



Fourth Sunday of Advent

Morning Prayer

Peace

preparing through rejoicing



You are invited to guard time for us to be together, united in prayer in one faith, to our one Lord. Dispersed community prayer at 10:30am.

You may wish to prepare by lighting a candle – or four candles! 😊

◆ denotes an optional pause to keep silence and meditate on the words

🔊 Denotes optional audio / video version from the church website:

<https://widcombe.church/our-churches/church-life/church-online/>

Preparation

O Lord, open our lips

and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Reveal among us the light of your presence

that we may behold your power and glory.

Blessed are you, Sovereign God of all,

to you be praise and glory for ever.

In your tender compassion

the dawn from on high is breaking upon us

to dispel the lingering shadows of night.

As we look for your coming among us this day,

open our eyes to behold your presence

and strengthen our hands to do your will,

that the world may rejoice and give you praise.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God for ever.

A Song of the Spirit - Advent

¹ 'Behold, I am coming soon', says the Lord,

'and bringing my reward with me, ◆

to give to everyone according to their deeds.

² 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, ◆

the beginning and the end.'

³ Blessed are those who do God's commandments,

that they may have the right to the tree of life, ◆

and may enter into the city through the gates.

⁴ 'I, Jesus, have sent my angel to you, ◆

with this testimony for all the churches.

⁵ 'I am the root and the offspring of David, ◆

I am the bright morning star.'

⁶ 'Come!' say the Spirit and the Bride; ◆

'Come!' let each hearer reply!

⁷ Come forward, you who are thirsty, ◆

let those who desire take the water of life as a gift.

Surely I am coming soon! ◆

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22.12–14, 16, 17

*Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.*

In the penitential, preparation season of Advent,
Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

*Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

cf Psalm 51

Receive God's forgiveness

May the God of all healing and forgiveness
draw us to himself,
and cleanse us from all our sins
that we may behold the glory of his Son,
the Word made flesh,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Opening prayer

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;
let us pray with one heart and mind.



As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Hymn

Thy kingdom come, O God,
thy rule, O Christ, begin;
break with thine iron rod
the tyrannies of sin.

Where is thy reign of peace
and purity and love?
When shall all hatred cease,
as in the realms above?

When comes the promised time
that war shall be no more,
and lust, oppression, crime
shall flee thy face before?

We pray thee, Lord, arise,
and come in thy great might;
revive our longing eyes,
which languish for thy sight.

O'er lands both near and far
thick darkness broodeth yet:
arise, O Morning Star,
arise, and never set!



The Word of God

Old Testament reading: 2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16

God's promise to David

7 After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² he said to Nathan the prophet, 'Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.'

³ Nathan replied to the king, 'Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.'

⁴ But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:

⁵ 'Go and tell my servant David, "This is what the Lord says: are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? ⁶ I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. ⁷ Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'"

⁸Now then, tell my servant David, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. ⁹I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. ¹⁰And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people shall not oppress them any more, as they did at the beginning ¹¹and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

"The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you:

¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever."

New Testament reading: Luke 1: 26-38

The birth of Jesus foretold

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

²⁹Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'

³⁴'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'

³⁵The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷For no word from God will ever fail.'

³⁸'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.

Reflection from Revd Judith Harries 

GOD'S PROMISE TO DAVID

The Bible is filled with strong personalities, but for me none beat David to the top spot!

Flashing images flash by us; David playing his harp, fighting battles, dancing, dancing jubilantly in praise of God; his grief when he hears of his best friend Jonathan's death.

And the story of David. the young shepherd boy, using his slingshot to kill Goliath, the Philistine's champion warrior is still used to show how the underdog can overcome tremendous odds to become successful.

King David carved out an empire unmatched in Israel's history yet, in historical records of the

10th c. B C, he is not even mentioned. However, he will forever be known, as he has down through the generations, as "the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs (2 Sam 23:1). And the man whom God had chosen. (1 Sam 14:2).

The Lord said to Samuel: "Rise and anoint him, for this is the one". Then Samuel took the horn

of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.

(This took place while Saul sat on the throne).

Samuel was the last judge of Israel when the people came to him and ask he appoint a king to rule over them. Samuel was very old, they didn't want any of his sons to replace him and they said it would give them more security. The idea to appoint a king pleased everyone except Samuel, maybe because his own sons were being rejected, and God. God had a deeper objection. Israel was rejecting his leadership.

Why was God against a king? We could see this new kingdom as a wonderful example of God using a choice made against His will, for it ultimately produced King David and, through him

Jesus, the King of kings. Or we might see that God only opposed the motive behind the people of Israel's request for a king.

The key is in the phrase the elders used: "Then we will be like all the other nations" (1 Sam 18:20). God did not want them to be like all the other nations.

Yet God didn't only give into their request, He picked out their man - Saul. God would accept a monarchy on condition that Israel still considered the Lord as its ultimate ruler (1 Sam 12:14).

Israel's new king didn't answer to a parliament or any court system. **He answered to God.**

Most nation's kings held absolute power. In Israel only God was absolute, and the king was His servant. Samuel, who had led Israel as a judge knew well that God's power was absolute. When Samuel had been chosen God had chosen a leader to suit Himself, a leader who listened to Him, a leader who honoured Him.

And as Israel transitioned from rule by judges to kings it was Samuel God chose to anoint the first two kings, and to counsel them.

When Saul was rejected by God because of his disobedience it was Samuel who stripped him of his authority, and Samuel who chose David to replace him.

David ruled from Hebron and the war between the house of Saul and the house of David raged for many years. When Saul died David became king of all Israel. After David marches on enemies in Jerusalem and conquers the City, he realises it would be the perfect capital from which to unify the Northern and Southern tribes. Because Jerusalem was on the border between the north and the south and, belonging to neither, it could offend neither side.

One of my favourite films is "Crocodile Dundee", and one of the best scenes for me is when Mick is in New York walking down a busy street with his girlfriend. Suddenly they are surrounded by a gang of thugs. One of them threatens Mick with a knife and asks him to hand over his wallet. Mick calmly looks at them, and then says:

"That's not a knife.....**this** is a knife!" And he pulls out a knife so big it makes the would-be-mugger's switchblade look like a penknife. They, of course, run for their lives.

This scene reminds me of our reading from Samuel. David has consolidated his power in Jerusalem by building a royal palace of beautiful Lebanese cedar. He is clearly feeling very comfortable in his new digs and presumably desires that the Ark of the Lord - *the very presence of the Lord* - has a house as well, instead of being housed in a tent. A plan begins to form in his mind. Why not build a house for God, a temple? David outlines his plans to his friend Nathan, the prophet. Nathan promptly agrees, thinking that David's plan for such a "house" will be pleasing to God.

But that night God speaks to Nathan, correcting him, and he has to return to David with God's message, a revised evaluation if you like.

It is though God was looking down at the plans which David has drawn up for God's "house".

He then looks at David and says, in effect, "*David, that's not a house.....**this** is a house*".

If David thinks he can build a house for God, he is wrong. It is God who plans to build a "**house**" for David. And what a house that will be. You see David had a bright idea, but it did not correspond with God's plan. The revelation God gives Nathan, which he is to convey to David, in a way puts both David and Nathan in their place..... for David's plan was not God's, and Nathan's agreement had been too hasty.

Then God asks David: "Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?" The theological writer Eugene Peterson puts it very well when he says: "but there are times when our grand human plans to do something for God are seen, after a night of prayer, to be a human distraction from what God is doing for us". This is what Nathan realised that night; *God showed Nathan that*

David's building plans for God would interfere with God's building plans for David.

And there is a side detail here which is quite obvious. David is very conscious of his position as king. Certainly, in relation to all the people of Israel, as well as those outside Israel, David is the highest authority in the land. But, in relation to God, David is merely a servant. David is living in a palace, and God is living in a tent, at least in David's mind. And David almost appears to be wanting to give God a helping hand. It is for this reason maybe, that God again puts David in his place; first by referring to the king as His servant, and secondly by saying to him:

*"Who are you to be building **Me** a house"?*

Nathan had got it wrong when he counselled David to go ahead.

And in our lives as Christians, we sometimes set our hearts on maybe entering a particular ministry, or following a path that seems attractively set out before us, and often in life generally.

And then God tells us **"No"**. These are difficult times to deal with because we have surely prayed about it, and really sought the Lord's agreement because we sincerely had the desire to serve Him. And then he says no. He doesn't want to use us in the way we desired, or open to having Him use us. It is hard. It hurts. It is confusing. Sometimes, at certain points in our lives, God has a very good reason for saying no when we attempt to sort out 'the job' so to speak.

The thing that is critical for us is what we do when God says no. It is critical because it determines whether or not we be able to go on trusting God; trusting Him enough to carry out His long-term plans for us. Trusting Him enough to place our future wellbeing into His hands because there is a plan for each and every one of us.

And the answers to the **why** and **where** God is leading us - where we work, where we live, the people we meet, and the consequences- often come years down the road. Later on in David's life, we can read in Chronicles why God rejected David wanting to build a "house" for Him. (1 Chron 22:8). David had been a man of war and bloodshed, and God desired His house to be associated not with war and fighting, but with peace and rest, and built by a man of peace. Later God tells David it was good he had the desire in his heart to build a house in God's name. Good because it was a desire that came out of a heart filled with love for God. And this is what really matters. Whether David built the temple or not, he will be rewarded by God when they meet.

And so it will be for us. We will be rewarded for all those things we sought to do to please God, even though we were sometimes told no. Because, just as with David, many times in our Christian lives, it is the case we sow an idea, but it is someone else that reaps the fruit we have laboured for.

Today is the Fourth Sunday in Advent so let me read verse 16 where the Lord tells David:

"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me, your throne will be established forever".

In the Reading from Luke this morning the birth of Jesus is foretold.

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you will give him the name of Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will have no end.

God's promise of a house for David is completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

This promise lives in a New Covenant between God and us, His people today. It is mediated by Jesus to all when we declare our belief sincerely in Jesus Christ as Lord and God.

Jesus is building the Father a magnificent house, in the sense that we are God's temple and the Church is God's new house..... a house that is for us all, where everyone is welcome.

Amen

Advent acclamation

People of God: prepare!
God, above all, maker of all,
is one with us in Christ.

Come, Lord Jesus!

God, the mighty God,
bends down in love to earth.

Come, Lord Jesus!

God with us, God beside us,
comes soon to the world he has made.

Come, Lord Jesus!

We are God's children,
we seek the coming Christ.

Come, Lord Jesus!

**Lord, make us one in the love of Christ today and for ever.
Amen.**

Intercessions

Lord we come before you with our prayers and intercessions.

Lord, we pray for your precious Holy Spirit to stir up our hearts afresh with your holy fire and the hearts of all your people.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for ourselves and for all Christians, that we your people will humble ourselves, that we will pray more, that we will seek your heart and your face with fresh urgency, that we your people will turn from any ways that are unhelpful to you, so that you will hear and forgive and heal our world.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Lord we pray for a fresh revelation that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but in the spiritual realm. So Lord, we pray for your presence, your grace, your power, your holiness and your blessing with your people and all those in authority in our land and in your church.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Lord we pray for your heart to be in our hearts, we pray Lord for your precious Holy Spirit to bring fresh compassion to each of our hearts. Lord, we pray that this Christmas time will be a time of compassion and not consumption. We pray for compassionate hearts in your church and throughout our world.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Lord in you are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Thank you Lord that these are not hidden from us, but rather for us. So Lord, we pray for your people and all those in authority to seek the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in your Lord Jesus. We thank you that the Wise Men sought you, and as many consider your birth this Christmas, we pray that many men and women will gain fresh wisdom and insight from you to solve the problems of our world and bring your Kingdom. We pray that we your people will not be wise in their own eyes, but rather reverence and honour you Lord.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for your healing for all those who are sick. We pray for your supernatural protection and power with all those working so tirelessly in the NHS. We pray for those who are feeling exhausted to know your joy Lord which is our strength.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for your presence with all who are lonely. We pray for those who have been bereaved to know to know your comfort and peace. Lord, we pray for your presence and peace upon all families this Christmas.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for those in financial difficulty or homelessness. Lord, we thank you that you are the great Creator and Provider. Lord, we pray for your blessing on businesses, your blessing on communities, your blessing on all those who are experiencing homelessness, we pray for your provision for all those who are in financial difficulty.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

And Lord finally we pray for fresh hope for all who are feeling discouraged or in despair. We pray for your precious Holy Spirit to pour out hope in all hearts and minds. We pray that hope will be grounded in your great and precious promises Lord. Lord, may holy hope in your and your Word rise up throughout our land.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Lord we commit all our prayers and intercessions to you, trusting in you.

Amen.



The Collect

Eternal God,
as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,
so we wait for his coming in glory;
bring us through the birth pangs of this present age
to see, with her, our great salvation
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Awaiting his coming in glory, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.



To Conclude

May the Lord, when he comes,
find us watching and waiting.

Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

