

Worship at Home

10th December 2023 – Advent 2

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In Psalm 85 we read:

God will soon save those who honour him, and his glory will be seen in our land.

On earth people will be loyal to God, and God's goodness will shine down from heaven. The Lord will give his goodness, and the land will give its crops. Goodness will go before God and prepare the way for him.

We light our second Advent candle

...as a reminder that God is the source of justice and righteousness; and as a commitment to walk in his ways, with integrity and compassion.

STF 171: Hark the glad sound

<https://youtu.be/zeBRYhG86x0>

**Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,
The Saviour promised long; Let every heart
prepare a throne, and every voice a song.**

**He comes the prisoners to release,
In Satan's bondage held; The gates of brass
before him burst, the iron fetters yield.**

**He comes the broken heart to bind,
The bleeding soul to cure, and with the treasures
Of his grace to enrich the humble poor.**

**Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
Your welcome shall proclaim, and heaven's eternal
arches ring with your beloved name.**

Phillip Doddridge (1702-1751)

Let us pray...

Almighty and Eternal Lord,
God of all that has been, is, and will be,
we join together to bring you our praise. For you are
the source of all that is good, all that is just, all that is
compassionate and all that is beautiful in our world.

Yet today, as we thank and praise you for who you
are and all you have promised us, we are reminded
that we too have work to do – that we are called to
prepare the way for you – to make straight the paths
that we walk in and open up the gates of our hearts.

Lord God, in your love, come and work in us again,
cleansing us, making straight our waywardness, and
levelling the mountains that overshadow us.

We invite you once more to come and cleanse from
us all that saddens or has dishonoured you. Forgive
too, our thoughts and words and deeds, done and left
undone, that have diminished or hurt our neighbours.
Call us back - to walk again in your paths of grace and
righteousness, for we ask this in Jesus' mighty name.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Read: Isaiah 40 verses 1-11

Isaiah speaks words of hope that God will bring comfort
to, and restore his people...

Read: Mark 1 verses 1-8

Mark starts his gospel of good news with John the
Baptist echoing the prophecy of Isaiah – words that
speak of God's promise, which is to be fulfilled in Jesus...

MP 249: How lovely on the mountains

<https://youtu.be/nDt4tq0r6qE>

**How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him
Who brings good news, good news,
Announcing peace, proclaiming news of happiness,
Our God reigns, our God reigns.**

Our God reigns...(x4)

**You watchmen lift your voices joyfully as one,
Shout for your King, your King.
See with your eyes God restoring Zion:
Your God reigns, your God reigns!**

Our God reigns...(x4)

**Waste places of Jerusalem break forth with joy,
We are redeemed, redeemed.**

**The Lord has saved and comforted His people:
Your God reigns, your God reigns!**

Our God reigns...(x4)

**Ends of the earth, see the salvation of your God,
Jesus is Lord, is Lord.**

**Before the nations He has bared His holy arm:
Your God reigns, your God reigns!**

Our God reigns...(x4)

Leonard E Smith Jr., © 1974, 1978 New Jerusalem Music,
Adm Kingswaysongs.com

Reflection on the readings

As I write this today, the main road from my home to
Kingsbridge is closed due to road works. This means
that any journey into town will either be made via a
very long diversion or by navigating my way along our
single-track country lanes with grass growing in the
middle of them (and very few opportunities to pass
cars coming in the opposite direction).

There are of course other options: I can change
where I am going or when I need to be somewhere;
or I can just stay home until my preferred route into
Kingsbridge is open again.

In this instance the purpose of the roadworks has
nothing to do with making the road straighter or
levelling it. I am though already looking forward to
when normal access will be restored (and this is only
day 3 of 16).

The reading from Isaiah, which we have just read,
starts with words of heartfelt comfort which convey
within them the certain hope of restoration. We
understand that these words were given to bring
hope to the Jews in their time of Exile in Babylon –
yet they also offer us hope, as within them we find
words that point to the coming of Immanuel – God
with us – who is our hope and our Salvation.

They are a reminder that God had and still has a plan
to put right all that is wrong; that he sees what is
wrong and that he is so much greater than all the
troubles that surround us. While they will eventually
wither and die, God stands firm, and He is for ever
and ever. His justice will be restored.

The restoration is to be dramatic. Mountains will be levelled; crooked paths made straight. A road will be built through the most inhospitable of places.

The picture is of so much more than just reopening an existing road – the picture here is about building a new, much better and bigger road – a super-highway bringing God to us – because of it we will see his glory and he can become our shepherd.

This call to make straight the road is also the picture which Mark puts at the beginning of his gospel. He reminds us of this prophecy – of a straight and mighty road being built through the dry lands. Mark also tells us how John the Baptist uses this prophesy to call all people to prepare themselves for Christ's coming.

John uses the words of Isaiah to challenge all who are listening to "change their ways." To recommit themselves to walking in the just and merciful ways of God and realign their lives with God's ways.

Why John; why now? John uniquely knew that God's promised plan had already been put in action and that God's Son was already with them. We too know that His plan is already in place and God is already with us. What better time is there than now?

Isaiah's prophecy speaks of a road being built, yet even when a road is completed, it's no good if it isn't connected with where it needs to go. This reminds me of a new road built recently outside Tiverton, which for a long time almost no-one used because the connection was incomplete (I'm not sure if that's still the case). It looked impressive but the disconnect meant it couldn't fulfil its purpose.

Yes, God is coming, but what if we are not on the road network? If we are not ready to receive him?

John calls us to reconnect with God and be ready. To examine our lives afresh and consider what and who is important to us. To give God his rightful place in our lives and make ourselves ready. The word John uses is 'repent': to turn back to God. He calls us to recognise our need of God's mercy and grace and to realign our lives with him again. To be reconnected.

Whether this is a major turn-around or just a 'tweak' of one or two degrees, we are all called to check our connection – for Immanuel is coming and we need to be ready. This is our wake-up call!!

To ponder:

What would be my first reaction if Jesus knocked on my front door today? What would I say to him?

Am I ready for his arrival? What is there in me that needs straightening out, levelling, or restoring? What can I do to enable this – can I sort this on my own? Will I take these needs to God in prayer this week?

God comes, and we will see his glory and can know him as our Shepherd. Will you give thanks for all the times and ways you have been comforted by his presence with you, seen his glory and known him as your Shepherd? Or maybe you need to ask God to reveal himself by his presence with you this Advent season?

Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God,

As we journey through this Advent season, may we also we hear your call to prepare the way.

As we examine and prepare our own hearts may we also hear your call to us to help prepare the way into the hearts of all our neighbours – for you are coming – you are here.

As we look forward to your coming again with joy and excitement today, we pray especially for:

- **Your Church** – may we work as one to reveal your love to those around us, both here, in our own towns and villages, as well as across the world. May we prepare the way.
- **Those who rule over us** – that they may do so with wisdom and grace, collaborating with each other for the good of all. May they prioritise our needs above their wants and ideals, and do this with humility, courage and compassion.
- **Those working to bring restoration to broken roads, broken lives, and broken relationships.** We think of those working in places where we have seen floods, fire, drought or storm this year. We also pray for those bringing aid to war zones and those working to establish peace. We thank you for everyone who works to create the fabric of our communities, here and across our world.

- **Those not looking forward to Christmas.** We know this can be a hard time of year for many people, especially those who feel alone. We ask you to bring them the comfort they need.

Finally, we pray for those on our prayer list today, knowing that you know all their stories... Also, for those we miss, or are concerned for, near or far away. Bless them with your peace, healing, forgiveness, and hope, each according to their need.

We bring all these prayers, and the unspoken prayers of our hearts to you in the mighty name of Jesus, trusting in your mercy and grace. **Amen**

STF 178: Long ago, prophets knew

<https://youtu.be/OeLA1LhqFA4>

**Long ago, prophets knew, Christ would come,
born a Jew. Come to make all things new;
Bear his People's burden, freely love and pardon.**

Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring!

Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing!

When he comes, when he comes,

Who will make him welcome?

**God in time, God in man, this is God's
timeless plan: He will come, as a man,
Born himself of woman, God divinely human.**

Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring...

**Journey ends! Where afar Bethlehem shines,
Like a star, stable door stands ajar
Unborn Son of Mary, Saviour do not tarry!**

Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring...

We will make him welcome!

Fred Pratt Green, © 1971 Stainer & Bell Ltd.

Blessing

Gracious God, you have come to us in Jesus, and you promise never to leave us.

As we look forward to Christmas, help us to be confident in your presence and your promise. And may the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon us; may he light our way and grant us his peace, now and always. **Amen**

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