Christmas is coming.
Jesus is coming.

God's true light! Alleluia!
God with us! Alleluia!

- **Blessing**

Look forward in hope
to the coming of your Saviour,
prepare the way for Christ your Lord;
welcome Him with love and faith
when He comes in glory.
And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

be among you and remain with you always. *(Common Order p598)*

- **Sung Amen**

These may be the 'traditional' Threefold Amen or an alternative, such as CH4 819-825

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music and words-only versions are now available; and digital resources, including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all

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.

- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 throughout Advent can be found on the Church of Scotland website (Advent) and in GWA 90-98

Isaiah

- CH4 274 – "Comfort, comfort now my people" – a paraphrase of the passage with a lovely Genevan melody. May be sung along with or instead of the reading.
- CH4 276 – "Wait for the Lord" – from Taizé. The whole song may be sung, or the chorus/ostinato used as a sung response in a prayer.
- CH4 284 – "Hope is a candle" – this may be sung progressively throughout the season as suggested in the hymnary.
- CH4 291 – "When out of poverty is born" – contemporary words to a well-known tune.

- GWA 183 – "In this darkness" – a contemplation on waiting in the darkness and silence for God. Perhaps one for a 'Blue Christmas' service?

Psalm

- CH4 473 – "Thy kingdom come!" – verses 4 and 5 relate to the psalms words about 'righteousness and peace'
- GWA 47 – "You are welcome here" (Come, all you wounded and weary) – the scriptural index in GWA relates this to Psalm 85 and it may speak into Isaiah 40 as well.

2 Peter

- CH4 238 – "Lord, bring the day to pass" – Ian Fraser's hymn echoes the waiting theme of 2 Peter and also Paul's hope in Romans 8.
- CH4 303 – "It came upon the midnight clear" – verse 5 'as dawns the Age of Gold'. This may be a Christmas hymn but …
- CH4 305 – "In the bleak midwinter" – verse 2, 'heaven and earth shall pass away'
- CH4 473 – "Thy Kingdom come!" – (again) verse 2 echoes the sense of awaiting the Day of God faithfully through the night's 'slow watches'.

Mark

- CH4 276 – "Wait for the Lord" (again) verse 1 'Prepare a way for the Lord…'
- CH4 277 – "Hark! The glad sound!" – a rousing Scottish paraphrase of Luke 4:18,19.
- CH4 279 – "Make way, make way, for Christ the King" – a contemporary big sing that expresses the Advent hope.
- CH4 334 – "On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry" – from the 17th century brings our plight to God and engages with the Gospel text.

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'.
- If singing in our congregations is 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

God Welcomes All can be ordered from Hymns Ancient & Modern

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

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